

Ep #460: Flip the Fall Dip: When the New School Year Loses Momentum



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello, Empowered Principals. Welcome to episode 460.

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. I've got something to share with you. I have a brand new program called The Empowered School. We're launching on October 27th. We're taking Empowered Principals who want to lead empowered school cultures. This will be a leadership experience for intentionally cultivating an empowered school culture.

One of the things that I coach on the most is around the culture of the school. How people think, how they feel, how they behave, the words they say, the actions, their mood, their attitudes. I coach on the interactions between the humans on campus more than any other topic that we coach on. Yes we definitely teach all of the skillset. But the art of building and cultivating a healthy and vibrant culture is the skill of a highly effective Empowered Principal. I hope you will join us for The Empowered School. The registration link is in the show notes. We'll see you October 27th.

Hello, my Empowered Principals. Happy Tuesday. I hope you are having the most beautiful week. I've got a special podcast episode in store for you. This episode contains clips from the Flip the Fall Dip 2026 series that I just hosted a few weeks ago.

Flip the Fall Dip is all about school leaders navigating the ebbs and flows of your culture, of the energy on campus, of people's moods and attitudes. There's ebbs and flows. There's highs and lows to how people feel. There's a big rush and a big high at the beginning of the year, and then come September and October, there's a little bit of a crash. And how do we

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navigate these waves of emotional energy, the peaks and the valleys, so that you can remain in an empowered state while you're leading?

These clips are going to give you little tidbits on flipping the fall dip. And if you would like to access the entire series, there will be a link in the show notes to my Skool (S-K-O-O-L) platform, where you can access different tiers of membership, and Flip the Fall Dip will be in there for you to enjoy. Enjoy this show. And if you need more information, please click the link, check out Skool, and decide which membership level you would like to experience. Have a beautiful day. Enjoy the show.

We kicked off the beginning of the school year. Most of you, you know, contracts started in July, but you had a soft launch where you were coming back in before the energy of your teachers, before the energy of the parents, and before the energy of the students. So in July, it's nice and quiet. Now, you might have things going on. You might feel a little angst around getting staffing prepared, getting master calendars and schedules prepared, getting, you know, maintenance things completed on your campus, any projects you're working on in your physical space, any remodels, any upgrades, the cleaning, all of those things.

Those are usually going on in July. Some of you are hosting summer school in July, but there is a softness to the launch of your new contract. And then in August, it's when things really fire up. It's the kickoff. There's a lot of energy, a lot of momentum, and you know how that feels. It's exciting. It's like exhausting and exciting at the same time. It's a good energy. People are ready to come back off of the summer, and we are kind of like riding the wave of that momentum. Okay? It is a lot of work.

So, then we're in, what are we? Middle of September. So it's been around a month for some of you where you got your staff set up. You got all the things in place. There was a lot of work, a lot of PD. You were in a lot of meetings. I know those days. I remember those days, which is why we kind

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of quiet down in August because I know you're so busy out there. And now we're reconvening in September.

So, let's talk about the fall dip. We're going to cover what it looks like, what it feels like, what it actually is, and we'll wrap up with some things to contemplate for this week going into your week, just to be able to kind of observe and identify and acknowledge what aspects of the fall dip you might be personally in, your staff might be in, or your school kind of at large, the culture, climate of your campus these days, okay?

And then we kind of get into like, okay, we've got the routines down. Now we're getting into what I call like the daily work, the grind, the real reason we're here, the deeper purpose, okay? So we're shifting from all that excitement and anticipation into kind of the daily grind. And it feels different. It isn't the hype and the excitement and all of this like high-caliber energy that we once had. And when there's that shift, when we dip a little bit in terms of excitement or motivation or energy, physical energy or emotional energy, just any kind of momentum, whenever there's a change, it feels like something's gone wrong.

As a school leader, we have our own emotional fuel that we put in our tanks. So you might wake up in the morning and be getting ready for work, and the fuel, the octane that you're putting in for the day, the emotional energy you're feeling is pretty uplifting. It's pretty high octane, right? You've got a really high-quality energy about yourself. You're feeling good. You've got your coffee, you're in the car running to work, and you're feeling good, okay?

