

Ep #437: Rebuilding Your Leadership Identity After Being Released from Your Position



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello, empowered principals. Welcome to episode 437.

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.

Hello, my empowered principals. Happy Tuesday. Welcome to this podcast. This is a different podcast than I believe I have ever done before. It's actually a recording of a Facebook Live that I did. So it's raw, it's pretty unfiltered, and I'm just jumping on in the Empowered Principal Facebook group, the public Facebook group. It's open to any school leader or aspiring school leader, site leader, district leader, county leader, state leader. Anybody who's leading in education, you're welcome to join. It's the public group. So, it doesn't cost for you to join. It's free, the Facebook group.

In that group, I'm doing a Facebook Live challenge where I'm going to do 365 lives, not necessarily every single day, but I'm going to do 365 of them. And I'm bringing value, content, insight, ideas, coaching, mentorship, and just having conversations with other empowered colleagues to expand and evolve our identity as leaders, to create greater influence and impact on the culture of our schools, on the approach we take in schools. It's there to be innovative.

And this episode is a recording, a Facebook Live recording that I did on being released from your position. There was a person within our Facebook group who was devastated at being released from her position. I jumped on live to provide this person some comfort, some words of encouragement, and words of empowerment to support them.

And from that Facebook live, I then went on to create an entire workshop, an entire masterclass, a five-day class on being released, how to process

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it, how to feel it, how to go all the way through it, how to learn from it, how to leverage it, and how to become more empowered because of it.

There is a five-day course I'm teaching it as you're listening to this. If you or somebody you know has been released from their school leadership position or even any position in education, please invite them to listen to this podcast and then direct them to the free masterclass. It's on YouTube. It's in the Facebook group I mentioned. It's available. It's free. Just access it because I want people to feel better but not to become victim of being released, to leverage it towards your empowerment.

So this class is for you if you or somebody you know has been released from their position. It's very painful. It's like going through the worst breakup professionally in your life. It's very painful, but you can not only recover from it, you can become more empowered because of it. So enjoy this clip of our Facebook Live. Join our Facebook group and consider joining EPC, The Empowered Principal Collaborative, for the upcoming year. We've got some exciting changes coming on. It's going to be more empowered than ever and I look forward to working with you. Take good care.

I want to bring up a topic that I haven't really addressed yet. So as school leaders, we are typically the ones who are holding conversations around releasing employees. So we typically have to hold the space or hold that emotional pressure, that tension when it comes to letting people go, firing people, releasing them from their position, releasing them from the district.

And that requires a certain skill set, a certain mindset, a certain bandwidth, if you will, because when we as school leaders let somebody go, we have to continue a collegial working relationship with them from the time we tell them, which is usually sometime in March or early April. We tell them at the end of the winter season, we have to go all the way through the spring season and a little bit into summer. So you usually have March, April, May,

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and maybe into June before they're actually finished working in the position.

So out in the corporate world, people can get fired on the spot. They can get fired with two weeks notice. Typically, you know, you get two weeks notice to wrap up your things. Sometimes they just walk you to the door, right? So corporate is different in that how they release people looks different, it feels different, the timeline is different.

So the amount of skill set required of the leader to be able to hold that pressure, hold that tension, hold that space, it's a shorter period of time. School leadership, we have to have a more refined skill, a more mature, a more advanced skill when it comes to holding that space when we have to let somebody go. We have to be able to handle the other person's reactions, emotions, behaviors, and there's an energy.

Especially when there's someone who is very well liked, either by their families, the classroom, the communities, their grade level, the school. When they are a person who's well liked within the school community, it can be more of a challenge because you're not only interacting with that person, you have the emotions of the grade level or the department and the rest of the staff and the parents from that classroom or the parents, you know, community-wide, and you can receive a lot of pressure, you know, during that time between March and June.

But in this group, the other day, there was a question around how to navigate the experience, the situation of being let go yourself. And I'm going to record a podcast on this in more detail, but I highly recommend going to that post. I want to thank the anonymous member who posted it.

It takes so much courage, so much bravery to say, hey, this is what's happening. This is the experience that I'm having. I'm finding it challenging. I'm finding it difficult to navigate, and I would love some compassion and

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empathy and some support and guidance on if anybody has any tips or strategies on how to handle being let go.

