

Ep #448: The Power of Authenticity in Leadership



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With Your Host

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Hello, empowered principals. Welcome to episode 448.

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 the end of July. We are gearing it up, aren't we? Many of you are having your leadership retreats, professional developments. You're doing all this planning. You're in it. I am working with my new crew of clients, wonderful, wonderful leaders. I am so excited for this year. I love the energy of a new year. I'm looking forward to coaching and creating and really developing high levels of impact in our schools this year.

I believe with all of my heart that true transformation is occurring. As we speak, we are in it. We are in a moment of transformation in our schools. And that's what I want to talk about today is the power of authenticity. I believe and I am witnessing the power of leaders going back to themselves, using what they know to be true, staying true to themselves, and creating true connections, true relationships, true conversations, and allowing themselves to be authentic.

Because we're in a world where we are bombarded by other people's opinions, other people's emotions, other people's belief systems, where the internet will provide anyone and everyone access to our time, our attention, our energy, our minds. Have you noticed that? The internet has this sneaky little way of letting the entire world into our space. And we forget that we are the gatekeeper of our authenticity, what we desire, what we want, how we want to create it, who we want to be.

And we're in a world where people feel very entitled to judge us, to critique, to give advice on how you should live, how you should lead, how you should lead your school, lead your life, how you should breathe. And that

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volume of external input into our lives can feel so intense that we'd rather be someone who just fits in or appears to fit in and be a person who is liked because the anticipation, just the anticipation of doing something or saying something that doesn't fit in or that somebody doesn't like is going to lead us into being canceled, not being chosen to participate, being rejected, or not belonging, no longer fitting into our school or our district or even the entire industry of education.

The fear is real. We see it happen to people. So what do we do? What I have observed, what I have witnessed, actually, even what I've experienced, is that we jump on the bandwagon. We adopt the latest trends. We talk about the latest conversations in education. We focus on what other schools, other leaders, other districts are doing. Why? Why do we do that? One, because we want to be engaged. We want to know. We want to be in the know. We want others to know we're in the know. We want to be seen as knowledgeable. We want to learn and we want to try new things. We want to be included in that conversation. We want to be in the trend, inside of it. And of course, we want to succeed. We want the trend, whatever it is, to be successful for us and for our school.

And why do we want that? We want to be able to say, hey, if we don't meet the goal, at least we tried the trend that other people said would work or that worked for other people. At least we knew about it and we tried, versus being told like, wait, didn't you do this? Everybody's doing this. Why didn't you do this? You're like, oh, wait, what? Well, I guess I better do that. But we're not doing that thing, whatever it is. We're not doing that thing because we believe it's the right thing to do. It's not action from authenticity. It's action from anticipation of failing. It's the desire to fit in and belong and to look good to everybody else, to trend, to be in the trend, right?

But what I've observed in myself, this is, I'm right here with you guys, and I've coached hundreds of leaders over the last decade. What the trends do and chasing the trends is that it leads us on a never-ending goose chase. It distracts us. It confuses us, and it disconnects us. So it's just very

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distracting to be out there with all the trends and all the things. And yesterday this was the trend and tomorrow that's going to be the trend, and we've got to keep up with the trends. We're just distracted, running around crazy.

But it also is very confusing. Wait a minute, I thought you said this would work. And last year it was that was going to work. And the year before that, and now this year, and this is why teachers are like, yeah, yeah, yeah. Here's this year's initiative. Here's this year's trend. I'm just gonna let it pass. This too shall pass. So they don't get invested because we're chasing trends and we're just trying to be in the know. And it disconnects us from what we think, what we know, what we believe, what we value, what is aligned for us, our school.

We end up spending our time ensuring that we know the latest trends so we can be in the conversation, so we don't look like the silly person who is the only one out of the loop. And we want to make sure that we're in the know and that we're acting in alignment to the trend versus acting in alignment with what actually we believe works for us. And hey, some of those trends out there, you're like, that feels right. That feels like what I've been looking for, what I believe to be as the gap where I believe it's missing. Yes, more of that, please. I feel drawn to it, aligned to it. That is different than, oh, I should be doing this because everybody else is.

