

Ep #433: Overcome Childlike Energy and Step into Mature Empowerment



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello, empowered principals. Welcome to episode 433.

Welcome to *The Empowered Principal® Podcast*, a not so typical educational resource that will teach you how to gain control of your career and get emotionally fit to lead your school and your life with joy by refining your most powerful tool, your mind. Here's your host certified life coach Angela Kelly.

Well, hello, my Empowered Principals. Happy Tuesday. Welcome to the podcast. I have an interesting topic that I'm going to discuss with you today. It's not a topic I have felt comfortable talking about for a while because it's so personal to me. I've been doing this personal work and been on this personal journey.

And in my work with my coach, my coaches, I should say, and through the work that I do as a coach, I've really uncovered some understanding about the fears that I had in school leadership when I was in school leadership, the fears that I have as a coach, the fears that I have as a human, as a female on the planet, and the way that I was conditioned to understand myself in the world, the way that I was taught and expected to behave or to respond or to act, behave, think, all of that at a deeper subconscious level.

And I want to talk about it today, number one, because it's really prevalent in aspiring school leaders and brand-new school leaders. This is the time of year when people are transitioning into becoming a school leader and stepping out of a teacher leadership role into an administrative leadership role. And with that can come what I call child energy, little kid energy, an immaturity that is tapped within us when we are venturing into the unknowns, a new adventure, a new chapter, a new position, particularly when we step into a leadership position.

So what I mean by child energy is this naivety, this uncertainty. I'm not sure. I'm kind of shy. I'm stepping back. I'm asking other people, what should I do? What should I think? What should I believe? What should I value?

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What should my philosophy be? I'm looking outside of myself as a little kid, you know, as somebody who's new, to guide me.

Now, there is nothing wrong with having a coach, having a mentor, having guidance, looking to those you admire for aspiration and inspiration and leadership, knowledge, wisdom. Of course, we can't know all of it ourselves. That's not the goal. We want to learn from others. The energy I'm speaking of, it's more of an approach fueled by fear.

So it's when you feel kind of afraid to be a leader. You're timid, you feel a little helpless, you lean on other people to kind of, you know, the buck stops with them. So you might feel more comfortable in an AP position because you're like, well, the lead principal, the buck really stops with them. So you might feel insecure with your opinions, your decisions, your actions, your initiatives that you want to take, or perhaps you are very easily intimidated by other people's confidence.

So when you are new, you walk into a room and there is a ton of highly successful leaders, very confident leaders, leaders who seemingly know what they're talking about, what they're saying, what they're doing. They have a vision, they have a mission, they're very fueled, they're passionate, they are knowledgeable, they seem very wise, they've been around the block before, they have experience under their belt, and that can feel very intimidating. Now, you can be a leader who's been doing this job for three, five, 10 years and still feel this.

So it tends to happen when you're new at something. That's pretty normal. And I talk about how to embrace being new in other podcast episodes. So when you're new, right, we sometimes we hold back. We test the waters. We check on other people. We're picking up cues, right? How are they thinking? How are they feeling? What how are they responding? You're looking at their behaviors, their facial expressions, their body expressions,

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that those nonverbal cues to kind of see what the response is going to be. And you're getting to know people before you lead, right?

We often tell first-year leaders, build relationships. And that first year, you'll get grace where you're not maybe taking a ton of forward action or you know laying out a vision or pushing people forward. You might just be getting to know people. That's very common in your first year where you are building relationships.

However, building relationships, that term can be used sometimes as a shield or excuse to not have to be vulnerable, to not have to express yourself, to not be clear with yourself on who you are and what you believe in and what you want to do and how you want to approach your leadership position and really stepping into the identity as a leader.

So I've noticed this with new leaders, I myself included. You know, it's easy to want to kind of tread water and watch what everybody else is doing and you're kind of picking up context clues. But you can tread so long that you're not stepping out and taking action, right?

There's a difference between watching what's going on and then trying a little something and then watching a little bit more and then trying a little something. That's different than just watching and observing and kind of waiting to react to other people around you versus taking leadership and responding internally with your own thoughts, opinions, and ideas.

And I understand when you're new, you're like, how do I know? I don't know what I don't know. That's absolutely correct. The way that you learn, trial and error. Yes, you observe people. Yes, you get out there and you just meet with them. You build relationships with them. You get to understand them and know them.

And also, you're also taking action. You're also expressing yourself. You're learning about your school and then you're processing that and you're

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saying, what are my thoughts and feelings around this? What am I adding to this? What do I believe to be true? What do I think is the next best thing for my staff or my school?

So it can happen when you're new, but I've also noticed that it can happen after you've been in an identity of empowerment. So perhaps you felt very confident and strong as a teacher or as an instructional coach. And then you get into a leadership position and you bring that empowerment with you, and then something happens. So sometimes you have felt, you have been in a stage of confidence or empowerment and you feel like you're in grown-up energy, adult, mature, you feel knowledgeable, you feel secure in your own skin and assured with yourself.

