Ep #465: Taking Action Is the Antidote to Shame



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With Your Host

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Hello, Empowered Principals. Welcome to episode 465.

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. Today, I want to talk about something everyone hates to talk about. We're just gonna put it on the table, we are going to pull off the band-aid, and we are going to expose it for the truth that it is. It is the feeling of shame. It's probably one of the worst feelings in the world, because it has tendrils of other negative emotions attached to it.

Embarrassment, remorse, guilt, insufficiency, incompetency, disempowerment. It's all of those things wrapped into one terrible package. And it is universal in that every human experiences the multi-emotional experience of shame, and yet we act as though when we're in it, nobody understands it, or when we're in it, nobody will allow us to be in it, or when we are in it, that we'll never get out of it. It feels so all-encompassing.

So I just want to talk about it, because we all feel it, we all experience it. And once I share with you my take on it, and the perspective that I was granted by my coach, then I feel like you will be able to leverage shame as a call to action versus a call to hide, stop, play small, okay? So for the purposes of school leadership, there are many layers to shame. We're talking about it today in terms of the purpose of school leadership and the emotions that come up with school leadership.

So for example, you might feel shame for doing something that was not in alignment with who you want to be. For example, perhaps you reacted emotionally versus intentionally responding. You got upset and you reacted and you fired off an email or somebody said something to you and you reacted with a snide comment, a little bit snarky, a little less than your

standard of how you want to show up in the world as a school leader. Okay, we all do it because we're human.

Somebody hits that nerve, we're tired, or we're in thought about something else, we're grinding on a problem we're trying to solve, and somebody says something, and boom, we get triggered and we react. and then we feel some shame around our words, our actions, our behaviors, our comments, our facial expressions, right? It doesn't even have to be verbal in what we do. We can simply roll our eyes or make a face that can put somebody into a tailspin, and then we feel shame around the way we behaved or the thing we said or something we did.

So there's that kind of thing. kind of shame when we have acted out of alignment with something other than who we would like to be. And then there is the shame that comes from the feeling when we are not doing something that is in alignment with who we want to be. And I think of that as procrastination.

So we're procrastinating with some kind of distraction. We know we have to get something done, but we are distracting ourselves. We are buffering. We are doing anything, but thinking about the thing we should be doing. And then we have a moment where we're like, why am I doom scrolling? Why have I been watching cat videos for the last 45 minutes? Why am I watching, you know, YouTubes or Netflix or, you know, TikTok when I've got stuff to do? Why am I zoning out here? Then there's an awareness that we are distracting ourselves, and now we're thinking about it.

We're still not doing, we're just thinking about the procrastination, and that's where the shame comes in. I shouldn't be doing this, I should be doing that. I don't know why I do this, I just need a break. And we go into this shame spiral, we call it, and then we further procrastinate as we're thinking about our procrastination and how we shouldn't be procrastinating. Meanwhile, we are further procrastinating. So what happens when we are feeling shame for doing something that isn't in alignment or for not doing

something that is in alignment? Well, let's talk about it. I'll just give you the answers right here, right now.

If you're feeling shame or guilt, it's often associated very closely. If you're feeling shame for doing something that wasn't in alignment with who you are or who you want to be, the response to that is to own it. Is to process how you feel, acknowledge what happened, own it, and then repair, apologize. Acknowledge publicly or to the person or to the situation at hand. the behavior, genuinely apologize, repair what you can, and then moving forward, adjust your behavior.

That is how you diminish shame, is you take ownership, you acknowledge it with yourself and feel those feelings because it hurts, and then you go and you repair and apologize and acknowledge with the other person and share with them how you want to respond moving forward. And then you create intentionality and awareness to the best of your ability for future interactions. And when you do that, you can be proud of yourself, not for the reaction that you had, but for your willingness to repair and respond and move forward with more awareness and more intention.

Now, when it comes to feeling shame for not doing something that is in alignment, so if you are not getting things done or you know that you need to get your observations done, this just popped in my mind, I need to get the observations done, I know that I do, but I continue to resist them, delay them, procrastinate them, push them away, find anything else to do on the campus other than observation write-ups, then we feel shame about being behind, or we are upset at ourselves for having to work late, or nights, or weekends, or when we want to be doing something else.