So trend chasing and not being in our authenticity, disconnecting from that authenticity, it leaves us kind of changing direction with the wind, wherever the wind blows, whatever the next thing in education is. And we've seen this, we see it on social media. There's constant trends. Something pops and now everybody's doing it, trying to be seen for a minute, trying to get likes, trying to be noticed. And then that fades, and then you've got to try the next trend. And then you become the person who's the person chasing the trends. But is it creating impact? Is it creating results?

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Authenticity, it's grounding. It is anchoring. It feels stable. You feel certainty. You feel assured. Have you ever been around a person whose energy is very authentic? They're very anchoring. I have a girlfriend who I met when I was 22 years old, just out of college. I got married right out of college, moved to this little town, became the early childhood teacher and coordinator for their district, and this woman who has my heart and soul forever was my assistant in the classroom.

She's the most authentic human ever. She is so grounded, so peaceful, so loving. She gives the best hugs. And when I'm around her, I feel so held and loved and cherished and supported and believed in. She just feels like a warm, cozy blanket, her friendship, and it's so real. Nothing sways her. She doesn't beat to other people's drums. She beats to her own. And in that authenticity, I feel stability with her. I feel genuine love and trust and safety.

I believe our schools need this. We need to come back to authenticity, come back to humanity, come back to human connection, conversation, collaboration. We need community. We don't need trends. We need authenticity, decisions about what our school needs because we understand who we are as leaders. We understand our staff, we understand our students, we understand the families in our community, and we understand the principles and the values that feel authentic to us for our community.

And these decisions have staying power. And they last because they're grounded in authenticity. They are aligned. They're the natural next step based on what we know our school needs, regardless of the trend. Some of the trends stick. Maybe one of the trends you tried five years ago is still working. And we're not saying we do the same thing over and over expecting a different result. If it's not getting the result, then it's not authentically working. We have to be true to that as well.

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This is about just being in our natural state as a leader. You're introverted, extroverted? Are you faking it? Are you trying to be extroverted when you're introverted? Or you're very extroverted, but you're turning down the volume because other people feel uncomfortable about your energy and your social activity in your community? I'm naturally extroverted and a lot of people don't like that about me, whether they're introverted or not, they don't like that as a characteristic. I don't change that because the times I have felt like I needed to change it because other people were bothered by it, and I would have to turn down the volume, I played small. It didn't feel good for me. And I was not in my best leadership energy.

I'm extroverted. Do I have times when I want to be alone? I like to work alone. I think better alone because I'm so social, I'm so extroverted that I get distracted, and I just want to be with the people. But when I need to get work done, I need to be alone. That's all of me, authentically. Turning down my volume because I'm an extrovert, because other people feel bad when I'm too extroverted for their liking, does not make me authentic. And it's exhausting. It's like I'm holding in all the pressure. I don't want anybody to see the truth. That's exhausting.

And if you're an introvert, like I have people in my life that are very introverted, quieter. It's not that they don't go and do social things, but they tend to listen and just observe more than they are like actively engaged in the conversation. But they're still observant. They contribute, you know, when, what they want and when they want to and in the way that they want to. But if you ask an introverted person to be extroverted, it feels exhausting. It's not authentic. Authenticity feels natural. It doesn't consume energy.

Have you ever had the experience where as a teenager, your parents wouldn't let you do something that other kids were allowed to do? So maybe you weren't allowed to drive your friends around in your car. It had to be just you. Or maybe your parents wouldn't let you go to big parties. Or maybe you had a curfew and other kids got to stay out much later than you.

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And you would beg and you would sulk and you would be so mad at your parents. "Everybody else is doing it, and you guys are the meanest, and I hate you, and why don't you let me do anything? You're no good. You're no fun."

And your parents would come back and say, "We understand. We don't care what other families are doing. In this family, your safety comes first. This is what we value. This is what we believe in. This is who we are. We don't want to not have boundaries. We don't want to not have curfews or rules."

And they would just hold true to that parenting belief, and nothing would sway them. Even though you were so mad and rolled your eyes and slammed the door and gave them the silent treatment, they held tight because they believed that was the best decision for their family. They were allowing you to be mad at them, allowing them to be the uncool parents. They allowed you to hate them. They allowed whoever, your friends, to think that they were the mean parents, and they allowed it because it meant being true to themselves as parents. And that mattered more to them than being cool or fitting in or having you like them in the moment.

