

Ep #439: Why Education Needs Trailblazing Leaders



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello, empowered principals. Welcome to episode 439.

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. And hey, I just want to acknowledge you for a beautiful job. Well-done school leaders, you're nearing the end of the year, and whether your year is officially done as you're listening to this or the days approaching are the last days of your school year for the 25-26 school year, I want to congratulate you and acknowledge you and celebrate you.

Even if you're not taking time to celebrate yourself, I see you, I feel you, I hear you. I have been coaching for the last year. We have been collaborating in the Empowered Principal Collaborative this year. I'm hearing the struggles, I'm hearing the challenges, but I'm also witnessing incredible wins, incredible progress, incredible gains, and incredible impact. Just, outstanding job.

If you are standing, at this point in the year, you might be tired, you might have some scars, you might be bleeding, but you are here at the finish line. This is something to be commended. It is not easy to lead an entire school full of children, full of adults, and the community that stands with the school.

So you are incredible, amazing, empowered, extraordinary. Please, please, please, schedule time in your calendar to celebrate yourself and the accomplishments of your year. Please take a moment to focus on the good stuff, what went well, what you're excited about, what you accomplished, what you are most proud of.

It is such an honor to work with individual school leaders, site leaders, district leaders, county leaders, state leaders. I work with all levels. And

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what I can tell you is that no matter what position you hold, whether you're an assistant principal or you're a superintendent of a school, you feel the same feels. We feel the same challenges. We want the same goals.

The human experience in any leadership position feels the same because human emotion is similar. We have similar experiences, and no two people experience the exact vibrations in their body, but disappointment is disappointment, and celebration is celebration. And I want you to know that you have worked so hard for yourself, your staff, your students, for us, for them, for the greater good. And I want you to know how much you are loved, appreciated, and cherished. You, my friend, are a trailblazer.

So what is a trailblazer? What does it mean to be a trailblazer? Who is a trailblazer? We are trailblazers. If you think of the word trailblazer, you're on a trail and you're blazing it. You are a person who trailblazes every single day. That is just simply a person who leads, who's bold, who goes out, who takes risk, knowing there's risks out on the trail. There's going to be scary things. Lions, tigers, and bears, oh my. You are out there anyway.

So I want us to think like trailblazers. As we're wrapping up this year and we are reflecting on what worked, what didn't, and what we're going to adjust for next year, I want you to be in trailblazer identity. What is a trailblazer? Who is a trailblazer? How do they feel? How do they handle being a trailblazer?

What did you do this year to handle each and every day, each and every situation? Did you focus on what wasn't working and sit down on the trail? Or did you get up every day and keep going and keep blazing? A person who is a trailblazer, like you, is a person who leads. They create motion. They are motion-generating leaders. A trailblazer is a person who creates a path for others. They create the trail. They create the way. Where there was no trail, one is created by the trailblazer. That is us.

The world of the empowered principal is trying to blaze a new path. We can no longer take the beaten path. It's been beaten down enough, but it's not

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leading us to where we want to go. It's not leading all students towards empowerment and success and independence and freedom and opportunity and choice. We can see that we need to trailblaze a new path. We need to take action. We need to create momentum. Somebody has to do it. That person is you.

I know you're tired. I know this rah rah speech should not be coming at the end of the year, but yet it is. And it's because this is the time to reflect and recommit. What are we going to do to trailblaze next year? Who are we going to be?

And look, you don't have to trailblaze alone. In the past, people had to trailblaze alone, and maybe they weren't as successful because they were alone, and they did get eaten up by the media, by the social media posts, by the public scrutiny, by the parents who didn't like you, by the teachers who rallied against you. Maybe they did beat you down. It happened to me. I was alone.

This is why I created *The Empowered Principal*® Podcast. This is why I wrote *The Empowered Principal* book, why I created one-on-one coaching to provide individual private, confidential, safe space coaching for people to talk about the real S-H-I-T that's going on in the field without fear of retribution.

And then, so many people wanted one-on-one that I created the Empowered Principal Collaborative because I couldn't serve everybody at a one-on-one level. And so we created a group coaching program, which became a collaborative, which is a masterful mastermind.