And then a situation kind of shakes you. I call this an identity quake, where something happens and maybe you didn't handle it as well as you would have liked or you didn't know what to do, or it really set you back. It kind of put you in check or it hurt you, it really criticized you. Maybe you got admonished. And we can revert back to more of that like childlike energy when we feel like we have been attacked or we've been admonished or punished or scolded.

So I've observed this in myself and in others that if it's not brand-new energy where you're actually just, you are new and you're learning and trying to figure things out, sometimes we get into this like big people energy where it's kind of bossy. You know? I think of like I'm the oldest sister of two, my sister and I, and I'm the oldest.

So like big sister energy, kind of bossy energy, like my way or the highway, one perspective. It's this kind of boss vibes energy, bro energy. Some people call it masculine energy. I think of like the *Devil Wears Prada* energy where, you know, the boss is just like very assertive and aggressive and, you know, people are afraid of her and she's clicking around and making

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everybody fear her through intimidation, right? Granted, it's a movie, but that's kind of the image that comes to mind for me.

Sometimes it lacks compassion or perspective or awareness on who they are and how they're being, or they're using it to kind of toss their energy, their vibe, and authority around so that people don't question them. People don't give them feedback. People don't critique you or they don't offer another way.

So sometimes we use this like bossy vibe energy as a layer of protection. We're actually so soft on the inside that we don't want people to give us feedback or critique us or offer something, a different perspective or a different approach to something. We don't want to hear what other people have to say or how they feel. We just protect ourselves. And in doing so, we're unaware of, you know, our lack of empathy or compassion or how other people might feel, you know, if they're feeling dismissed or they're feeling that, you know, we are being rude to them in some way.

We can use empowerment as a form of protection. And we can also use this childlike, innocent kind of naivety as a form of protection. So just first of all, just notice if you're doing one or the other. So sometimes when you are naive, you might get kind of a smackdown where people are like, step up and lead.

And you're so afraid to do that because you feel you don't know, you feel like an imposter, you're afraid, you're new, and really the solution to that is kind of dipping your toe in, making the best decision you can, grounding yourself, getting in alignment and moving forward, being vulnerable, knowing that you won't do it perfectly. There's overcoming that fear.

And then there's the other side of this where people who have been very bold and strong and protected and they're in their, you know, *Devil Wears Prada* energy, something happens or someone comes along and awakens you in a very abrupt way where they give you the smackdown and it stings

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so much. It puts you into doubt. It makes you doubt yourself, question yourself.

And you're like, whoa, I used to feel so confident and now I'm, I feel like I'm walking on eggshells. I'm walking around and I'm not sure if, who to be or if I can be strong again or I'm afraid of empowerment because this negative experience happened. And again, that's another identity quake, right?

So an identity quake is just something that comes in and shatters your reality. It literally changes your identity. And oftentimes, at the time it happens, you'll say, I did not see that coming. You might in hindsight see the signs that it was coming or the signals, but at the time it happens, it feels like you got blindsided.

Like an example might be that you got laid off. You had no idea it was coming and you got laid off and you weren't expecting it. Maybe you were reassigned or you were demoted. You went from being a teacher leader to not being in a leadership position or you were an AP and put back in the classroom or you were a lead principal and they asked you to go to an AP position. And that can be demoralizing. It can be kind of an emotional smackdown where you feel afraid to speak up, afraid of your own empowerment.

And we can find ourselves kind of swimming back in childlike energy. Like, well, I tried this and it didn't work. So now I'm going to go over here. And now we're in the land of all or none where we're either in our empowerment and we're being kind of protective in one sense, or we're being in this childlike energy and we're being in this, you know, protectiveness where it's not me, not my fault, you know, I don't know what I'm doing. I need other people to help me. Kind of a helplessness.

So my goal in supporting school leaders is to find the land of and, is to bring you back to the middle ground, which is authentic empowerment. And sometimes you have to explore the boundaries. You have to be in that little

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child energy, and then you need to be in big boss energy to kind of feel the boundaries of that, to land in the middle that feels appropriate for you.

So fears of identifying as an empowered leader or fears of stepping back into your empowerment or being in a mindset and an identity of empowerment is something that many principals experience.

So if you are experiencing this where you're new or you're going to be new and you're anticipating this fear, or you've had a little smackdown at some point and you feel wounded and maybe you have, you know, your heart is gaping open and you're heartbroken or you're very embarrassed or ashamed or you're unsure of yourself and you're doubting yourself and you're recalculating and rebuilding back up to your identity, this is normal. It's a part of our experience. It's how we test those boundaries.

But when it's left unattended, if you're either in this childlike energy or you're in this big boss energy, you will find that you will go through the motions of leadership and you will be acting as a school leader, but you're not generating the outcomes you want or not having the impact that you desire. And that's where the feelings of imposter syndrome or I'm not good enough, I feel insufficient, come up because you're doing the work, but it's not creating the outcomes.

