

Ep #451: Empowered Routines: Creating Habits That Support Your Leadership



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello, empowered principals. Welcome to episode 451.

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 New Year. Welcome to August 2026. Here we go. We are ready for a brand new school year. Are you ready? Are you already in session? I'm thinking about all of you. I'm sending out so much love, so much enthusiasm, so much excitement for this new year. I want you to know that this is the perfect time to be thinking about empowered routines for the year.

So, it's that time of year. We're starting off fresh, kicking off school. EPC is starting. So for those of you who are interested in EPC, please click the link in the show notes, get registered. We are starting in September. We are so ready for you. We want you to be there. We want your talent, your wisdom, your strengths, your expertise in the room with us at the table sharing, collaborating, connecting, networking, problem-solving, supporting, creating, innovating. This is what we're doing here in the Empowered Principal Collaborative. It's the most loving, supportive group that you can find on the planet for school leaders. I really, deeply, truly believe that. So join us in EPC. This is the time because we are starting. We want you there. Okay.

Let's talk about empowered routines. So, we have routines in our life, whether we recognize them and acknowledge them or not, whether we are aware of them or not, whether we are intentional with our routines or not. So, during the summer, you had a certain routine, and that routine looks very different than the school year for most people. But we can be a little more flexible in maybe our sleep schedule or our travel schedule, even our eating schedule for that matter, right? We have different schedules in the

Ep #451: Empowered Routines: Creating Habits That Support Your Leadership

summer, but now we're back getting into a routine. And this is the time of year to be conscious of the routines that you have, to be intentional about the routines you want to create. And I would like to offer empowered routines for you to consider and contemplate for you personally, what you believe to be empowered routines for you.

So, what's the beauty of having a routine? We all have them. So why do we have them as humans? The way that I see routines is that they automate our decisions and actions. They're things that we want to just do on autopilot that help us achieve the lifestyle we want, the goals that we have, the experiences we want, without having to re-decide every single day. So when you wake up in the morning, and morning routines are actually really essential, and they're important. We're going to talk about them in this podcast.

Your morning routine is essential because it starts your day. It determines your energy, whether or not you feel momentum, you feel excited. That energy about how you feel about your day, the life that you're going to live today in this moment, starts with your morning routine. So morning routines, and routines in general, they automate our actions. So we don't have to re-decide every morning. You don't wake up and decide every morning, "Am I going to brush my teeth?" "Am I going to get dressed?" "Am I going to do my hair and makeup or take a shower?" We automate those routines in the morning because we want to be clean, we want to be healthy, we want healthy teeth, we want to go to school dressed in our professional clothing, not our jammies. And so, we will automate a routine in the morning.

So, we use routines and we leverage them because they help us create our identity. Routines are just actions that we take on a regular basis. So the things you do on a regular basis, they determine your identity. They determine how you feel, they determine what you accomplish, and how you

Ep #451: Empowered Routines: Creating Habits That Support Your Leadership

accomplish them. Because as you know, there's no one right way to do a morning routine or any routine. There's just the way that works for you.

So, you do have a routine, and I'm using the morning routine as an example. You have a morning routine whether you are conscious of it or not, whether you think about it or not, and whether you're intentional about it or not. So, it's not the "what" in the routine. It's not so much about what you do in the morning. You know what to do. Most of us have a pretty similar routine.

Now, some of us might wake up and meditate the first thing or journal the first thing or do gratitudes the first thing. Other people might just grab their phone and start scrolling or reading the news or checking the email to see if there's enough subs for the day. Some people get up out of bed and take a walk or stretch or go to a yoga class. Other people get up and prepare the lunches and get the kids things all ready. There's a routine in everybody's home and it looks a little different, but the routines are in place so that what you want to accomplish gets accomplished without having cognitive dissonance and arguments within your brain internally every single day. Should I brush my teeth? Should I not brush my teeth? Should I pack the kids' lunches? No, I don't feel like packing the kids' lunches. Do I need to get dressed today or do I not? We don't do that. We just do. Okay?