And now I offer both, one-on-one coaching for private confidential conversations that need to be kept private and confidential, because sometimes in education we need that, and other times, we need to collaborate, we need to connect, we need to see that there are other trailblazers out in the world doing this work. You are not alone. We are not alone. We trailblaze together.

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We don't let no and never done it before stop us from experimenting and trying and getting up every day. Even when we have to take a moment, take a breath, take some rest, lick our wounds, we get up and we try again. We have courage. A trailblazer feels fear but gets up and goes forward anyway. They know there are people who don't like them out there. They know there are problems they're not sure how to solve.

They know there are conversations that are not comfortable to have. They know that they have to ask people for permission after they've done the thing. They understand there are risks and they say yes anyway. That's us. Somebody has to do this job. It is us, the people recording this podcast, listening to this podcast, sharing this podcast with fellow trailblazers, joining EPC, joining one-on-one when you need one-on-one coaching.

And look, there's a time and place for both. There are times when you are so down as a trailblazer, you feel so defeated, you have no hope, and you have to just express yourself and get all those emotions out, and you don't want to do that in a public setting. That's why there's one-on-one coaching where you can still tap into trailblazer energy but feel your feelings and to be human in a safe, private space. Trailblazers aren't exempt from fear. They're not exempt from pain. They just have the courage to feel it. When they get knocked down, they take the time to recover and get back up.

My Empowered Collaborative members, they have access to a 30-minute one-on-one session with me once a month. They get that in addition to the group coaching every single week, and they do, they use them.

Every single person in that room has utilized one-on-one coaching for something that has knocked them off their feet, that has taken them aback, taken their breath away, and they have needed a minute to discuss it in privacy, to talk it through, to come up with a solution that they couldn't see because they were, you know, clouded in their feelings about what happened. But a trailblazer doesn't just sit down and let them win. They

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clear the fog. They get clarity. They take their rest. They get the support they need. They stay committed to the vision.

And I know you're tired. It feels like, oh, I don't have it in me. Yes, you do. And here's how I know. You have it in you whether you show up or not. You can tell yourself, I'm not cut out for this. I don't have this. I'm not a trailblazer. I don't identify as a trailblazer. I'm not empowered. I'm not exceptional. I'm just little old me showing up. That's trailblazing.

You can stay in bed, think that you don't have what it takes, and tell yourself and shut yourself down, and you could even quit the job, but it's still within you to do it because you've already done it. You got in the ring, you got beat up a little bit, you got some battle wounds. I get that. You're still a trailblazer. You trailblazed this year. Or if you're an aspiring leader and it's your first time in the ring, welcome to the rodeo. Let's go. Let's commit to the vision. Let's commit to discovering more than we are committed to comfort.

We could sit on the sidelines, friends. That's not trailblazing. We could wait for others to trailblaze to make it easy for us, so it's comfortable for us to be a school leader until you find out that no matter who has gone before you, there's still trails to be blazed. We want to understand the bigger picture here that education is about humanity, the human experience. We are here to develop humans, and that requires us to develop as humans.

We can only develop the littles in their human capacity to the extent which we are willing to continually expand and develop ourselves personally, which equals professionally. Children need leaders who are willing to be trailblazers. When will we just decide to step into this identity, to allow ourselves to be empowered, to accept the calling, to be a trailblazer, and to show up not because we want some accolades as a leader, but because the children need us, and our staff needs us.

I know you're tired. I'm going to say this. It's the end of the year. You should be tired. Trailblazers get tired. Why? They're busy blazing trails. We need

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someone who's going to stand up and say, "Look, I want to be a trailblazer. I am a trailblazer. I want the support of fellow trailblazers. I don't want to do school like it's always been before. I want to be willing to try new ways of thinking even though it's new, even though there's some risks, because the truth is even the comfortable path has its problems."

We see them. We're in it right now. When we do things like we've always done them and we do them because we're told to, not because it's right, but because it's what somebody else wants, we're not trailblazing, but it doesn't mean we're solving the problems.

We need new ways of exploring and experimenting, new ways of measuring milestones and progress, new ways of communicating and interacting. We've tried new curriculums, but from the same companies over and over and over. Lobbyists who have monopolies in the curriculum development company. Little guys who are entrepreneurs trying to bring beautiful curriculums, they're not heard and seen. Why?

