Ep #464: A Career of Memories & Lessons



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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Ep #464: A Career of Memories & Lessons

Hello, Empowered Principals. Welcome to episode 464.

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. How's it going? Are you ready for Thanksgiving? Oh, for those of you here in the United States, Thanksgiving is next week. My hope is that we give you a best of or one of our most popular replays of the podcast. As I know many of you will be relaxing, enjoying, playing, traveling, being with your family, being with your friends, and celebrating your gratitudes, your appreciation for your life, for those you love, for the blessings you have in your life. And I'm right there with you. My son and I will be traveling to spend time with our family.

So, my sister and I, I think you all know this, but my sister and I have lost both of our parents and our last living grandparent. My dad and my grandmother passed within eight weeks of each other in 2022. So this year, we are without them, and we will be celebrating together. So, we'll be at my sister's farm in Iowa. It is the most beautiful historic home. She has such talent for decoration, and she is excited to host. My sister's so fun. She can do anything. She is truly a jack of all trades. She's got a savvy business mind. She's worked in the business industry. She's worked in everything.

And she also worked at my dad's shop, so she's very hands on. So my sister, her house is like Better Homes and Gardens, Sunset Magazine. It is gorgeous. And she said, "I will take care of the atmosphere and provide the location. So I'll create the vibe. Please, please, please, if you create the food." She says, "I hate cooking. I don't want to cook." So she's providing the atmosphere and the vibe and the home and all of the beautiful things. And my son and I are going to do the cooking. So we're really excited to go back.

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So I hope you are planning out the experience you want to have, whether that's with a bunch of people and you want to be, you know, alive and well with all of your loved ones, or you want a quiet week at home. May you have the experience you desire. So, moving on to the concept of today. I'm just so excited about the trip. I can't wait to see my son. It's been a while.

Okay. I want to talk about lessons learned. So, you know, we teach lessons in school, right? That's what we're there to do. We teach lessons, and we make lesson plans. But in school leadership, there are also lessons learned. And as adults, we don't stop learning. However, try as we might to avoid learning because learning can be painful. It can be fun, but it can also be painful.

We have two kinds of experiences. We have the memories that we create. These are the celebrations, the wins, the moments that remind you of why you went into education, why you became a teacher, why you became a school leader. There are big memories and there are little memories, right? There are the days when you drive home and you feel so proud of yourself. You were so productive, you accomplished something, you feel very fulfilled and satisfied, or you maybe connected with people and you just feel so full.

Maybe it's the first day back to the office core memory. First day with your staff core memory, the first PD of the year core memory. Maybe your first staff meeting with everybody, class list posting, first day of school, like those are core big memories, right? Perhaps it's seasonal celebrations or traditions at your school. We had, Fall Festival was a big deal at my school. We had this lemonade social where all the kids and families came before school. We did the school posting or the class posting with the lemonade social. That turned into like pizza and lemonade. It was a crazy thing.

And then we would get to donate backpacks. So Google would donate 500 backpacks filled with supplies and we could give them out to all the kids. It became the coolest thing. I loved, loved that event. So you might have seasonal celebrations or special field trips or assemblies that your school

celebrates. Other core memories like testing season is always a big one, and then the end of year, right? The field days, the celebrations, the promotion ceremonies, those are the big memories you're creating. And then you have the small memories.

You know, setting up your office or that time you like set aside time to clean up your office. That felt really good, right? Or the funny time when your office was the closet at the back of the library because something broke in your office and you had no power or you had no electricity or you had no internet, or they were repainting and you got moved back to a little corner in some other room on campus, right? You remember those things, right?

The day that someone brought you a coffee when you were craving one, but you just didn't have the time because you were running late, you didn't have the time to stop. The day someone treats you, you remember that. It's a memory that's created. Or the day that you treated your office staff to a coffee. "Hey, thanks. Thanks for that extra work you did getting those class lists up and ready. Here's a coffee. Really appreciate it. Here's bagels and coffee." Whatever. You remember those things, and they remember those things. You're creating memories with intention, whether they're the great big events or the small ones, right?

Think about all the little memories you have. The day where the, you know, the teacher who doesn't really like you, they normally just kind of pass by you, but one day, they actually looked at you and cracked a smile. And you're like, "Whoa." They genuinely said, "Good morning." What just happened? That's great. I remember that.

Or the day the parent that normally dislikes you shares a compliment with you. Hey, the day the copy machine didn't break down, put it on the books. And the week the copy machine didn't break down, that deserves an award. And the month the copy machine, wait a minute. Does a copy machine ever not break down for an entire month? I don't think I have a

memory of that one, but let's go for the week, right? You know where I'm saying.

Our days at work, every single day, it becomes a memory. And believe me, and I believe you, we school leaders have some of the funniest, some of the craziest, some of the wildest stories, the wildest memories. We also have some of the most heartfelt, warm, fuzzy, happy, delightful memories. And I believe that we have some of the most accomplished, successful, satisfying, and proud moments. This job is so fulfilling. And it's also filled with lessons, and this is the hard part. This is where our brain starts to perseverate, where it starts to focus.

But I want you to consider that there isn't a good day, a bad day. There are memories and lessons. It's not a, "I won" or "I lost." "I succeeded" or "I failed." It's, "I created a memory and a lesson." Even with good things, you learn things, and even on hard things, you just learn it a little more deeply. It's the day that you learned how to fix the jam in the copy machine yourself versus asking your secretary to do it. She's out of the office, you have to fix it. You had no idea, and you just sat down on that floor and figured it out, right? But you remember that. It's a lesson. You might have been frustrated, it might have taken you a hot minute, but you figured it out. It was a lesson. It's also a memory.

