

Ep #455: Hypervigilance vs. Resilience: What's Really Driving Your Leadership?



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello, Empowered Principals. Welcome to episode 455.

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.

Hey there, Empowered Principals. You know what time of year it is. We're going into the fall. And that means the fall dip is coming. Look, you're not going to prevent the fall dip from happening. That's not what flipping the fall dip is all about. I invite you to join us in Flip the Fall Dip 2026. We are hosting the Fall Dip throughout the month of September. So, September 16th, 22nd, and 29th, we are hosting the Fall Dip Series.

Listen up school leaders, there's no school that stays in complete flow 100% of the time. There's no school culture that doesn't have its ups and downs. And there's no one leader out there who is preventing the fall dip and the energy in other people from shifting. It's about navigating it. Leading through it and staying in alignment with your own leadership identity and integrity. Join us for the Fall Dip this coming September 16th. We'll see you there.

Well, hello, my Empowered Principals. Happy Tuesday, and welcome to the podcast. Hey, if you're brand new to the podcast, let's give you a special shout-out. We are so happy you are here. I'd love to hear from you, whether that's on Instagram at The Empowered Principal, Facebook, you can find me at Angela Kelly or the professional page, you know, the business page, Angela Kelly Coaching. You can find me on LinkedIn, wherever it is that you like to hang out. Just give me a shout-out and say, "Hey, heard the podcast," or you can leave a comment below on your podcast platform, and I'll be sure to write you back. I would love to say hello and meet you.

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If you've been listening for quite a little bit of time, which is the last eight-plus years going on nine, thank you. We are friends. It's wonderful to have you in the world of the Empowered Principal. We are doing things differently. We're talking differently. We are believing in different things. We are in an energy and in a frequency of empowerment. We strive for that over here. We're also having the human experience. So, we are here to feel better. When we feel better, we do better. And when we do better, we make an impact. So, welcome. I'm so glad you're here.

All right, diving right in. I have personally been exploring the difference between these two concepts. I'm going to share them with you today and share you my thoughts to date as I'm exploring these because it was something I wasn't aware of. And the first step to expanding ourselves, evolving ourselves, and empowering ourselves comes down to awareness. You don't know something until you know it. We don't know until we know. And once you know it, you can't unsee it, and then you can contemplate it and explore it and just play around with it a little bit to come up with your own concepts, your own theories, your own ideas about what you want anything to mean to you.

So, I've been exploring the differences between hypervigilance and resilience because I had them very confused. I would have bet dollars that my hypervigilance was resilience. I would have bet you money on that, that I'm strong, I'm capable. I was listening to a podcast recently, and this person was sharing very deep trauma that had occurred to her. She was being interviewed, and she was very open and candid about the experiences she was going through or had been through or continued to experience. And she kept saying, "But I'm a strong person. I'm such a strong person."

And it struck me because I have found myself saying in times of crisis, in times of stress, in times of trauma, "But I'm a strong person." Like I'm such a strong person. Like, I'm so strong to be handling this abuse, or I'm so

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strong to be handling this toxic relationship, or I'm so strong to be handling this negative environment or negative situation. I'm such a strong person. And we tell ourselves that we're such strong people. And school leadership, ooh, it can be traumatizing. It can be stressful. It can be exhausting. It can be very trying, and we will say to ourselves, "But I'm such a strong person."

And that's where I decided to create awareness around this. Like, what am I saying when I'm saying, "Well, I'm such a strong person?" Why am I saying I'm such a strong person? And for me, it was hypervigilance speaking. It was my protective shield coming up. But I'm such a strong person. I can take this. I can handle it. I can keep going. I'm resilient. So I was confusing and I was kind of clumping together resiliency with hypervigilance because hypervigilance, at least for me, feels very productive. I'm on.

It's like my adrenaline's on, you know, 200%. I'm looking around. I'm on top of all the things. I'm getting up early. I'm knocking out chores in the morning. I'm working out hard. I'm getting the lunches ready. I'm driving to school. I'm listening to a podcast driving to school, and then I'm on it. Like I've got systems, morning routines in place and I'm like clockwork, and then I'm on top of kids being dropped off for the day and morning breakfast and, you know, recess and lunch and getting in those classrooms and oh, I all these IEP, like I'm working myself to death, but I'm on it.