And I've been in this. I've been in this as a teacher where you're kind of spinning trying to figure out who you are and how to get results. Then I was spinning around as a principal, and then I was spinning as a district leader when I was the coordinator for the RTI programs across the district.

And I've had moments and chapters of that in my business, spinning as a coach, trying to figure out how to serve more people or how to communicate, how to coach better, how to communicate better, how to explain these concepts of what I believe will really create positive impact for school leaders and students and staff and communities, which is this internal work that we're doing here, called empowerment.

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So when you are in a cycle of imposter syndrome, and if that tends to surface on a regular basis, you might find that your strategy becomes waiting for others to tell you what to do, waiting for people to validate your opinions, waiting for people to make the decisions or to support your decisions before you move forward. Before you take any action, you make sure you're like over-ensuring that you're doing the right thing. That's childlike energy.

It's like waiting for mom and dad's approval, waiting for teacher's approval, waiting for your, you know, athletic coach's approval versus getting out there and just playing the game and then be willing to get the feedback and be willing to make mistakes, but you're going for it, you know, 100 miles an hour, 100%, right? It can stagnate you and your school from evolving yourself, evolving others, your staff, those you're leading, your students, your community.

So as uncomfortable as this is, addressing this childlike energy within you, acknowledging when you're in it, validating the fears and the other emotions that are fueling it and owning, really owning that you do have access and the ability to step back into your own power is required of you as a leader, to feel better and feel more aligned.

Exercising empowerment, it is not simple because the little kid energy within us is triggered all the time. We want to retract. We want somebody else to be the leader. We want them to tell us what to do. We don't want to take ownership. We don't want to be out on the front lines, you know, taking the bullet, so to speak. We're gonna want to be behind the shield.

But part of leadership requires us to own the leadership part and to step into our maturity and to step into the truth that we have the power within us to lead with maturity and to own our emotions and to own our decisions and actions and to have the bandwidth to when we get it right, we celebrate.

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When we get it wrong, we apologize and repair, but we keep going. We don't let it stop us.

It's hard work. It's scary work, but it is so freeing. It is highly rewarding. I do this work consistently myself. I work with multiple coaches and I also support school leaders as a coach through this process. We discuss this work in EPC. Clients of mine will schedule one-on-ones, you know, private sessions for deeper emotional processing. I believe it's the most empowering way to be a highly effective leader.

And I'm talking not just school leadership, but the leader of your life. Being you, doing what you want to do, living your life the way you want to live, allowing other people to have their opinions about you and have their opinions about how you should run your school and have their thoughts and ideas. And not that they can't have them, but that you can still be in your empowerment.

You don't have to be dismissed or to demote yourself or your own ideas or your own approach to life or leadership because other people have different opinions. If someone's in a funk, it doesn't have to mean now you're in a funk. If they have a negative opinion of your decisions and actions, we don't throw them out. We can listen to them, but we can self-discern.

That's true empowerment. Is being able to see that somebody else's tantrums, somebody else's emotions are theirs to own. We don't need to own them. We don't need to fix them. We don't even need to change them. We can acknowledge them and allow them to have their feelings while we get busy and regulate our own emotions.

So when we feel triggered, when we feel like a little kid and somebody's scolded us and we're sad, we can be sad, and then we can be mature and say, okay, why am I sad? What can I learn from this? What do I believe is

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true here? And you're right back into your empowerment. Easier said than done, I know, but it is the path to empowerment.

And that's the whole goal. That's my mission, is to empower principals, to empower site and district leaders, state leaders, to empower teachers so that they can empower children. That is the purpose of education. In my book, I believe that we are here to authentically empower people to have their own identities, their own feelings, allow people to come up with their own thoughts, their own ideas.

We call it critical thinking. We want to empower that. We don't want people to think in conformity or to be isolated if they think differently than us. It's to bring us together, to collaborate, and to allow differences of opinion, to be mature, to respect ourselves as much as we respect others, to not wait for others to tell us what to do for the rest of our lives.

So if you feel called to really working on your empowerment and learning the skills, the exercises, the practices to get yourself back into a state of empowerment when you have slipped into this childlike energy, I really invite you to join EPC. You can join now. You can join this summer. For those of you who book for next year, you get access to the rest of this year. You get to come in the back door and see what the end of the season looks like.

Then we jump into summer of fun, and then we're off to the races. I'm going to have, you know, programming in the summer, trainings to help you prepare and get ready for the fall. It's a wonderful time to join EPC. I love you all. I care about you and I invite you into your mature empowerment.

And that little kid energy, I promise you, it comes out all the time. It comes out in me. It comes out in others. You want to know how to recognize it and you want to know what to do with it, to create awareness around it, to feel it, to acknowledge it, to validate it, to get back into alignment, and then to

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have the courage to step back into your mature empowerment. Have a beautiful day. I love you all. Take care. Bye-bye.

Thanks for listening to this episode of *The Empowered Principal® Podcast*. If you enjoyed this episode and want to learn more, please visit AngelaKellyCoaching.com where you can sign up for weekly updates and learn more about the tools that will help you become an emotionally fit school leader.