And you're putting in, you're listening to the podcast, and you're feeling really empowered, and you're driving to work and you're ready to go. And the minute you walk in, the secretary says, the attendance clerk is out, we're down a sub, three people have already stopped by to talk to you, the superintendent's office called, they're going to do a walk-through today at

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one o'clock, and she is flustered. She's exasperated, she's flustered, and you can feel it.

When you walk into that office, you went from, yay, it's going to be a great day, to, I'm feeling this vibe here. I'm feeling this energy, and now my energy has shifted. How I'm feeling has shifted. My mood. People call it their mood, like their mood has changed. Like she's in a bad mood, or they're not in a good mood, or now I'm not in a bad mood. You know, put me in a bad mood. That's energy. It's emotional energy.

And we had our backpack, our emotional backpack, filled with our energy, and then we walked into the office and we got bombarded with somebody else's emotional energy. And instead of maintaining ours, we added it to our backpack. So now, you know, we've got like hopes and dreams for the day, and we've got our plans and our calendar set. And then we're like, oh gosh, now, hmm. Now she's upset. Now I feel upset. I feel like I have to fix her. I don't want her to be upset.

So now I'm going to do the attendance clerk thing, even though I don't really know how, or I'm going to go take care of the sub so she doesn't have to worry about that. And I'm going to try and fix how she's feeling because I want her to have a good day. So because I want her to have a good day and because it's my job as a leader and because I feel bad for her, I'm going to put her emotional energy into my backpack. So now we've got layers. We've got the hope of what we how we wanted to feel and where we started our day, layered with how she's feeling.

And then, as you're trying to figure out attendance clerk, the sub, you know, what we're going to do at one o'clock when the superintendent comes through a walk-through, now somebody comes, knocks on your door, do you have a minute? Famous line. Do you have a minute? Well, actually, no, but because I don't want you to be upset, and I can see that you're very

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worked up and something is very urgent, I will say yes, and I will meet you. So let's come into my office, have a seat. May I offer you a coffee?

No. This is very urgent. This is very important. I have a field trip today, and this chaperone... okay? Now they are very anxious, really nervous, really wound up, and they're coming to you because they want you to fix this for them or figure out a way. So now you have how you were feeling, how the secretary was feeling, and now how this teacher's feeling, which then like impacts how you're feeling.

Now you're like, oh my gosh, on top of being flustered, now I'm also anxious about this. We've got to figure out, we don't have, we're down a chaperone, and we have to have so many chaperones. We've got to figure this out. So now you're taking that on. And then we handle that. And now we're like, okay, we've got to go check in on breakfast. We walk into the cafeteria, and there's a parent who says, "Hey, I just want to let you know, my son came home and blah, blah, blah about this other kid and they're bullying my son, and we need to have a meeting about this."

And so now we're like, okay, I don't want you to be angry. So I'm going to put that in my backpack, and now I'm like, I'm feeling the fear of you being angry, and I don't want you angry. I want you happy so that I can feel happy so that we can all get along. I'm going to have to take care of this. This is what leaders do. We take all of the emotions, and we embody them. We put them in our backpack, and then we wonder why we're so exhausted.

We're just trying to get through the day. We are just getting up, living to work. We are in fight-or-flight ourselves. We're just surviving, scraping by. And we wake up and we're focused on what we need to fix. And we go in and we try to fix it. And we give it our all. We give it our all.

There is not a principal that's not working. I don't know of a principal who's really not doing the job unless they are in complete fight-or-flight, dysregulation, and they're in freeze. Like they just, they're frozen, they don't

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know what to do, or they've tried so much, they're physically exhausted, they just can't do it anymore. But typically, the dip for us and for our staff members, because we're all human having this a similar experience, we're focusing on what's not working.