But the day you realized the importance of keeping your office organized, your superintendent comes, your desk is a mess, they come unannounced, and you are flailing to find the documentation they're looking for. You felt so embarrassed, so unorganized, and now you realize the lesson learned, the importance of spending five minutes at the end of your day to organize yourself, to be prepared and ready for the next day, and how it's worth it even if you have to be five minutes late or you have to leave five minutes later than you wanted to, but to just organize yourself and in five minutes, you will feel differently.

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That's a lesson we learn, and we learn it through not having done it. Right? The day you understood why your boss wants you to respond within 24 hours. It's a lesson. You didn't respond, then there was a consequence or something bigger happened because of it. Now you understand. Before you were like, "What's the big deal? I'll get to it when I get to it, you know? I'm busy." Now you understand.

It's the day you figured out the significance of being proactive with behavior plans and not reactive. It's the day you remembered why you should have let that person go last year. That's a painful lesson. All of these are things that I have personally learned, which is why I'm laughing because I can vividly remember the lesson. I remember sitting on the floor in the copy room with a dress on and heels trying to fix the jam in the copy machine that would have taken my amazing secretary about 30 seconds. It took me about 30 minutes, but now I learned how to do it.

I remember, I'm an organized person, but I was having a week, and then the new superintendent comes over, and I feel like a blubbering, disorganized fool in front of him when he's asking me for something simple, and I can't find where I put it because normally I'm organized, and because I wasn't, I felt the pain and embarrassment of that. I remember that. The 24 hours, that was a painful lesson. That involved a parent, not good. Never did I ever make that mistake twice. Proactive behavior plans, that was just an ongoing lesson. I feel like I learned that more than once. And definitely letting somebody go. Why did I not listen to my instinct, my intuition, my gut telling me this is not a good match, this is not a fit? They're all lessons.

The way we talk about our work days is in all or none. It's, they're good days or they're bad days. "I had a good day today." "I had a bad day today." And then we tally. Good days, check. Bad days, one, two, three, four, five... check, check, check. Oh no, I've had more bad days than good days this week. I've had more bad days than good days this month. I've had way more bad days than good days this year. We look at good or bad.

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And from there, from all of our tallies, we start to make decisions about our identity, decisions about our career, decisions about who we are as a leader. Are we in the right job? Are we at the right district? Are we cut out for school leadership at all? We make lots of bad days equal, "I'm not good." Bad days means "I'm not good," or "This job's not good, the situation I'm in's not good, the location I'm in's not good, the school I'm in's not good, this district's not good."

Let's consider a different perspective. Let's consider memories and lessons. I'm experiencing what I want to experience. I'm feeling how I want to feel. I'm living and working in the way that feels most aligned to who I am and what I desire. There's one perspective. So, I want to live and lead as though I'm experiencing the things I want. I'm leaning into how I want to feel. I'm living and working by the way that feels most aligned to me. I am being who I desire to be. That's one perspective. Another perspective: I'm learning, I'm growing. There's a lesson in this. Today was a learning day. Wasn't fun. Learning days are what we're here for. I learned that wasn't comfortable, but what did I learn today?

We don't, as a consistent practice, I believe, I don't believe we consistently ask ourselves, "What did I learn today?" Most of us stop at, "I had a bad day." And because we're feeling bad, the last thing we want to do is explore why it felt bad or for a deeper introspection or what we learned today. We don't want to think about it anymore because it didn't feel good. It's like, "I'm exhausted. I had a bad day. I just want to go home, put on my comfies, and forget about it." But here's what asking, "What did I learn today?" do for us.

It invites us to go beyond the bad day feelings and into being able to extract the wisdom or information or knowledge or skill that we developed as a result of the bad day. And once we go beyond the feelings of the bad day and into the wisdom, knowledge, information, skills, whatever it was you learned for that day, the bad day doesn't seem so bad anymore.

It's like, "Oh, I spent 30 minutes sitting on the floor in the copy room, but I know how to fix the copy machine now." Or, "Man, did I get chewed out by my superintendent. My heart aches. I'm embarrassed. I feel rough. I'm a little ashamed." And I might take a while to lick my wounds. I'm going to feel sorry for myself. I'm going to do, you know, a seven-minute pity party over here. And then, what did I learn? Because if I learned something from it, I can let it go. But if it was just a bad day, now I'm going to hold on to it and tally it.

So, when we do the good day, bad day versus memories and lessons, your life and your career is summarized either as a good life and a good career or a tough life and a tough career. So I like to summarize my career as a lifetime, a career time full of memories and lessons. So, I invite you, pause for a moment. Pause your to-do list. Pause your body. Take a deep breath. Pause your stress and just think about your career thus far. Contemplate the memories you've created. Contemplate the lessons you've learned. And if you can extend yourself to be grateful for those lessons or to see why you needed to learn them.

Sometimes we learn a lesson and we don't apply that knowledge for five years or 10 years later. There were some lessons I learned that I could not understand why I had to go through it, why I had to live through it, why I had to experience it, and where I was ever going to live that again or be able to apply that wisdom. And sure enough, I will coach on it. Somebody's been through something I've been through and I'm like, "Oh, I'm now I understand why I went through that. It was so I could help this person in this moment, and I wouldn't have been able to help them if I hadn't been through that. I wouldn't have known how to coach on it."

That has happened to me time and time and time again in the last 10 years as a coach. So whatever you're learning, please understand that it's a lesson that is empowering you to be able to provide yourself or somebody else with wisdom, support, knowledge, help in the future. Trust me, this is

the truth. Go have an empowered week. Enjoy your memories and your lessons, and we'll talk next week. Take good care. Bye.

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.