And each circumstance is different, but the approach that you can take is the same. So you can look at the post, see the courageous post that this person shared with the entire community. And please, if you see that post, give people lots of love, lots of encouragement. This is what this group is for. We're here to connect and to collaborate and to be supportive of one another, okay? So lots of love and gentleness and tenderness for this person who's going through this very difficult experience.

But I want to offer some guidance and some things to contemplate and think about when you are the one being let go. So it's interesting because we find it difficult to let somebody go because those emotions, it's hard. It's hard to let somebody go. It feels like we're ruining their career or we are, you know, creating an upheaval in that person's life that it's like we are responsible for it because we've made the decision or the district's made the decision and we're going it.

So that can give us some empathy and some perspective when the tables are turned and when we are the ones who are asked, you know, either they're asking us to leave or they're asking us to step down or they're, you know, what we would call a demotion. But when they're asking you to move from one position, maybe a leadership position back to a classroom, or from a lead principal to an assistant principal, or from the district back to the schools, it can look endless ways.

Or they can say that you know, you can resign, we'll give you the opportunity to resign so that we don't have to fire you, okay? None of that feels good. It all feels horrible. And I empathize with you. This has happened to me personally. So I deeply understand the feelings that come with this, the shame, the embarrassment, the public humiliation that you feel, then the self-deprecation that happens like, what did I do? What could

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I have done differently? Where did I go wrong? What's wrong with me? I'm not good enough. You know, all of that.

So you have the social aspect of it because it's very public, and then you have the internal battle that's going on inside. And then you might have, depending on your unique situation, you might feel this conflict happening within you where what's happening on the outside is not what you believe to be true with you on the inside. And that was the case with this person who posted in our group. And to that I want to say, here's some steps that you can take.

This is coaching that I would give my highest paying clients, and I want to offer it to anybody in this group just because I know how painful it is, and I want to support you through that. Now, on the podcast, I'm going to go deeper, and then in EPC, obviously, we are with you every step of the way. If something like this should happen to you, you have an internal network of support, internal connections, and you have live real-time coaching.

But in summary, what I want to offer you is, number one, you've got to sit with those big feelings. You've got to acknowledge them. You've got to say them out loud. I'm angry. I'm frustrated. I'm embarrassed. I'm so embarrassed. I'm so ashamed. I feel humiliated. Whatever it is you're feeling, try to be as specific as possible. I'm enraged. I am confused, overwhelmed. I don't understand.

Say it out loud to yourself. Look in the mirror and say it. Just acknowledge the emotions that are coming up. They might be on the anger end, and the frustration, the anger, the rage, they might be on the almost helplessness like, how did this happen? Why is this happening to me? What did I do? I don't know. I'm confused. I'm overwhelmed. I feel like a victim. I feel like I, you know, was taken advantage of. I feel like I was a scapegoat for something else.

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Explore that. If you're in confusion at all, explore it. Try to create clarity. If you're in the anger stage, say it. Why are you angry? Get it all out. Let yourself rage about it. Whether you write it all down, whether you say it out loud, walk it off, scream it off, cry it off. Let your feelings be validated.

Because, and here's why we do this first, if you try to swallow them down and skip over this part, they are internally driving your decisions and actions. So if you're very angry, but you don't acknowledge the anger or you don't explore what the anger's all about and why you're so angry, that anger is the fuel that's inside of your body. You'll feel it festering in there. And this is when we react.

We say something out of anger, we send an email out of anger, we talk behind somebody's back in anger. We go on to social media in anger, or we, you know, approach somebody, attack somebody. When we're in anger and anger is the fuel that is driving our decisions and actions, if we don't explore that anger and understand where it's coming from and why, in order to regulate ourselves first, we're in reaction mode, not responsive mode. And that intentionality is everything because it will escalate what is already happening.

So you've really got to acknowledge and validate those emotions. Do it in a private space. Try not to do it at work. I know it's hard when you're feeling the burn inside. So if you need a minute, take a walk, take a drive, take a five-minute break in your office, 10-minute break in your office, take 30 minutes. Go take yourself for lunch. You know, do something that you can do to be with yourself. Go sit in your car, even. I've had clients who just their one-on-one session is just inside their car so they can speak freely. Be somewhere where you can.

And if you can, when you get home, see if you can create some time and space just to let it out, just to acknowledge it, and to really go beyond, you know, the feelings and to explore why they're there. What thoughts are

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driving them? Why do you feel the way that you do? Write it all down, journal it out, put it on a piece of paper, put it on your phone. It doesn't matter. Capture it in some way, shape or form.

