

Ep #459: Internal Data: Leading Beyond the Numbers



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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Hello, Empowered Principals. Welcome to episode 459.

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. Welcome to the podcast. 459, when I said that out loud, wow, that really struck me. That's a lot of episodes. We've been here on this show and this podcast in the world of the Empowered Principal®. So if you are new here, welcome. And you know what? If you have been listening to this for the last eight or nine years, thank you.

Thank you so much for being here every single week. I often welcome in our new principals and our new listeners, but I don't take the time to really thank my long-term listeners. I'm so sorry. I love you all so very much. This is why I do the podcast. I do it for you. So if you are a listener from the very beginning, or you've been in here for a few years, thank you. I appreciate it so, so very much. So we're going to dive right in today.

I want to talk about data. Do you have PTSD when I say the word data? I know I do. So, we're going to talk about data. We have a lot of thoughts about it, don't we? We have beliefs, opinions, a lot of feelings about data. Some of us love it. Most of us hate it. I'm raising my hand. But let's talk about it. Let's make it make sense, okay?

I looked it up in the dictionary because we throw the word data around quite generously in the field of education. And the dictionary says that data is defined as information in visible form. And I found that interesting because to me that means that just about everything around us is data. Like the weather's data. It tells us what's happening in the atmosphere right now. Traffic is data. It tells us, hey, people are on the road. There's a lot of traffic, a lot of cars.

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And because of that, we make it mean and we assume that it's going to take a little bit longer to get to work than it does when there is less traffic or you know, you look on your GPS, when you see red, you know that means traffic and that means a slowdown and that means more time. So we are inundated with data. Our phones, our computers, oh my gosh. We are on data overload. We get emails, we've got the calendars, we've got all the apps, social media. Oh, and phone calls, that the one thing we probably use our phone for the least is a phone call. That's a form of data.

So everything around us is data. And I consider this data in visible form, right? That form of data, I call that external data. It's information that comes from outside of us. It is external from us and we're taking it in, we're consuming it. It is input going into our brains and into our bodies.

And in education, boy, are we inundated with data. Gosh, you know, just thinking about it, I'm just was so over it. I just got so tired and overwhelmed and kind of just sick of it. We were told data must drive instruction. Data is the answer to what we need to do next, that decisions should be data-driven. We have so much data in education. We don't have the time nor the space to analyze all the data we collect.

And we've all been there. You guys know that feeling of analysis paralysis. We talk about this. We've talked about this for decades in education. The more that technology has come into existence and the faster it can collect data, the more data we have. And we are notorious. We spin out and we actually waste so much time analyzing data. We talk about it all the time: attendance data, behavior data, academic data. And we should, because it does give us information to make decisions. We want to make informed decisions. We don't want to have no data or lack data. It's hard to make decisions. I get it.

But if we're being very honest with ourselves, there is so much external data that we collect and we dissect. We spend so much time collecting it and dissecting it that it's not as informative as we'd like it to be. Meaning,

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we have all this data, we're looking at it. Teachers are looking at it. We're moving it around, we're putting it on spreadsheets, and we're not really sure what it means or why it's happening or what to do about it. So we're making guesses.

And it's part of the reason that we have just so much information overload. Can you imagine like being a student right now? If the principals are overloaded, the district staff's overloaded, teachers are overloaded, can you imagine how kids feel? Like think of how much information and data they're taking in their little worlds. It's crazy.

And we have decision fatigue. We have data fatigue. Can you imagine how kids must feel? We spend so much time and effort looking at different numbers. When we spend all this energy trying to decipher what it means, what we should do, what's the right thing to do, what's the next best thing to do, what's the priority? And depending on what we make that data mean, generally speaking, it's not very fun because when we look at data, we're not looking at celebration data.

We kind of push that to the side. We look at the data that tells us the kids that aren't doing well and the students who aren't coming to school and the teachers who aren't performing and the schools that aren't performing and everyone's looking around like we want to pick the school that's got all the pretty A pluses and stars. We don't want to go to that school that's got B's and C's or even D's or however they're rating your school these days.