So, this is about what we want to create for our routines. So often times, and I want to use the example of like being healthier, fit because it's something so relatable. We know what to do. If we want to lose weight, we know eat less, move more. Or eat certain kinds of foods that work for our body that help us to lose the weight. We know that. It's not the what. How do I do this? How do I start this routine or how do I create a routine? It isn't the what. We know how to do it. And even for you principals out there who are brand new, you don't know what you're doing.

So even if you don't know the what. And look, do we actually really know the what? When we're thinking about my goal, I want to build a routine that

Ep #451: Empowered Routines: Creating Habits That Support Your Leadership

the outcome of that routine is, you know, increased student success, increased teacher success. My outcome that I desire is a thriving, successful school, academically, professionally, personally, socially. I want a healthy culture. I want these things for my school. What is the routine? We might not know. Oh, do this, do that.

But even when we don't know exactly how to create a desired outcome and what exact steps we need to do, especially if you've never done the job before, none of us really know exactly how to raise test scores or what support a student or a teacher might need to create successful outcomes of their own. But we do know some possibilities. We can guess, we can test our theory, even when we don't know. So you can test out a routine, see if it empowers you, see if it empowers others, see if it works, try it. If the routine doesn't feel good or it's not creating the outcomes, adjust. You don't have to get exactly know the how.

But a lot of times, we know. We'll say things like, "I know what to do. I know I should be doing this or that." So the first step in empowered routines for this school year is to know what you want. What outcomes do you want to create? What experiences do you want to have? How do you want to feel as a principal this year? And why? So what do you want and why? How do you want to create it and why? How do you want to feel and why? Make sure you know the why.

Here's why. It anchors you. It anchors in the routine. I brush my teeth because I want a clean mouth, fresh breath, and healthy gums. It's a non-negotiable. I just do it. It's who I am. It's my identity. I'm a person who brushes their teeth every single day. I floss, rinse, brush, I do all the things. Water pick, whatever you have. We do that because we desire the outcome. It becomes a non-negotiable and we get results from it. We go to the dentist, we don't have cavities, or we go to the dentist and they clean and tell us good job. Keep it up. We want that. We don't want to lose our teeth. We don't want gum disease. We want a healthy mouth, okay?

Ep #451: Empowered Routines: Creating Habits That Support Your Leadership

Sometimes we know what to do, sometimes we don't, but we can test the theory. If you want something but you're not sure what, you can anchor yourself in the why. This is why I want it, so I'm willing to figure out a routine that helps me get what I want. If I want to lose five pounds, I, you know, let myself have fun this summer, I gained five pounds, I want to lose it during the school year. I'm going to meal prep. That's going to be my theory. I'm going to test my theory. I'm going to meal prep on the weekend, have everything ready, put it in containers, and off I go. I'll test that theory. If that doesn't work, maybe I need to walk before or after school, or you test the theory and see what works for your body.

But that is the easy part when it comes to building empowered routines, knowing what you want and why you want it. Most of us know what we want and why we want it. And if you don't, start there. What makes empowered routines challenging are the very convincing reasons that our mind will provide us as to why we cannot execute that routine, why we can't put it into play and make it become a habit, make it become an identity. It's just who we are. It's non-negotiable. It's just what we do. We don't even think about it. We just do it. Okay?

What makes empowered routines difficult to implement and to execute? Our brain has the motivational triad going on that works against us. It wants us to seek out pleasure, avoid pain, make things as easy as possible. When your brain wants those three things and you're asking it to do something that's a little bit uncomfortable or a little bit different, or it requires some effort or some thinking power, your brain will be like, "Nah, I don't feel like that. I'm kind of tired. I don't have time for that. That's not going to work for me," right? It says things like, "Oh, we couldn't get into classrooms today. I had a discipline issue." Feels very reasonable, feels very justified, and maybe it was, but it is a reason and it's an excuse as to why you didn't get into classrooms. I know that feels harsh. Just stick with me on this.