Once you've had a chance to do that, you've got to go in. Now talk about holding space. When you hold space for other people, now you've got to go in and hold space for yourself. So you have to be able to go to work between now and the end of the year and to show up and lead your school and make sound decisions with intention and do so with the best interest of your staff and students in the upcoming year, even though you're not going to be there. You have to be that mature. You have to be that emotionally regulated. That can be really hard.

It's hard when you don't regulate yourself and allow yourself to feel those emotions. You cannot lead when you are ignoring or trying to like avoid feeling those feelings and letting them come to the surface. So now you've got to hold space for yourself. How do you do that?

You have to have a meeting with you. What's coming up for me? What is this situation about? What do I think it's about? Why do I think this is happening? Is it happening for me? Is it happening to me? Is it happening because of me? Is it somebody else's fault? Where does your brain go? Is it blaming you? Is it blaming them? Is it blaming the circumstance? Where is your brain lying the blame? Where is it putting the blame? It's placing blame somewhere, most likely. So just be honest with yourself.

This is where these one-on-one meetings we have with ourselves, they can be very vulnerable because it's where we have to get really honest. Now, in the case of the person who posted in our group, they were feeling like they were wrongly accused. Now, if you sit down with yourself and you're like, I'm very angry, this is why, I feel like I'm wrongly accused. Here's what I believe to be true.

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You will know. You will feel if you're in alignment, if you are in alignment with your integrity, with what you believe and what you value and how you behaved and what you know to be true and you believe you acted in alignment and in integrity, you will feel that. It will just land as true for you. And this is where we have to honor ourselves and have our own back.

Because other people want to accuse other people, they don't want to take the ownership, so they're going to blame you or they're going to blame the school or they're going to blame the scores. I feel like this is one of the hardest things we do as leaders is take radical ownership, 100% relentless responsibility where we have to say, okay, what do I know to be true?

They may be falsely accusing you, but you know in your heart that is inaccurate and from my perspective. Here's what I did. Here's why I did it. My intentions were clean, my actions were clean, and their accusations are misguided. Now, you've got to live with people being wrong about you, people saying things that you know aren't true.

It happens in the tabloids all the time to celebrities. They have to be able to go on with their lives and not fight every time they see something on social media or every time they see something in a tabloid. They would drive themselves crazy if they went and had to argue and it's called JADE: justify, argue, defend, explain. J-A-D-E.

When you're JADING, justifying, arguing, defending, explaining yourself, you could be doing that all this school year long if you allow other people's different interpretation of you, different perspective of you, if you allow that to gnaw at you and you feel like you have to JADE it, you have to defend it, explain it, try to get them to believe you, you'll spend your entire energy, your entire leadership time doing that.

Empowered leaders know this is who I am. This is what I believe to be true and all that chatter and hearsay, it's false. And if you feel that professional, you know, what do they call it? Defamation of character, or if something like

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that's been going on, for sure, if you have worked through and you believe you have a case, you know, get, seek legal advice. I'm not a legal advice person. This is not legal advice. This is personal development advice. This is a personal development journey. This is an invitation.

So when you're feeling this way, look into yourself, what feels true for me? And we have to hold space and allow other people to be wrong about us. I know, it's really hard because we want people to like us, we want to explain, we want to work everything out. But there are times when other people are accusing us of something that we didn't do and we want to get in there and clean it up.

This person said, I don't even want to do that. I just want to like hold my head up high. I just want to get out of here with grace. And I'm like, that's actually, you're 50% of the way there. If you're not here to get into the fight and to JADE and to, I call it picking up the rope. When you tug-of-war, if you want to go to tug-of-war with your district, you can spend the next three months doing that.

Or you can say, here's what I know to be true, you know, internally. I'm going to sit with that truth and I'm going to walk in and hold my head up high and do the best that I can from now until June. Now here's where it gets hard.

Sometimes when we are accused of something, there's a little thread of truth. It might be like 90% fabricated or when people like dramatize things. Maybe there was something you did that in hindsight, when you look back, you're like, I could have handled that differently, or maybe I did misspeak, or maybe there was a mistake I made, or maybe I missed something, or maybe I did misstep. Okay, you're a human.

Here's where it's really important to stay in full integrity. We have to acknowledge that part too. So as much as we're acknowledging this is the truth, this is what I know to be true, this is who I am, this is what feels good

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and feels true for me, and I'm going to hold my head up high knowing that I wasn't integrity here, I also have to be in alignment and integrity with owning where maybe I did misstep.

