

Ep #457: Authority in Leadership: The Beliefs That Shape How You Lead



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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Hello, Empowered Principals. Welcome to episode 457.

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, if you're new, we are so happy you are here. I am going to dive right in today because I just got off a call with a client. And we're diving deep with this client of mine. She is a one-on-one client and also in EPA, which is the Empowered Principal Academy. She's also in EPC, which is the Empowered Principal Collaborative. So she is here to win. She is here to be empowered, and she's killing it.

And if there's anything that I can teach you on this podcast and I can share with you, it's that regardless of our professional training, regardless of our political ideas, concepts, conversations, regardless of the, you know, there are so many things that go into school leadership. There's the resources, there are the ideologies of leadership, there are the tools, the techniques, the strategies, the platforms. All of those things help us be an excellent school leader.

But at the end of it all, what it really comes down to is us, our thoughts about us, our thoughts about other people, our thoughts about our relationship with one another, with other people in relation to ourselves, how we see ourselves with other people, how we communicate with them, how we interact with them, what we believe about them, what we believe about ourselves, what we believe about everything. It comes down to our belief systems.

And one of the things that I teach in my programs and coach people on in my one-on-one sessions are on these belief systems, our identities,

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because the identity is truly the component that impacts your outcomes, what you believe you are capable of, what you believe you are able to do and not able to do, the limitations you believe are in the way, the lack of those limitations. All of those belief systems are working together which impact your decisions and your actions every single time.

So I was speaking with this client, and there are some deep-seated beliefs that we all have about ourselves, based on our past, based on our past experiences. And those little experiences are hidden down deep, and we don't even realize how they are impacting today. The very decisions and actions that you take today can be founded in belief systems that were developed when you were very young. And I know you know this intellectually, right? We all know the inner child and past trauma work. There is a lot of research on this and work being done in the world around childhood issues and trauma issues, those kinds of things.

So, I was speaking with this client, and I'm sure these things come up for you as a school leader. You're listening to a teacher and you're like, I wonder where that fear is coming from, or I wonder why this behavior is happening. And when you start to wonder and you have conversations around it, you'll find a belief system that is driving that person's emotions, that person's decisions, that person's choice of approach will be founded in a belief system, every single time.

So, as I was working with this client, the conversation was around a male peer. It wasn't a superintendent; it was a peer. So, principal to principal, direct peer, principal of one building, principal of another building. But there was a male-female component happening, and I bring that up because there were belief systems that came to the surface around this.

So, you are going to have peers or you'll have superiors, people who are at the district level, if you're a site principal, directors, coordinators, assistant sups, sups. There will be people in your life, and you will have thoughts

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about them. You'll have thoughts about yourself, thoughts in relation to them. And one of the thoughts that came to the surface was belief systems around authority.

Now, with this peer, there were thoughts around the circumstances involved. So I asked about those circumstances because I'm always curious to understand a person's belief system. So, tell me the set of circumstances that are making you feel this way. Well, new versus veteran. I'm newer; they have this many years.

So they know more, they have more experience, they don't need my advice, they don't want it. I don't have as much wisdom to offer as somebody who is veteran. Do you see this? There's a belief system around somebody's years of experience. Here's the belief system: years of experience equals smarter, wiser, better. It creates an unequal relationship, right? There's inequity in the relationship. But it's coming from the mind.

Who's to say that somebody with more years of experience 100% is guaranteed more wisdom or better skill sets? And we know that's true because we have teachers who've been teaching for a long time, and we wouldn't label them as our most dynamic, impactful instructors. Years of experience does not equate to high performance, high effectiveness, empowerment. But we have belief systems around that. When it comes to us.

When it's somebody else, we're like, "Oh, that's amazing, years of experience, all these things. But little ol' me?" Or when we're a principal and we're like, "Well, years of experience don't mean anything, honey, because I've got a teacher here who needs some support, and they've been at this for a while," okay? It just depends on the situation that we're facing.

So, it's interesting to notice what your thoughts are around authority because it will impact how you show up, the energy you're in, the attitudes,

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the behaviors, the belief systems, the questions you ask or don't ask, the approach that you take, how you feel about yourself, how you believe about yourself, and your capabilities. So in this case, I was recognizing through the belief systems that it felt like sibling energy, like a younger sibling energy. So the person I was working with was looking kind of up, putting this other person on a pedestal because they had more experience, also because they were male. They were bigger, they're older, they know more.

So like a younger sibling might look up to an older sibling and be like, "Wow, they're so much bigger than me. They're cooler than me. They're older than me. They know more. They can do more. I'm just left behind. I'm smaller. I'm younger. My voice doesn't matter. They get all the say. Like, they're a bully because they're older," right? Our childhood brains do this. Well, we bring those belief systems into our workplace, into our professional decisions.

So it's very important to acknowledge like when you're feeling a certain way, whether it's a positive emotion or a negative one, you want to understand why. What belief system is behind this emotion? When I'm feeling frustrated because somebody got a promotion, what's the belief system that's creating the frustration? Well, only internal candidates ever get hired. Belief system. All the males get promoted over the females. Belief system. I'm not saying it's right or wrong, good or bad, true, not true. It's just curious and interesting. We want to notice this. Hmm, why do I think those things? Why do I believe this?