Ep #451: Empowered Routines: Creating Habits That Support Your Leadership

Or somebody will say to me, they're trying to get home to their family, but they keep going home late and then their spouse is upset and the kids, you miss this and that, or the kids are upset, and it's a big mess, but you just can't seem to get yourself out of the office. They'll say, "I couldn't go home on time. There was a meeting last minute. I had to catch up on paperwork. I hadn't checked emails all day. I had to get this thing turned in." There's always a reason as to why they can't implement the new empowered routine, the routine that says, "I manage my time, I determine when I work, when I go home, and I ensure that I get my priorities taken care of so that I can be home with my family because that is a priority for me." The brain is very convincing, you guys. "Can't make it to yoga, too tired after work. I just can't do it. Or I can't get up and walk in the morning, it's too early."

Most of the time, we know what we need to do. We know the steps if we want a certain goal. Let's say we want to get into classrooms, and because we believe that being in classrooms, being present, connecting with kids, connecting with teachers, you want to be in there. You want to see what's going on. You want to be in the learning environment so that you can be the instructional leader that you are passionate about being. We know what we need to do. What we don't know how to do when it comes to empowered routines and implementing them is how to coach ourselves through all of the reasons and the excuses and the rationales that our brain will offer us in the moment.

And what I have found to be true for myself is that it is much more difficult to honor a routine that you wish to establish when your brain starts telling you, "It's okay, you don't need to do it now. Do it tomorrow." Or, "You know, you have to get it done right now. There's no time for going home on time." To either delay work and you'll do it tomorrow and not do the routine because you're too tired or there's not enough time or something came up and there's all these reasons, or you do all of the work because you're afraid to not do the work and so you're constantly overworking, overexerting, and not living a life outside of school leadership.

Ep #451: Empowered Routines: Creating Habits That Support Your Leadership

But it's very difficult to honor the routine in the moment because you have feelings about it. You're either going to be too tired, too exhausted, not have the energy, or you're going to be so afraid if you don't get it done or you don't check the email or you go home on time, you're going to be deemed a terrible principal and you're going to lose your job. So, my little secret here, my little hack, is to make the decisions about your routine in advance. Decide ahead of time. This is when I'm going into classrooms. Put it on the calendar. Mark it as a sacred hour on your calendar. I'm going into classrooms. Don't call me unless there's life and limb happening, right? Like, if there's a 911 or potential loss of life, then of course, interrupt me. Otherwise, I'm prioritizing this. It's my new routine. It's who I am as a principal. We don't do that.

If you make these decisions in advance, it's much easier when your brain's like, "Oh, this thing, I got to check the email." "Nope, we're doing this." The problem is when the excuses come in, because they will, there's no stopping it. And I don't care how long you've been a principal, our brain continues to offer the excuses and the reasons why we don't want to honor the empowered routines we have set into place or that we want to set in place. But when you make the decision in advance, your brain does have less chatter. There's just less conversation around it in your mind. It won't extinguish the chatter, but it reduces it. It turns the volume down.

Let me provide a concrete example. I used to struggle in the morning. I would wake up really early and I didn't want to be loud, but I would be tired, of course. And I just couldn't decide what I wanted to wear. And I would sit and stare at my closet and then I try something on. I don't feel like this. I don't feel like that. I just don't want to do this. I don't know what to wear. And I would waste time trying to make a decision. I hated that feeling. It didn't feel good in the morning. I just was always felt like I was running late.

And so what I ended up doing was on Sunday, I would go in to my bedroom and I would get in my closet and I would pick out five outfits. Monday was

Ep #451: Empowered Routines: Creating Habits That Support Your Leadership

my school colors day, so I would put out all of my leopard, Monolama leopard sweatshirt, polo, whatever I was wearing for the day. That was Monday. Tuesdays, I knew I had leadership team meeting, so I wore something professional because I had to go to the district office meetings. You know, Wednesday was staff meeting day. Thursdays was minimum day. Fridays was Fridays, right? So a little more casual on Fridays. We had a lot of, you know, usually sneakers and a blazer or something comfortable but casual because I knew I'd be running around, okay?

