

# Ep #440: Rewriting Your Empowerment Story



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

## Ep #440: Rewriting Your Empowerment Story

Hello, empowered principals. Welcome to episode 440.

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. It's good to have you here. Listen up. I want to talk about story time. We're going to talk about storytelling, but not in the classroom, not the stories we tell in class, the stories that we tell ourselves. Because look, I've been coaching myself, I've been coaching your fellow principals on the stories, the narratives that we tell ourselves. Unfortunately, there are stories that we tell ourselves that disempower us.

They are stories about ourselves, our identity, our capacity, our ability. We don't believe we're good enough for this. We don't have enough of that trait. We're not cut out to be a leader. We're not good enough, strong enough, smart enough, decisive enough, skilled enough. Something is wrong with us. We have stories about who we are and who we are not. Now, where do these stories come from? Who writes the story about who we are?

Do our parents write that story? Do our siblings write that story? Do our mentors, coaches, teachers, advisors write those stories? Do our friends write those stories? Who is in charge of writing the story? Do our teachers write those stories? Do our bosses write the story of who we are and what we are capable of and what we are not? Who has the pen?

It is us. We are telling the story. This is who I am. This is who I'm not. This is what I'm capable of. This is what I'm not capable of. I don't understand how to do this. For me, I had a story about my capacity to understand technology platforms, how to create my website, how to create audio clips, how to create video clips, how to do a Facebook Live, how to create the podcast, how to write the book. All the things that I have now

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accomplished, I had a story about myself beforehand. And even when I did overcome some of those challenges, I still told myself, but I'm still not good at technology.

I'm still not that skilled. Like I'm not really good on social media. Like I feel too old. I don't feel competent. I don't want to learn that. I don't like it. Well, I was holding the pen to that story. But what I was doing was not only a disservice to myself but a disservice to everyone I serve, to every school leader who wants to be in the Empowered Principal Collaborative, who wants to listen to this podcast every single week. I'm doing a disservice to the service that I want to be providing in the world. Think about the story you have about yourself.

Think about the stories we have about others, comparing and despairing ourselves with other people. They have that trait and I don't. They have it easier than me. They're more liked. They have better connections. They have better schooling. There's something about them that makes principalship, school leadership, being a superintendent easier for them than for me. How we compare and despair, or we think someone has it a certain way. We don't really know that, but we write a story. We create a narrative that has us not feeling empowered.

So we have stories about ourselves that feel very disempowering. We have stories about other people that disempower us simply because we're comparing what we think about that person and then telling ourselves we don't have that, or that they have it easier. We also have stories around why not me? The question, why not me? What's wrong with me? Why didn't I get chosen? Why didn't I get selected? Why wasn't I good enough to make the team?

I remember trying out for cheerleading. Didn't make the team. What did I make that mean about me when I was 14 years old? And am I still carrying that story now, that I don't belong and I don't fit in? Let's talk about stories about not belonging. This has come up over and over again. There are

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stories that we create about ourself that are very disempowering. We want to belong. We are wired as human beings. One of our universal desires and needs is to feel significant, to belong, to be loved, to be appreciated, to fit in.

And there's a difference between belonging and fitting in. Belonging is just being you authentically, and people cherishing your existence in the world. People loving you for exactly who you are. You don't have to pretend, you don't have to people please, you don't have to put on a facade. You belong here. Fitting in is when we people please and we create a facade and we speak or we think or we dress or we talk in the way that we think other people will accept us. We try to create acceptance by not being ourselves. That's trying to fit in. But stories about not belonging.

And then what happens is, when we get invited to belong to something, we get an invitation to be a part of something that would feel good for us, that we said we wanted, that we crave. We want the connection, we want the collaboration, we want the support, we want the solidarity. You know, we want the synergy. But when invited into spaces, into rooms, into communities where we could belong and feel good about that, we then say, oh, I don't have the time for that. I don't have the energy for that.

We get invited to belong, but we don't feel a sense of belonging. And it's not because those around us are rejecting us or ostracizing us. It's because we believe that we don't fit in, we don't belong. So we go into rooms where we want to be in, but then we feel awkward or clumsy or silly or incapable or insufficient in some way. And we end up removing ourselves or not even participating because we don't think that we measure up.

So we get into the room that we wanted to be in and then we compare and despair and then we dip out. Or we just sit there and freeze and we don't participate and we don't gain any connection or belonging from the experience. I've observed this in group settings with professionals like yourself where people go to conferences and there are people who get out

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there and they network and they belong and they feel good and they shake hands even on their first time.

And then there are people who go who've been to conferences for years, but they sit back in the corner and they don't go to all the things or they don't go to the happy hour. They just stay in their hotel room and they just work and get their work done. And they're like, oh, that felt really good. I wasn't interrupted. But you might as well just sat in your office and not expended flights and hotels and dinners and the conference fee to go to a conference where you just sat and got some work done.