So when it comes to authority and figures of authority, we have very deep-rooted belief systems about authority because when we were little infants and we could not take care of ourselves, we had authority figures in our life caring for us, and we were very dependent on them. And when we were around our parents or our caregivers, extended family, community members were in positions of authority, we were taught things around authority, respect authority, right? If someone's got title, status, positional

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power, like a superintendent, like a school board member, like other people in positions of authority, or your parents had positional authority over you, they had authority over you.

It could be coaches, it could be mentors, auntie, uncle, the adults in your life as a child had authority over you. You have thoughts about authority, thoughts and opinions that are probably based way back when. It's important to create awareness around them. Because when you don't, you start behaving in certain ways, and you're kind of like, "Why did I just do that? That was awkward or weird," or "Why can't I speak my peace? Why am I so afraid to speak up?" Probably belief systems and past experiences.

So, if you have issues with authority, and I'm saying this for my heart because I have huge authority issues. I continue to have them, and I've been working through them, obviously with my own coach and through the years. I have shifted many of those belief systems, but their roots are deep. So it still comes up. It's not like we're going to eliminate the belief system entirely until we're ready to fully let it go and we're ready to no longer believe. We feel safe enough to believe that we can be equals, that we can have a voice.

So I was coaching this client on her thoughts around authority figures not, first of all, we had to define what authority figures were for her, but we also looked at, you know, what you make that mean and why your voice can't be heard and why they don't want to hear your voice and listen to your voice.

So if any of you out there are afraid to speak up in a meeting, if you are biting your tongue, holding back because of a belief system you have or a fear that you have, it's okay to explore it in a safe environment before you decide, nope, no longer holding my tongue, and you go and unleash, right? You want to check it safely so that you can ground yourself. What is it that I really want? How do I want to be heard? What do I want to say? Why do I want to say it? So it's important to understand how you personally define

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authority, how you define being heard, how you define wisdom, experience, when somebody has power or authority, what does that mean? What does that look like?

So really exploring what authority means to you, what it looks like for you, how you define it. So when we talk about power, and I talk about personal power, your personal power, we're all gifted with personal power. Do we exercise that personal power and to what extent? And what limits us from exercising that personal power to feel empowered? We have a lot of thoughts around authority when it comes to utilizing our personal power and exercising and feeling empowered.

So I want to just dive into power real quickly. This is by no means a thesis; it's just a crash course. But when we talk about people of authority and we have thoughts about that, we have emotions around that, we have belief systems around that, you want to explore that because you'll start to see how your belief systems were rooted in a five-year-old brain mentality, the capacity of a five-year-old and what they're making it mean, or a 10-year-old or a 12-year-old. You'll see your meanings, your understandings, your experiences evolve as your life evolves.

But we have a lot of fears around power, and rightfully so, because there have been people in positions of power and authority has been leveraged to cause pain, to cause harm, to cause fear and intimidation. So our body, when it responds with a fear-based reaction, especially when your nervous system gets involved, it's not just cognitive fear, it's actual like literal body, amygdala going crazy, nervous system dysregulation kind of fear. That's normal. It's trying to keep you safe. So we have to go back up into our prefrontal cortex and say, "Hey, let's explore this fear. What is so scary about authority for me?" And explore it. What is scary about power?

So when I talk about personal power, what do I mean by power? What I mean by personal power is individuals have the power to think and believe

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whatever they want. They have the right, they have the power to do that. No one can come inside of your brain and change your mind. They can try to convince you, coerce you; they can do things externally so that you will follow along, or maybe you do change your mind, but it's your agency when you change your mind. When somebody has a very convincing argument, you're like, "Okay, I'm with you. I see that now. I agree." They have provided you with compelling evidence enough for you to change what you're thinking or what you believe.

That's why we read books. That's why we listen to podcasts. That's why we hire coaches. That's why we go to school to learn. Teachers are exposing students to ideas, to concepts, to skill sets, and the kid's like, "I can't do that." "Oh, wow, I can do that." We keep exposing them. Two plus two is four. "Two plus two is four. Oh, I get it. Two plus two is four. I agree with you. I believe you. Now I know that two plus two is four." But it's the child, it's the teacher, it's the other person, it's the person in position of authority, they have 100% agency to think and believe whatever they want. So yes, that is personal power.

They also have the power to do and say whatever they want, whether we like it or not. It's their personal power. So people in positions of power, yes, they can think and believe whatever they want. They can do and say whatever they want. They also have the power to make any decisions they want, even decisions that impact us. Yes, they can. They have the power. They have the authority, internal authority and positional authority, external authority. And they have the power to implement those actions. They can implement actions that impact us. And they have the right to do that. They have internal agency, they have internal power, and they have positional power, which is external power.