And it felt very productive. It feels very responsible. It feels very in control. And as leaders, we believe as part of our identity that we are to be in control, that it is our responsibility and we should take ownership for things being in our control. I'm not saying we shouldn't. I'm just acknowledging that take on ownership that all things should be functioning highly effective, systematic, efficient, working properly, thriving, everyone should be happy, everyone should be doing what they're supposed to be doing, and if they're not, that's on us. There's the leadership mindset for you, right?

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And when I think back, my goal was just to stay on top of things. I created systems. Teachers, we create incredible systems. We're very systematized people, or we wouldn't go into teaching. And you see people who aren't systematized who just love teaching for the sake of loving kids and they probably loved school as a kid and they're very artistic. They might not have like organized systems that people like me would think are organized, but they have their own form of organization. So we do this to stay on track, to always be on guard to make sure that nothing goes out of place, nothing gets off the rails, that everything's in alignment. Everything's on.

So when I was tired, I pushed through. When I was frustrated, I pushed through. When I was miserable, hating life, I faked it and I pushed through. I pushed through everything. There were days I pushed through waking up, getting out of bed, going to work, then putting a smile on my face, trying to rally myself into positivity and trying not to be fake positive or toxic positive, but real positive, and what can I focus on? Oh, I can focus on how productive I am, how resilient I am. I tried to rally other people into staying on the positive train to keep going.

I saw myself as expanding, evolving myself, empowering myself, becoming the leader, being in the identity of. And in some ways, it was. I was expanding my capacity. I was expanding my capacity to do things when I was exhausted. I could show up to meetings after getting blasted at the last meeting and put a smile on my face and walk through. I considered that resiliency. I could agree when my mind was in full disagreement. I could say yes when my entire body was screaming no.

So I was expanding my capacity, my capacity to disconnect from myself, to disassociate how I was feeling, to numb myself, to numb my mind, to numb my body, to just numb the emotions out, to disregard my own needs, my own physical needs, mental needs, emotional needs, social needs, my own discernment, my own ideas, my own compass. I was expanding my capacity to disconnect from all of that, disconnect from my discernment, my

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own ideas, my own compass. I was expanding my capacity to turn down my own volume, turn down my own voice, turn down my own way of leading.

I was also expanding my skill sets of inauthenticity, the skill set of misalignment, the skill set of fitting in. I was perfecting that. I wasn't resilient. I was hypervigilant. I was doing everything in my power to control the things outside of me and to control all of the things around me, my whole campus. I was trying to control it all, whack-a-mole. You know the drill. But I was doing all of that because I was scared. I was afraid of negative consequences. I didn't even know what those negative consequences would be, but I imagined them, and they were very scary in my mind.

These were all the things that I guessed would happen if I messed up. My boss firing me, being berated publicly on social media, online, in the newspaper somewhere publicly, on the front news, front page of the news, on the 6:00 news, right? I was so afraid of rejection, of being scolded, of being reprimanded publicly, especially publicly, that was really like a big fear of mine. It was one thing, like, I could be hypervigilant in a meeting with just me and my boss and take that, but publicly, you just feel ashamed and humiliated, right?

I was worried teachers weren't going to like me, so I wanted to people please. I was so mad when parents would go above my head because I meant that I failed at my job. I feared everything. I feared being rejected. I feared being attacked. I feared being held responsible for things that weren't mine to own and then being mad about that and resentful. I was so afraid of being labeled incompetent.

So what did I do? Go on hypervigilance mode because I didn't want to feel those feelings. Into survival mode I went, using that hypervigilance strength. It was a strength of mine at the time, as a protective shield

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because I thought, okay, if I just stay on top of everything, do it for as long as it takes, for as long as I have energy, I'll be safe. Things are going to be okay. I would be liked, I'd keep my job, everything would be cool. I wouldn't ruffle any feathers, cause any waves. So just go underground, do my job, and stay protected.

But what I have learned is that hypervigilance is being on guard all times in the name of resilience. It's not resolving those past pains or the fears that you have or looking them in the eye and noticing what you're actually afraid of or why you're actually afraid of it or if it's even a real threat, or if you're just making it up in your mind. Hypervigilance is avoiding those potential fears at all costs because you're so afraid to experience the emotions that you've had in the past once again.