But we get caught in a catch-22 with data. We're told as educators, as school leaders, as teachers, we need it. It is essential to make decisions and action plans. And then, at the same time when those plans that we created based on the data, don't create the results that we want, then we're told we used the wrong data or we misinterpreted the data or we didn't use the right data, or we didn't use it at all. And we just go around and around and we blame data. We use data, we spend time on data. We use it as a crutch.

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But here's the thing with external data. This is my opinion. So here's the thing with external data. For every human who's looking at it, every individual has a different way of collecting the data, analyzing the data, and interpreting it. Data means different things to different people. Some people will care about certain kinds of data more than other kinds of data. So they're going to focus over there on that data. People will focus on and collect the data that is meaningful to them.

And why do we do this? Because we're humans, because of what we make that external data mean and how that interpretation makes us feel every single time. So we will avoid data that doesn't feel good, and we'll collect data that feels a little bit better or we get hyper-focused on attendance data over academics. If they're not here to learn, then we can't teach them. And other people are like, but look at, you know, maybe kids don't want to come because look at the academics and maybe we're looking at this data about once they're here. So if you think about data and it gives you the shudders, it's because there's so much meaning attached and so many feelings around external data.

But this is my stance and I will stand on this hill until somebody proves me wrong or I find another truth. But until then, we are not going to change the external data, meaning we're not going to change attendance rates, we're not going to change graduation rates or test scores or kids getting promoted or the number of kids on grade level. We are not going to change that kind of data or even like teacher surveys and their happiness and the culture and all of that. We are not going to change that external data until we understand our internal data.

Internal data is the information we receive from the inside, from our minds, from our bodies, from our hearts, from our souls. Your mind has thoughts. It has belief systems with deep, deep roots. It has interpretations of things, opinions of things, perspectives of things. Your body, it has data. I need to sleep, I need to wake up, I need to move, I need to rest, I need to play. I'm in pain, I'm in hunger, I am full, I am thirsty, I'm hot, I'm cold. It's giving you

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data internally. Our heart emotions, how we feel, what feels aligned for us, what we value. Our heart tells us this feels good, this doesn't feel good.

This feels true, this doesn't feel true. This feels aligned, this doesn't feel aligned. Our soul, it's the compass inside that there's a knowing that goes beyond external data. We can look at data all day long, but you know how you just know? Your gut tells you something. It's like, I know the data's saying this, but I feel this. We don't allow that portion of internal data to have a voice because people are, you can't prove it or it's not visible, it's not on paper.

But there's an internal guidance. There is an internal GPS system that is at play. It's our gut telling us information. Some people call that intuition. Some say it's a sixth sense. Whatever you call it, I understand that it sounds woo woo. It sounds a little out there. And I know it can sound like fluff. I used to think that too. I'm a very tangible person. I like proof. I like tangible. I like external.

But however, I have studied this and as I've studied highly successful people, because I wanted to become one, I have worked with very highly successful schools, highly successful school leaders, highly successful leaders outside of education and highly successful coaches. Every successful person that I have personally interacted with or every book I have read on leadership, successful schools, when you read stories, whether that's about coaches coaching their teams to championships, athletes, you know, Olympic athletes making it to the top, getting the gold, they say the same thing. Everyone speaks to this.

So let this sit with you for a minute. There is no moment in your school leadership experience where you have officially arrived. You are going to have moments that feel accomplished, moments where you get to experience something that you were striving for. You guys made it on the, you know, California Distinguished School list. You made it as a Blue Ribbon school, whatever your state says, you know, gives you these little

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awards that say you've arrived. It's a moment in time. You get that moment. Like people go off and win music awards. Their album goes out, it goes platinum, they get an award for it. It's a moment in time.

But if they only celebrate the night they win the award, what is the rest of life like? It's just there working and grinding and going into the recording studio and having to write and that all that work. If they hate that part of it, and then they hate going on tour, but they're just trying to get the award. Think about that. That's a very sad life where you are striving for the award and it's a fleeting moment.