That's what authenticity is. It's grounding. It's natural. You can allow other people to have different opinions, and it doesn't sway you. You're solid. I have to tell you, I just had a consult call this week with a young man who has so much wisdom, so much skill, so much talent, so much charisma. I thoroughly enjoyed speaking with him. And we were chatting about the interview process and how easy it is to get caught up in responding in a way that we believe the panel wants to hear. We start wondering, did I say the right thing? Did I do the right thing? Did I say enough? Did I say too much?

And we start to waver in our authenticity, in our identity. We start to try and control our identity and how people perceive us in an interview because we want so badly to fit in, to belong, to not get rejected, to get hired, to land the

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job so we can go do what we love to do. And we sometimes will answer in ways during that interview, thinking more about what the panel wants to hear and how we're being perceived versus answering from the depth of our heart and soul, regardless of whether they agree with us or not. So it's important to have those values, those philosophies, your principles when it comes to being a principal, and staying true to that.

Because if the goal leans towards trying to be trendy, trying to be in the know, trying to razzle-dazzle other people with what they want to hear, what they tend to believe, what's popular for the moment, then we are doomed to be in a leadership experience that is built upon pretending and faking it and being trendy, based on what the whim of others want in the moment or what's popular in the moment, and that is so exhausting.

Being authentic means being true to what you believe, no matter what, knowing what you believe, first of all, and then staying true to it until something comes in that may invite you to adjust your thinking. You believe something until something compels you to believe otherwise. You stay open, but you don't waver on every single person's opinion or every single whim.

So speaking to your philosophy, your ideas, your approach, what you believe, you think will create genuine impact and empowerment in your staff and your students, allowing yourself not to be a match for every school out there, but to insist that you find the best match for you. You're a match for them, they're a match for you. Trusting there's a school who is aching to have you and only you, your style, your flair, your personality, your skill set, your wisdom, fully authentically you as their leader.

And hey, I know this, being authentic is vulnerable. Not everyone is going to accept your vision, your beliefs, your approach. Not everyone's going to decide to hire you, and that can be hurtful. But when we trust I'd rather be authentic than be liked or trending because it's so short-lived, that's the whole point. The goal's not to be liked by the masses, which by the way is

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impossible. I mean, I think about vanilla ice cream. There are a bazillion ice cream flavors in the world. Some are very exotic, some are very simple. Vanilla, it's the universal flavor. It's simple, it's very easygoing, it doesn't stain if you spill. It can be mixed with other flavors. It kind of leans toward boring and uneventful.

And even then, as unthreatening as vanilla ice cream flavor is, there are people who don't like it or don't prefer it. So there's no amount of blending in and trending that you can do as a school leader to be liked by everyone. The minute you do something in the effort to be liked, the trend will change. And then people don't like the trend. There's always an anti-trend to the trend. The trend kind of trends up and then everybody's doing it, and then somebody comes in and says, nope, opposite. That happens in education. It's very cyclical all the time.

So the, a minute you initiate an educational trend simply because it's what everyone's talking about and it sounds like maybe this is it, this is the quick fix, it will have backlash. And then another trend will roll right into town. You've experienced this, I'm sure, right? But what has staying power, what's tried and true, at least in the human experience, is the frequency of authenticity.

So allow yourself to be true as a leader. Be in alignment with the needs of your school, your staff, your students, even when what you guys are focusing on at your school goes against the current trend. If it's working, keep at it. If it's not working, explore what might work and why do you believe that that will work? Not just because it's trending, but because you believe it's the next best step. That's authentic decision-making in school leadership.

So this year, I invite you to focus on your authenticity, what feels natural for you, what feels good for you, what feels true for you, what naturally draws you in. What consistencies do you believe your school community needs

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from its educators, from its leader? Connect with this leadership approach. Give it a try. Let us know the impact it creates. I'd love to hear your story.

Have a beautiful week. I care about you all so very much. I look forward to celebrating your authenticity. Talk next week. Take good care. 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.