Maybe there is a nugget of truth in what my district's saying to me. We're not saying it justifies you being released. It isn't about the release as much as it is about you getting honest and true with yourself, true alignment with what you believe to be true, not true, and where you can see the shade of gray, where you can see where their perspective of what happened, maybe misinterpreted, but you can see why they might have done that or you can see it in hindsight where you might have handled something differently.

It's okay to acknowledge that with yourself. It's painful. It's like looking at yourself in the mirror and like, yeah, I messed up. I own that. That's hard because it's that sinking feeling of like, I did this to myself.

And let's just go to the place where maybe you did do something that warranted, that made their decision to release you like understandable. Then we have to get into your self-identity, your self-concept. And I've had this happen to myself as well where you look for the truth. And don't convince yourself you did something wrong if you didn't, and don't convince yourself you did nothing wrong if you did.

Be as honest with yourself as possible. I think it's the hardest thing we do as humans, definitely hard as leaders because we're public when we're leading a public school, right? Or we're leading any kind of educational institution, it is public in some way, shape or form because you're dealing with the public, people, you're dealing with people.

But if you can be 100% honest with yourself, this is where it doesn't feel true and I'm in alignment and I can see their perspective is valid. Not 100%, but I get it. I get where maybe I could have done something differently and I'll take that moving forward. Then you've got to work on identity work. This is hard. It is hard to be released. What I want to say here is, do this work,

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feel your emotions about it, explore them, give them a voice. Ask them why. Why do you feel this way? What's coming up? Let it all out. Get real with yourself, 100% real.

Have a little one on one with yourself and say, hey, what feels absolutely true? What feels like locked in alignment? What I didn't do, what I did do, what I would do differently, and then hold your head up high, go into that job with as much integrity as possible, knowing that it's not about what happened as much as who you are in your handling of it. It's a lesson. It's painful, but you're growing, you're expanding your capacity to handle public scrutiny, to handle feedback, criticism, even if it's just a perspective difference.

You're learning how to handle that while also holding your head up high, knowing that you are still worthy, knowing that you are still worthy of being a leader, that you have what it takes and you're growing your capacity even more to lead through this painful chapter and that your career is not over because of this chapter.

And that's a whole nother topic. So if you are feeling this way, I really encourage you to sign up for EPC, or you can sign up for one-on-one to get through this process. But many people, I've coached dozens and dozens and dozens of school leaders who have been through something like this and they've been rehired. We tweak some things, we tweak your identity, and we get you to believe in what you have to offer. And that takes a little bit of growth and a little bit of time.

So if this is you, I want to send you so much love, so much grace. I know it hurts. I know it hurts. It's happened to me personally. And I want you to know you are not alone in this. You don't need to walk this path alone, this chapter alone. Please reach out for coaching. Please reach out to join the Empowered Principal Collaborative.

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The work that we're doing here as leaders and the work that we're doing in EPC, it's the missing link. It's what's not talked about at our leadership team meetings, at the district team meetings. We're not talking about how hard it is to lead a school in the public eye. How challenging it is to hold space for 25, 50 staff members and their emotions and their behaviors and their thoughts and their opinions, you know all of their feelings and their actions too. Let alone 500 to 1,000 to 2,000 plus students. It's a big job. It's a big ask.

But if not you, then who? You're capable. You're cut out for this. This group is here. We're here to build people up. We're here to empower ourselves and others. So while it's challenging and sometimes we want to lick our wounds, go ahead and do that. Take the time you need to feel the feels, to give yourself that love and grace and, you know, gentleness. But you don't want to sit in coddling yourself or feeling like you're in victim energy for a long time.

You want to work through this, go through the emotions, and then rebuild up what's working, what's not, what do you want to do differently, build up that identity, and then rebuild yourself, rebrand yourself so that you can go out into the job fair situation and land your ideal job, which is one of my specialties. It's one thing that we love to do in the Empowered Principal world is get you empowered, get you hired, land your ideal position, and then insist and ensure that you thrive.

So school leadership offers it all. I've been through a lot of it. So I'm here for you. And I wish you the most beautiful week. I wish you an empowered week. And if you are struggling, just know you're not alone. We're here to support you.

Thank you to our member for reaching out and I look forward to working with each and every one of you, coaching you and mentoring you to the highest level possible. Have a great week, you guys. Take good care. Bye.

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