Can you imagine that for the rest of your life, your job was to get up, get ready, go to work, and you have to maintain a positive attitude, but we're going to make you focus on everything that isn't working all day long. I know you set this up. I know you hired all your teachers, but now this one's going on leave. I know you onboarded all your teachers, but this one is moving. Oh, I know you got your class lists all in place, but we got 15 more kids. I know that we were, said we were going to do this roll out, you know, in December, but we've decided we need to do it in October. Oh, I know the math books aren't in. That's okay. Yeah, I know not all the materials. That's all right. You'll figure it out.

I know that your job is supposed to be an instructional leader, but we're down subs, so everybody's going to be in the pool and everybody's going to be subbing. All of the school principals now have to sub, but you still have to get your other stuff done. And this is our assignment. Be positive, lead the way, and make progress, but the only thing we're going to talk about, the only thing we're going to look at all day long is what isn't working, what you haven't yet done, the failures you've had.

We're going to rub salt into those failure wounds. We're going to remind you of those, and even though you have accomplished so many things, we're not going to celebrate that because you're on to the next problem, the next malfunction, the next unexpected emergency. That's what we've been given as a job assignment, and we're focusing on what isn't working, what isn't working, what isn't working. Of course, we're going to feel miserable.

Unfortunately, that's not what life's about. We weren't born to be miserable every single day. We didn't go into school leadership, we didn't go into

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education to feel hopeless and depleted and defeated and discouraged and miserable and incompetent and insufficient and to be chronically dissatisfied with who we are and what we're doing and where we're going and what we've accomplished and who we work with. That's not why we're here.

It's not location based. It's not which type of school. I've seen it happen in, you know, primary, elementary, middle schools, junior highs, high schools, private, public, charter, specialized programming. It's all common because we're all humans. No matter where you go to school, what kind of school you go to, what age group, it's all a human experience, okay? So it's not the positions, it's not the gray levels, it's not the department. It's just a human experience.

Because of that, that's very important to remember. I'm having a human experience. That helps ground you, but it also gives you agency over that experience because you can't control what's happening around you, but you can control your response to what's happening around you. And it might not feel like you can control your response because you feel so tired, fatigued, fed up, overwhelmed. We're going to talk about all those obstacles and what to do about them, okay?

So the fall dip in its essence, it happens when we as humans, as school leaders, lose perspective. We kind of get lost. We get down in the weeds, we get lost in the forest, and we're not zooming out.

So, the third one is emotional fatigue. That might be happening right now. Physically, we go for it, mentally we're going for it, and then emotionally, we are holding space for all the people. You know, teachers are anxious. Yep, we've got you. We're going to take care of you. Staff members coming in questions like, okay, I've got you. Kids are anxious, parents are anxious. Everyone's excited/anxious for the start of the school year. New people

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might be afraid, unsure of themselves, parents are coming in with all their questions.

You know that energy where everyone else has a lot of energy going on emotionally and you're like, okay, okay, okay, you're trying to help them all. Eventually, you're going to have an emotional crash. That happens when people are like riding this high wave, pushing through physically, pushing through mentally, then emotionally, or it just feels, it could be like you rode this high and now it's like after a big event, you were so excited, you were riding this big wave of anticipation.

The day was so much fun, and then you're kind of like there's a crash after, like you're sad that it's over, and what are you going to think about now? Sometimes we have that at the beginning of the school year, especially if like teachers are on it and they're kind of quiet, you're like, okay, who needs me? I'm used to like being on, you know, full gangbusters here. What's going on? You might feel a little dip or a little bit of boredom like it's a little too quiet, things are a little too stable. Like, who needs me? I need to be needed, right?

Okay. So there's physical fatigue, mental fatigue, emotional fatigue. There's a moment where we can kind of lose focus all together. It's not so much the fork, it's just kind of like, wait, who am I? Where am I? What am I doing? What's my purpose? And we start to question ourselves, our identity, our role, our purpose, the mission, and we're feeling like kind of fatigued from all of it, even just leadership fatigue. I'm tired of leading, but I don't want to not lead. I don't want to stop leading. So what do I do?

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.