I've done this. I'm calling me out. And I know if I'm this way, if I get into rooms that I desperately want to be in, rooms with fellow principals, rooms with superintendents. I have traveled with a group of superintendents and felt like I didn't belong, even though I am a fellow educator, even though I am a coach for leaders. I've been in rooms with fellow coaches and I felt like I didn't belong.

And now my clients are coming to me saying, you know, they want to be in rooms like EPC. They want to be in collaborative rooms, but they don't feel like they belong. They're afraid that they might not be good enough or smart enough or experienced enough to share with like-minded principals. They're afraid if they're going to come in and be a trailblazer that they're not going to be a strong enough trailblazer. I find that so fascinating because I'm like, I relate to that. I have been that way.

We say we want the support. Like, we need help. I don't know what to do. But we aren't willing to accept the help. We're not willing to receive help when it's offered. We're like, no, no, no, I've got this. We have a story about how empowerment equals independence, that if we're to be empowered, we have to figure it out all by ourselves and do the work on our own and figure it out all by ourselves. So we say we want to be supported and we're upset when we don't feel supported, but we don't accept and receive the support. Isn't that crazy how we do this to ourselves?

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So this is an invitation. As we're closing out the school year, walking into summer, you have some space and time to really think about what it is you say that you want, and then the story you have about yourself, the story you have about others, the story you have about are you the villain or the victim? What role are you playing in your life? Are you empowered? Are you disempowered? Stories about belonging, stories about not belonging. Stories about wanting support but not receiving it. Where do you receive support? Where do you not?

Let's get honest with ourselves over the summer and tell ourselves the story that we have about ourselves. What is the truth? What are the stories you tell about yourself to yourself and to others? Just notice the identity that you're claiming right now.

And the way that you can clarify this if you're like, I'm not really sure what I think. How do you feel about yourself? How do I feel? Name the emotion. When I think of me, I feel... When I talk to others, I feel... When I tell people who I am and what I do, I feel... When I think about my career, I feel... Full transparency just with yourself. You don't have to put this on social media.

Just have a conversation with you. Does the way you feel about yourself, about your identity, about your relationship with others in the world, about your relationship with support, receiving it, your relationship with belonging, does it generate momentum? Does it generate eagerness, excitement, drive, energy? Or does it generate looping, more of the same, stagnation, story after story, rinse and repeat.

You try to get yourself empowered and maybe you feel it for a fleeting moment and then you wake up the next morning and you're like, oh, I got to start all over again. There's just lack of momentum because there's a lack of belief. There is a story of disempowerment. There's maybe some boredom or disengagement or apathy.

If there was a gift that I could hand over to you as a school leader and just pass it out around the world, it would be the gift of an empowerment story.

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It would be supporting you, helping you to understand how to shift the narrative about yourself, about being proud of who you are, truly proud of who you are and what you are capable of, of who you were. Even thinking back to the past versions of yourself. In moments where you might have chosen differently, given clarity in hindsight.

So even if you weren't on a healthy path, a clean path, a safe path, a productive path, maybe you had moments of, you know, lacking momentum. But you focus on the moment you decided to change and being proud of that. You focused on how you managed to survive moments of trauma, of the hardest moments of your life, but you kept going minute to minute, hour to hour, day to day. Even if you were functioning at 10%, you chose that 10%.

Focusing on how you committed to goals that you've already accomplished, looking back and saying, I'm proud of that. I am proud that I ran that race, that I completed college, that I got my master's degree, that I passed that administrative exam, that I was able to teach seventh grade for 10 years. One year sounds like a marathon win for me. I've never done it, but I have always admired and acknowledged the middle school teaching staff. I think that is miracle work. They are doing the work of angels to be with the middle school students day in and day out. That's an accomplishment.

Focusing on what is working, focusing on our wins, focusing on who we are, the beautifulness, the gracefulness, the person that you are. Even if you're not graceful, I am not graceful. I don't have this beautiful face and beautiful talents and a beautiful way of communicating even. But I just get out here and I'm just giving it to you authentically from me to you.

This is who I am. Somebody in the world likes this version of me. So I need to like this version of me. My clients love me. They love all my idiosyncrasies. And people love you. So you have to love you. This message is coming from my heart to your heart.

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If there's anything I have learned, it is that you cannot lead people to empowerment if you don't feel empowered. If you don't love yourself, how can others love you? And they do love you, but you don't receive the love. You do belong, but you don't receive the belonging. People want to support, but you don't receive the truth of that support.

So what if this year, we stop writing ourselves off? We start collecting evidence and we leverage that evidence that you are in fact capable, able and enough. Look back at your past, look at all you've accomplished. If you can do that, you can do this.