Or, even worse, we continue to put it off. Like, well, I can't do it now because I've got to pick up my kids. Well, I can't do it now because I've got to take them to soccer. Well, I can't do it now because I've got to make dinner. Well, I can't do it now because kids need a bath. And I can't do it

now, I'm too tired. and then there's another day. Right? So what's the solution?

It is owning it, acknowledging it, and putting it on your calendar. There's something about putting the task that you've been avoiding and putting it square blank on your calendar so your eyes can see it, your body is typing it kinesthetically, your eyes can see it. It has space, which means you have assigned it a date, time, and duration on your calendar which prioritizes the task, and then you go and you do the thing.

No excuses, doesn't matter what your mood is, you do the thing. And your subconscious is going to be desperately searching for other ways to procrastinate you that feel very important, very reasonable, and you have to have the awareness to be on to yourself unless there's blood or fire or unless there's a 911, I'm doing the task.

Even if you do one tiny bit of the task, what you're doing is when you do something you're creating movement and once you've stepped over the threshold of starting, now you have momentum. Little baby steps creates movement, which creates momentum. That is the cure for shame, for not doing something, is just to do it. And what we wanna do is we wanna sit and we wanna think about why we're not doing it. Why am I not doing this? What is holding me back? What are my blocks? I should think about this.

And the reason I know this so intimately is I am the queen of contemplating my delays, contemplating why I'm not doing something, why I'm not getting it done. Oh, what are the fears behind this? What am I worried about? Sometimes that is the distraction. And I have noticed that in myself. Sometimes I'm feeling shame because I feel sorry for myself. Sometimes I'm feeling shame because I'm telling myself I need more time to rest, more time to recover, more time to figure out my shame. When the actual antidote to shame is action, a call to action.

So here's what my coach said to me. She said, what if shame was the code word, the call that tapped you on the shoulder that said, hey, GPS

correction, recalculating, redirect back to action, right? Instead of it being some internal flaw of my human being character or my personality or my ability to focus, it's simply my GPS system saying, tap, tap, tap. This feeling feels so bad because it's trying to get your attention because the simplest response and call to action is to do something in the direction that you were meant to go. To repair something where you feel that it wasn't in alignment with who you are or to start something that will keep you on the direction of where you're headed.

So I now view shame as simply the signal that guides me towards alignment. It's a course correction from that internal compass that you have, your internal GPS system. So I've been thinking about the different ways that shame shows up in school leadership. I'm gonna cover a few of them. I know there's more, but these are the ones that came to me immediately. Number one, shame can feel like a form of defeat.

So let's say you're feeling very defeated and then you feel shame about that. When you're spinning in shame about a defeat, what shame doesn't want you to do is stand up, dust your pants off, and show up again. It doesn't want you to go back into harm's way and to fail yet again and yet again. It wants you to hide your face after a fail. It wants you to play small. Don't do this again. You might get hurt again. You might get disappointed again. You might actually fail again.

But if you follow that GPS guidance, which is an error, system error, that's gonna take you down the path of don't ever try again, don't do anything out of your comfort zone, and don't ever move forward. We're just gonna stop the car. Do not move forward. Do not go one inch forward. Do not try and find your destination. We're just gonna sit here in the middle of the road, engine off, not even trying, done. That's certainly not gonna get you to the destination, now is it?

Versus the solution is, I'm going to keep driving. I will never stop making progress towards my vision, towards the destination, if I don't give up, if I

don't turn the car off. When your car GPS - you could make 20 missed turns. You could be so lost in the city and loop around and get lost and get on the wrong exit. You could be lost for hours. Your GPS system never gives up on you. It never criticizes you. It never laughs at you. It never judges you. It just keeps redirecting you. Knowing the destination, knowing where you want to go, it's like it understands how complicated it can be to navigate a new place that you've never been before. So it just stays with you, strong and steady. Your internal compass does the same.