So yes, but here's what else is true. In addition to, this is the land of and. You also have the power to think and believe what you want 100% of the time. Please don't abdicate that power out to somebody else. Well, they

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told me to believe it. Well, that's what they said, so I, you know, they made me believe this. No, take back your power. Take back your agency. You think and believe what you want. This is why I teach self-discernment and exercises around discerning for yourself what you want to think, what you want to believe.

We also have the power to say what we want and do what we want. We can say and do whatever we want. There are consequences to what we do and what we say, positive and negative, but you can speak. You can behave. You can do what you want. Most of us will do that within the realm of weighing out the consequences and discerning, is this a risk I'm willing to take? Is this a consequence I'm willing to risk? Yes or no? But we do have the power to do it.

We also have our own power to make decisions that impact us and impact other people. Even a child has the right to think and believe what they want, to do and say what they want. We know this if anybody's ever been around a toddler. 100% internal authority. They make decisions that impact you as their parent, positive and negative. They bring us the most joy, and they can bring us to tears. But they have the power. We all have internal power to implement our decisions, to implement actions that impact us, that impact them. We all have that power.

But at the same time, we don't have power regardless of authority. And I want to make this clear and invite you into, you know, exploring your thoughts on authority. What people don't have the power and what they can never have power over is our internal agency, our internal power. They can do something, we can still choose to believe what we want to believe, think what we want to think. Look at Mandela. He was in prison for years and years. He told his mind what to think about, what to focus on, what to believe.

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Even when he was imprisoned, we have the right and we have the power, and they will never have the power over what you do and what you say. They can be very convincing, they can be very intimidating on, you know, both ends, very inspiring. It makes you want to do and say things or very intimidating, which makes you want to do and say things. But at the end of the day, you make the decision about what you believe, how you feel, what you think about, what you say, what you do, how you behave, your attitude, your mood, your manners, how we feel about ourselves and others, the energy we decide to be in, what decisions we make or don't make, what actions we take or don't take, 100% ownership.

I know that's hard. It's very hard. But when we own that, that is what empowerment feels like. My boss said this, I decide how I respond. I decide how I'm going to feel. I decide my identity. I decide who I am in this moment. I'm going to decide with intentions. It doesn't mean it doesn't sting. It doesn't mean you're not afraid. But you're looking at those emotions. Why am I hurt? Well, I want my boss to like me, or I'm embarrassed because my boss said it in front of my colleagues, and I want my colleagues to believe I'm a good principal. Why am I feeling fear? Why am I so afraid?

Well, my thoughts on authority or my thoughts on what he could do, I could lose my job. Okay, so do I want to speak up at the risk of losing my job? Or do I want to believe that I can speak up in a way that's respectful, and kind, and appreciative of his positional authority or her positional authority, and also see my fear and say, that is a possibility, but it's less likely if I'm intentional with my words and the way I communicate.

No matter a person's positional title or status, no matter what authority it grants them, their power can never truly disempower you. They cannot take your power away. You decide. And if you get let go, then you decide to be the person who gets hired right away and gets an even better job or a more desirable job, or wherever you are on the spectrum of belief about yourself, landing a job, whatever it takes.

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So what they do have control over, you might have thoughts and opinions about that. It might contradict what you believe. You might have strong feelings about their words, behaviors, decisions, actions, implementations. You have to be aware that your response to what's happening with them... this is where I talk about two separate sets of emotions and steer cycles going on. There's what they're doing, thinking, believing, and saying, and then there's over here what you're doing, thinking, believing, and saying, and then there's thoughts and opinions about the other.

So you might allow your beliefs to shift in reaction to them. You might allow your emotions to sway in reaction to them, or you might allow your decisions and actions to be in reaction to them. But that is different than being controlled by somebody. Having positional authority is different than the power to control you and your mind.

So if you're feeling like my voice isn't heard, I lack power, I want you to look at both truths and give some equal airtime here because we're leaning over to the younger sibling mindset only. I don't mean that in a negative way. I love my younger sibling. It's nothing to do with real siblings. It's just that it's the mentality I'm talking about, the little kid mentality, the immature version of our brains. If we look at the truth of the truth, both, yes, people have external power. They have external title, status, authority based on their positions, based on who they are. But we also have equal internal authority.

There is evidence in your life that your voice has been heard. One, you're alive on the planet, which means you have a voice. Two, you have people in your life who care about your voice, whether that's a friend, your family members, your colleagues, your spouse, your partner, your own kids. Somebody in your life cares about your voice. If you are in school leadership or even if you're aspiring to become a school leader, which means you're in education, people care about your voice.

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They care about what you have to say. Your teachers care, your parents care, your colleagues care, families care, students care. So play with this. Be with your belief systems on authority and explore them. Obviously, if you want more help with that, I can help you in a one-on-one setting or inside of EPC. We'll dive into those belief systems that are limiting you, that are creating fear for you, and we'll break them open and plug you back into your personal power. All right?

I know authority is scary. This is a lifelong work of mine, and it's very empowering to explore this and break free of some of these fears and limitations that hold us back. Your voice is heard. Your voice is desired. We need you in this field. We want to hear what you have to say. We love you, and we wish you the most beautiful rest of your week. Have an amazing day. Talk to you next week. Take care. Bye.

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