When we accomplish something, we tend to feel good for a minute and then it's old news and we throw it in the burn pile in the backyard. We don't stack up the wins for ourselves, but we sure do stack up the losses against ourselves. And I know that because I'm the queen. Maybe you feel that you're the queen too of stacking your losses against you.

But let's try a different approach. What if this year we decided to create that empowerment story? Because of that experience, I learned this because I didn't do that, I was able to do this. Because I learned that hard lesson, because I failed at this, because I missed that opportunity, this is what I now know.

Creating a story of faith and trust and momentum, a story of overcoming and becoming, a story based on, you know, where you're headed, where you're going versus perseverating and ruminating and chewing on where you've been. Instead of focusing on the past, let's where are we going now? Forward from this day on. In this moment, who am I?

So, I'm inviting you officially to the Summer of Fun Challenge. The Summer of Fun Challenge is a challenge that I started back in, I think it was during COVID, like 2020 or 2021. But my original intention was just to celebrate life, all of you as a principal. The little moments, the big moments, all of it in between.

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Because as principals and as district leaders, we sometimes forget that we are human, that we deserve to have fun, that we have permission to have fun, that we don't need to be a professional robot 24/7, 365 for the rest of our lives. This is your time. Summer is your, you know, hall pass permission slip to go and play. And releasing and playing doesn't mean you don't care about your work. Not at all. It just means you want to live a full life, alive, engaged, plugged into life versus just robotically being this professional leader where you're so afraid, everybody's eyes are on you 24/7.

You don't have to go crazy or be wild or break the law. You don't have to own a big yacht and get on Instagram and take all these worthy photos to be having fun. You don't have to go on vacations or throw a massive party. You do want to be in the energy of celebration, being in the energy of happiness and delight, the satisfaction and fulfillment, the pride and joy of just being you.

Being with your friends, your family, in your life, not being like a carbon copy of yourself where you're watching yourself, you're watching your life, or you're watching others live, which feels terrible. When you see other people out having fun, you're like, well, I can't have fun. I'm a school leader. What? No.

The Summer of Fun is all about connecting you back to simple joys, the fun of your childhood, your youth, when there wasn't so many darn responsibilities. Remember when you could just be light and alive and engaged in your day, in your world, and all you were was present?

When you were running around with your friends, you were, for us going to the beach, going to drive-in movies, going out for pizza after the football game, just laying on the back of your car, looking at the stars, you know, remember when you first started dating? Like how present you were? And that moment was all that mattered. Fun doesn't have to be massive, expensive. It doesn't have to be this grand, you know, parade of global travel.

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We can just be human, a person, to release the pressures and tensions of always being on, always being productive, polished, perfect. Give yourself the freedom and the permission to just be a person, a human, to live the human experience. To just occupy a space where you don't have any other responsibility other than to take care of ourselves and amplify our own joy and pleasure, to take care of our own needs, to fill our own buckets. The Summer of Fun is about celebrating your life.

How you feel about yourself, the story that you tell yourself, whether it's a story of empowerment or a story of disempowerment, that is the experience you will have. I want you to feel as though you are the most cherished person on the planet because you are. You are to me. I've been in your shoes. I know how painful it feels to not feel like you belong, to feel like you don't matter, to feel like you're not good enough, you're not capable enough, that people don't care, that nobody wants to help you, that you're struggling on your own, that you've got to do everything in silence.

You're carrying the weight of not just your school, your community, your staff, the dramas on your staff, the dramas with the kids, the dramas with the families and community members. And then you go home and you have the weight of the shoulders with your own family and then friendships. There's a lot of weight. But I want you to know you're seen, you're felt, you're heard, you're cherished, you're loved. You matter.

And the Summer of Fun Challenge is to remind you of that. To rewrite your empowerment story. We are starting the Summer of Fun Challenge in June. We are in a Facebook group called the Empowered Principals. It's a public Facebook group for any educators, for school leaders, aspiring leaders, leaders, site leaders, district leaders, everyone's invited as long as you are aspiring to be a leader or are a leader in the field of education.

We are here to belong. We're here to feel good. We are here to be empowered. We are here to have fun, right? We are here to create a story about ourselves that isn't about compare and despair and why not me? It's

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about because of that and why me, and together we win. We create grand slams here for us as leaders, for them, those we're leading and for the greater good. I invite you into the Summer of Fun Challenge.

Let's write your empowerment story. Let's get you into EPC and let's break away from the stories that we don't belong, that we don't need support, that we aren't good enough, that we're not capable, and that we can't make change because together we certainly can. Have a beautiful week. I will see you in the Summer of Fun Challenge and I look forward to meeting you in the Empowered Principal Collaborative. Have a beautiful week. Take care, bye.

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