The simplest way, when you've been defeated or you've taken a hit or you're greatly disappointed or something didn't go your way, is to dust your pants off, feel the feels, get up again. and turn the car back on and let's keep going, okay? Other kinds of shame, shame that shows up as insufficiency. I'm not good enough. Why even try? This is never gonna happen, so why bother? It's me. Everybody else can do it but me, poor little me. I'm not sufficient. I'm not good enough. This type of shame will spin you out for a lifetime if you decide that you were not given the tools and the resources to lead your school, or that you were not given the tools and resources to figure things out.

It's so interesting because I have friends with little tiny babies, and they can't do anything. And not once do they give up living, do they give up trying to grow themselves, to learn new skills. Never once do they stop believing that they're not going to be fed or loved or held or changed, never. They don't feel insufficient, not at all. They were born completely sufficient. So really look at what insufficiency does to your mind, your heart, your soul, your body. It has physical repercussions. When you allow insufficiency to take you down this shame spiral, you will not be able to lead yourself, your life, to lead others, to lead your school.

So try this sentence on, see how it fits. Insufficiency is a myth. There is no not good enough in a human, not any human on the planet. You were born sufficient. That would mean if you were born insufficient without the tools to survive and thrive, if you were not provided with those, then it would mean

there was a universal mistake. And I don't know that that's possible. So if we were to try on in our human brain, look, I know you wanna offer me insufficiency, but insufficiency is a myth. There is no not good enough. I'm good enough. I was born sufficient. And look, the human body, it is born in all kinds of ways, all kinds of ways. And every way that any human could ever be born is sufficient. The brain is also born and wired with different levels of functionality. And every kind of brain is sufficient.

People without legs still have the capacity to find transport for themselves with the appropriate tools. Which by the way, some human brain invented and created to make it easier for people born without legs to be mobile and transport themselves. People who are born with cognitive or intellectual differences are still 100% sufficient and whole and loving and lovable. They are 100% sufficient at being able to be a human on this planet. It doesn't matter what the body is born with or without or the cognitive abilities. Sufficiency doesn't apply. You're sufficient 100% from the day you were born until your soul passes on to the next chapter and your human form is put to rest.

I really invite you to consider dropping the belief that insufficiency is a part of your identity. It can feel difficult to do because we've allowed ourselves to believe that some part of us is insufficient and incapable. Not true. And on that note, when shame shows up as incapable, now I think of incapable and insufficient as separate. Insufficient is something is inherently wrong with you that you cannot fix, that you were born or wired insufficient of tools, resources, capacity. Incapable is simply a gap in learning.

It's like, I don't know how to ride a bike, but I want to learn how to ride a bike. So the solution to closing that gap from not knowing how to ride a bike to knowing how to ride a bike is to learn how to ride the bike, is to sit on the bike, hold the handles, start with training wheels, have a human behind you pushing, having someone show you how the pedals work, sitting on a bike and pushing down on the pedals and feeling with your body how it feels. Sitting on a, what is it called? A recumbent bike, incumbent bike, something

like that where it doesn't move, but you're just sitting there on the bike and you get the feel for the pedals. Having a trike instead of a bike, starting with a big wheel, understanding how pedals work, understanding the motion.

Then you get onto the bike with training wheels. and then you learn balance and you're toddling around and eventually your core inside of your body understands balance and it's able to start doing it on its own because it doesn't want to fall because it's fallen. You take the training wheels off, you fall. But you're capable of learning. There's just a gap between where you're at and where you want to be and the skill you don't have versus the skill you want to have.

So we can expand and evolve our capacity at any time. We can expand our skill set. We can expand our perspectives. We can expand our physical skills and strength. We can evolve our thoughts and beliefs and ideas and intellectual processing and our mental state. We can evolve our emotional bandwidth and regulation. Shame in the form of incapacity is simply an invitation to expand your capacity, just as every other person on the planet is invited to do. No shame required.