Because the companies who have all the power, all the status, all the title, all the recognition, all the brand recognition and name and finances, they crush those who are in competition with them. The same companies for decades who are run by people in positions of power who want to maintain their power, maintain control of the narrative of the curriculum, and maintain keeping people disempowered. The same kids over and over get the curriculum and the same kids don't. We've tried that.

We've tried new technology platforms with the same interaction methods, which is screen time. And now they're on screens all the time. Is it helping children develop their bodies, their minds, their hearts, their souls, their intellect, their ability to discern for themselves what they believe is best for themselves and others in the world?

We've tried mainstreaming and differentiated learning groups, but with the same mindset. You know, kids who go into intervention in the early grades

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tend to stay in intervention, marching along. Kids who once they're in special ed, very few kids get to exit the program. We're tracking kids.

Trailblazing requires us to take a new trail. And look, it's not like we have to build a new world in order to blaze a new trail. We can work within the same paradigm but take a new trail. It requires us to take a new trail, a new trial. Trying something that we don't know if it will work or not. Trial and error. That's why it's called a risk.

So for those of you who watched the Artemis go up into space, it went to the dark side of the moon, something that has never been done before. So NASA's been around for a while, and NASA's had some pretty big freaking accomplishments, but they've had some massive failures. They know risk is involved, tremendous risk, life and death risk, but they continue to trailblaze, and they just went around the dark side of the moon. They collected data never collected before. They achieved something that used to be impossible.

How did they do that? Trailblazing, risk-taking, courage, determination, willingness to try something new. The people who work at NASA, every single one of them, expanded what was possible in every aspect of that space program, from the rocket itself and all of the hardware, because I think what happened last time when there was an accident, an issue, they found out that there were pieces of the rocket that wiggled apart.

So the engineers who designed the hardware had to think outside the box, had to trailblaze. The space suits were upgraded, trailblazed. The materials that protected them from the heat around the rocket inside and out, trailblazing. From the programs that track the whereabouts of where they are, trailblazed, to the well-being of the vessel itself and to the souls on board, trailblazing. There was a potential of life and death risk, and every precaution was exercised with as much precision as possible, but even so, there was a major risk of failure.

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We know this is true because we've witnessed NASA's failures very publicly, very dramatically. And still, those humans who once were in our schools, by the way, who were educated by us educational trailblazers, are now in programs where life and death is a risk, and they're still saying yes.

The willingness went where no human has gone before. Trailblazing. We need trailblazers in education. I am one of them. I'm doing this with major risk. I have risked everything in my life, everything, and I'm still here doing it. I'm still showing up, bloodied, bruised, beaten. My life, I had identity quakes so big it has shattered me in who I believe to be I am, but I'm still showing up. I'm still showing up. Why? Because somebody needs to do it, and it might as well be me, and it might as well be you.

I want you to be a trailblazer, to have the support of fellow trailblazers, to be the one. We've got to decide in education that education's actually about the humans in front of us, not about the test scores, not about the curriculum companies, not about those in power who want to hinder empowerment, but those who are inside doing the work, empowering children, empowering staff, empowering students, empowering families, empowering communities.

Our world is asking for trailblazers right now. The energy of the globe is saying we need trailblazers, and people are trailblazing. Are you one of them? Yes, you are. You don't have to trailblaze in other ways that people are trailblazing. You trailblaze in your own way.

The focus of the 26-27 Empowered Principal Collaborative school year will be all about trailblazing, tapping into curiosity and courage, taking the plunge into exploration and implementation, experimentation. We're going to coach ourselves, and we're going to support one another through the human experience of this leadership journey.

We're going to lead with love, compassion, kindness, curiosity, understanding. We're also going to have high standards and accountability. We're going to take emotional ownership of our experience. We're going to

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take ownership of our belief systems, of our values, of our emotional state, of the energy fueling our decisions and actions, and we're going to take full and complete ownership of our decisions and actions. We're going to own our wins as much as we own our losses.

I don't see many principals not taking ownership for losses, but I sure don't see them holding themselves in celebration of their wins. Trailblazing is both. Are you in? I hope so. Let's go. Have a beautiful week.

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.