So if somebody's broken your heart, you don't want to date anymore. Why? You don't want to be heartbroken again. So you're going to be hypervigilant, not going to go on those dating apps. You're not going to go on a live date for heaven's sakes. You're just going to resolve that you are going to be single for the rest of your days, and that is very sad, but that's who you must be. So your resiliency is that you're strong enough to be a single woman for the rest of your life versus, do I want to be single or not?

If I want to be single and I choose it and it feels good, that's different than I'm never dating again because I'm too afraid to have my heart broken again. So if you want to go on a date, but you don't think you can handle it, or all you can think about is the past breakup and the heartbreak that you experienced, then you're in hypervigilance mode. It's a different fuel driving your decisions and actions because it's coming from the fuel of fear.

For those of you who are familiar with my podcast, I talk a lot about road trips. I talk a lot about being on the journey and stopping at the gas station, and you decide which type of fuel you're going to put in your tank, your energy tank. And the energy tank can get filled with any emotional energy

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you want, fear, pain, resentment, frustration, anger, happiness, joy, delight, satisfaction, motivation, drive, empowerment, pick the fuel. But the one driving hypervigilance is fear. Deep fear. I'm not saying it's unwarranted fear. I'm simply saying we're acknowledging that it is fear.

Resilience is a different fuel. It's assuredness. This fuel is based in trust and faith and belief and capacity, capability, empowerment. It is working with the emotions and through the emotions. It's exploring how you feel, why you feel it, what's making you feel the way you do, understanding why you feel the way you do and choosing with intention to allow those emotions to be a part of your human experience, to process them, to look them in the eye.

Hey, you know, resentment, what's coming up? Let's talk about this. Hey, heartbreak. Let's look at this. What's coming up? What can I learn from you? What wisdom do you have for me? What do I need to know for next time? Because I'm going on another date. So let's talk about it now. Sit down and have a conversation with those feelings. You process it, you learn from it because then you can release it.

Resilience equals released pain. It's a release. It's trusting that you can allow and process any emotion, that you're not afraid to have them because you know how to handle them. It's faith that you will figure out whatever comes your way. It's not trying to avoid them from coming your way. It's saying, if they come my way, I will figure it out. I'll be okay. I'll handle it. It's taking the wisdom from those past mistakes and those pain points and leveraging them when you come across a new challenge. It is having the patience for yourself and for others as we are all navigating the human experience.

Resilience is true strength. It is confidence that you can handle uncharted territory. It is the belief that you are okay, that you'll be okay, that you are okay right now in this moment. Even though you feel fear, even though you

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feel worried, doubt, confusion, overwhelm, you are okay. You are safe. You can remind your brain that. You're doing what you need to do. You're doing enough. You're being sufficient in this moment.

When we're hypervigilant, we haven't reconciled with the past, with those past pains and those past experiences. We are simply looking to avoid, defend, and protect. We're on guard. That's why your nervous system is on high alert. That's why your body responds to stress. You get hypertension. You might have pain management issues in your neck, shoulders, back, legs even, or your hips, a lot of hips and joint issues when we're holding on to a lot of stress. When we're hypervigilant all the time, the body can't relax. It can't rest. It's always on alert. There's never a moment to rest and recover.

But when we're resilient, we understand that the painful moments that we all experience, no one's exempt from them, they are essential parts of our lives. We understand that they're temporary. They don't last forever. We see that we are equipped to handle them. We acknowledge that they provide us wisdom and guidance. We realize we're okay even when we've experienced something that wasn't okay.

Coaching helps you shift from reacting in hypervigilance mode to resilient mode. You don't try to prevent hard things from happening. You understand that when they do happen, you are built to process it, learn from it, and overcome it. This is the work we do in the world of the Empowered Principal through one-on-one coaching, through group coaching, and through the academy. This is the work that you learn. For me, it is the work that works. I invite you into EPC. We would love to have you. Have a beautiful week. Take great care of yourselves, and we'll see you next 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

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learn more about the tools that will help you become an emotionally fit school leader.