Thinking about the incapacity is where the shame comes in. I want to do that and I don't know how. I should know how. It's too hard to learn how. I don't think I can do it. What you're saying is I don't have the patience, I don't have the will, but it isn't the skill. The shame you feel is in not having the will or not having the patience, not having the will to try, the willingness, the openness to feel clumsy and awkward and to fall down and scrape your knee and to maybe feel a little embarrassed and to try again until you figure it out.

This is why I love being a teacher. I love being an educator. I love working with kids. They have such an enormous capacity to fail in public, to get up and try again, to explore with curiosity without so much internal dialogue and external worry. They just go and explore the world, they jump on the bike 200 times because their will to learn, their will to build that capacity is

so much stronger than their fear of embarrassment or their fear of scraping their knee. They just go. So if you're feeling incapacitated, it's the thoughts around it that create shame.

But here's what happens. Shame steps in when you're thinking about the incapacity, but pride, Being proud of yourself steps in when you stop thinking about expanding your capacity and you start practicing and exercising expanding your capacity. Taking action, doing, eliminates the shame. Now shame in the form of disempowerment is where we have abdicated our personal power to somebody else. We have delegated our personal power and given our power to somebody else.

This is why we believe people have control over us, that people trigger us, that people make us feel a certain way, that people make us do certain things. This is the most loving thing I can tell you and I tell myself this whenever I feel triggered, whenever I'm angry, whenever I'm disappointed with somebody. Whenever my feelings are attached to somebody else or to even a situation, that situation is not triggering you. You are triggering you, Angela. People don't trigger us. And I know that it feels like it because I have been tested on this over and over again.

People in my life, family members, friends, colleagues, just the world, circumstances. I have been tested on this over and over again. It's like, oh, you think you have the ability to stay in your empowerment? Try this exercise. Ooh, ouch. I had to really take a minute for that one. But again, do I want to abdicate my power, my personal power over to somebody else and let them write the script, write the narrative of my life, create the memory for me of that moment? Do I want them to have the trigger button, have the red push explode button on me? No, I want to have the button. I want to have power over the button. I want to have the say over the narrative of my life. I want to write out the script of my memories and what I make situations mean for me.

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We simply forget in moments of disempowerment that we have the power to think and feel and do what we want. Even if you were imprisoned physically, you would have the ability to have power over what you're thinking, your belief system, what you're making it mean, how you're feeling, how you want to react or respond, what you wanna say, what you wanna do. We have the power to interpret any situation in any way that we want to. to. You have the power to generate the perspective and the understanding for yourself of any situation in a way that serves you and serves the greater good.

So when something bad happens to you, you're going to have the human experience and also you have the power to say, hmm, what's the learning here? What's the perspective I want? What's the next step I want to take? It's the most empowered thing I can do to enhance my capacity to handle anything that comes my way. We have the ability to decipher meaning into anyone who triggers us or any situation that sets us back and develop the narrative that either serves us or disempowers us.

You've heard this before, but I say it again. You are the captain of your ship, the master of your soul. You are the one thing on the planet that you're in charge of completely. So in moments of shame, and we all have them because they are a call to action, when you're feeling shame, ask yourself, where do I have power? You will have the power to look at the situation through various angles and lenses. You will have the power to contemplate the meaning and the interpretation that your brain is offering you, and you get to select the narrative that feels the best. You will have the power to process your emotions. You will have the power to set the intention of how you're going to respond with your words and actions and behavior towards others.

Shame is simply a call to action. So when you're feeling shame, let it be the signal, oh, I'm just a little bit out of alignment. There's a call to action, means do something. Either repair something if you're feeling shame for being off course in your intentions and who you want to be, or do

something towards the progress that you want to make. Thinking about doing it is not doing it. FYI. Because I am the queen of thinking about all of the things. but I have really stepped into just do it mentality. Thank you, Nike. We appreciate the slogan. It is serving our world well.

Empowered Principals, if you want to leverage shame, use it as a call to action and just do it. One final thought. Back when you wanted to be an educator, when you first wanted to be a teacher you first wanted to be a school leader, why did you want to do that? And imagine if nothing were in your way and you were just teaching and leading from pure service, what would you be doing? And go do that. Have an empowered week. I love you all. Take good care, and I'll talk to you next week.

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