There is no moment where this work is done, no moment where you have arrived and you land forever, no moment where everything's finally in place and you can just rest and ride. We are in the business of human development, including our own development. So what we're talking about here, what education is for is to improve the experience of living as a human on this planet. That's why we teach kids. We teach them to give them skills and knowledge and information and wisdom and tools and strategies to enhance their experience as a human on this planet, to give them the skill sets they need to live the life they want to live.

And this is up for debate and I could really go into this because, well, my conspiracy theory is that like schools are a way to control and to limit people. I want to break that open. I don't want you to feel limited. I don't want your teachers to feel limited. I don't want students to only have certain access to the potential in their lives. But when it comes down to your life, I care about you. I care about your experience as a school leader.

My experience was so miserable, I made it the rest of my life's mission to help other school leaders not be miserable in their lives, to not want to want their job, but to actually desire it, to actually want it, to improve the experience of school leadership by understanding the internal data that's speaking to us and to understand what it is that we're actually doing here.

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We are here to teach children so that they can enhance their experience. Same is true with our teachers. We don't want teachers miserable. It's miserable to work with miserable teachers. Have you realized that? You've had that experience. I know I have too. I have been one of the miserable teachers, and I've been a miserable principal. My district leaders don't love miserable principals, even when they are doing things that make our life feel miserable, right? But that's not the goal.

How can students know if their lives are being enhanced by coming to school? If we don't tap into their internal data? If we don't use internal data, if we don't teach it, if we don't exercise it ourselves? How can teachers know what they're doing is working for them and for their students unless they check into their internal data and we allow them to. We have to give permission to talk about internal data.

How can we improve the quality of our own work, our own impact, our leadership without the guidance of our internal compass and doing what feels good for us? You guys, we are here to enjoy this life. Yes, we're here to lead. Yes, we're here to support. Yes, we are here to work and offer our talents with the world. Absolutely, yes. But we're also here to live, to love, to enjoy.

The Empowered Principal® Collaborative is helping leaders just like you learn to enjoy their jobs, actually enjoy their jobs, their lives, their schools, the people that used to drive them crazy. They now understand how to work with them. They have been focusing on what feels good in life and in their career instead of only focusing on what isn't done yet and what hasn't yet been fixed. Please, do not wait to enjoy yourself. Do it now. Listen to your internal data. What is it telling you? What do you need physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, financially, spiritually, professionally? What do you need? Ask it.

Your data is so wise. It knows exactly what you need. It knows if you need sleep or not. It knows if you've been procrastinating or not. It knows the

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next best step. And even when you don't know that, you have a pretty good hunch. Your internal data, I promise you, this external data, it's a distraction. It wants to keep you distracted, keep you second-guessing, keeping you chasing, keeping you from listening to what actually will guide you. Your internal data will always guide you.

It guided you to the person you're with right now. If you're in a partnership, a marriage, if you are in a relationship, it guided you to that person. It guided you to whether you or not you wanted to have kids or how you're raising your kids. There's guidance available there. And all of this external data, it's just noise. And it's not that you don't want to look at it, you can take it in, but the internal data is what's going to help you decide and cut through all of the data and all of the noise and all of the distraction.

Don't fool yourself into thinking that your job is to swim through all of this external data and that is your job as a principal. That's distraction in my book. Focus on internal data. You'll be surprised at how quickly you cut through all the BS and all the distraction and all the noise. Give it a try, my friends. I care about you. I want you to enjoy your school leadership experience. Have a beautiful week. Happy fall, happy principals month. I hope you're enjoying yourself. And if you missed it, let me know if you are interested in Flip the Fall Dip for the 2026.

And I just realized something. I have a very special announcement. I have a new access for you, especially if you're incoming and new to my programs and you want to kind of taste test, like you want to go to Baskin Robbins and try the 31 flavors before you pick which one is the right one for you. I have something coming up. I'm not prepped to announce it just yet, but I am so excited. I'm going to leave you with a teaser. And next week, we will put that announcement in the actual podcast so that you can enjoy the new access that you will be gaining very soon. Have a beautiful week. I love you all. Take good care. Bye.

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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.