So, I started just thinking about, I already know what's coming up for my week. And so I knew the meetings I had, I knew the professionalism, and I did keep a pair of like extra pair of shoes, extra blazer. So if I had to dress up, or I also had a pair of flats if I had to run around and be more comfortable for emergency stuff. But I kind of knew what was coming for the week. And so I made myself decide on Sunday, this is what my outfits are for the week. I hung them in the bathroom for the week. They were just there and I didn't have to think about it. Monday's was in front, Friday's was in back. Just pulled it off and done. I had a like a rack, a hook thing that I put all of my outfits on and it just was there, wasn't in the way, made it work. You can hang it anywhere. It doesn't have to be in your bathroom, but that for me, that's what worked.

But then I just went in and I knew to get ready, that's what I was wearing for the day. No more chatter, didn't argue. Now, did my brain be like, "Oh, I don't feel like that today. I want to wear other things?" Sometimes, yes. But in that moment, what was most important is that I honored the decision I had already made for myself. Just wear this outfit. Unless there was a stain or something was wrong with it, but we want to honor the decisions we make in advance when it comes to empowered routines because that is how we build up our integrity. That's how we build up trust in ourselves. Choosing in advance helped me not to have to make the decision in the morning when I wasn't fully awake. And even then, my brain would still be like, "I don't want to wear that today. I want something cozier, more

Ep #451: Empowered Routines: Creating Habits That Support Your Leadership

comfortable, or I don't feel perky today. I want that color. I want to wear a different color."

So, I could always allow myself to change if I wanted to. That's not the point. I could allow that. But when I do that, I erode my trust and faith in myself. I diminish my self-discipline. I dilute the strength of my word to myself, of my own integrity, of honoring what I said I would do, the promise I made to myself. Now, is a different outfit life or death? Absolutely not. But if I can't do this with small things, small routines, if I can't honor them and build up my self-discipline and my self-trust and my self-integrity and my faith in myself and honoring my word and sticking to that promise to myself for the little things like an outfit, I'm definitely going to allow my brain to talk me out of the big things, the more uncomfortable things, the things that are challenging and scary and overwhelming. I'm for sure going to avoid those things and keep changing my mind.

So empowered routines are about what you want, why you want them, and the self-coaching that is required to honor them. This is the gift of coaching, learning the skill of self-coaching. You're not going to have a coach in your pocket. I can't come with you every second of the day and be like, "Okay, let's coach on this." You've got to learn to do it yourself. That's what EPC teaches you. Self-coaching teaches you how to recognize your current routines, your brain's typical excuses for those routines, and how you react to those excuses so that you can learn how to self-coach and honor. And look, if a routine isn't working, you of course can renegotiate that routine, but it comes from a place of what you want, why you want it, and what you believe is the best routine to get you there.

So be aware of your routines. Create some awareness. Create consciousness around your current routines. This is the perfect time to do it because it's the beginning of the year and decide this is what I want. This is why I want it. This is who I need to be to do it. And I want to learn how to self-coach myself, to empower myself, to rely on me, for me, for my best

Ep #451: Empowered Routines: Creating Habits That Support Your Leadership

interest, for my empowered routines. You are worthy of this. You deserve this. It is a skill that every human on the planet deserves to learn is the skill of self-coaching.

So, I'm inviting you in before the doors close. We're starting in September. Join us for the Empowered Principal Collaborative. If you prefer one-on-one coaching, schedule a consult call. There's an individual consult call link in the notes and we can talk about it and decide if one-on-one's the best fit or if EPC is the best fit. But we'd love to have you in the Empowered Principal Collaborative. Have a beautiful day, my fellow leaders, and I will talk with you next week. Take care.

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.