

2022-10-04_Jackson-Robyn_FINAL

Speaker 2 :

As an assistant principal, you must learn to bloom where you are planted. If you do, you will open up huge opportunities to make meaningful differences right now in your career and build the skills you need to make an even greater difference once you become a principal. Those aren't my wise words. They were spoken by Doctor Robin Jackson, addressing a common concern of assistant principals. How do you grow your own leadership in the shadow, or at least the presence of another leader? Hello colleagues and welcome to the Assistant Principal podcast. I'm your host Frederick Busky, and the goal of this podcast is to improve life and leadership for assistant principals. Today I'm joined by Doctor Robin Jackson, the CEO of Mind Steps, the host of the podcast school leadership reimagined, and the founder of builder Ship University. Robin is here with us today to examine some concrete approaches to helping non principals show up and thrive as leaders in a way that adds value to everyone. Hello, Robin.

Speaker 1 :

Hi, I'm so happy to be here. Thanks for having me.

Speaker 2 :

It's a pleasure. You know, I was scanning podcasts the other day and especially ones for assistant principals, and I came across school leadership reimagined and listeners should write this down. Podcast episode one sixty eight. Can assistant principals be builders? So I was immediately intrigued by the title and I wasn't familiar with your framework, but as soon as I started listening, i felt that connection it's as we said earlier off air, you know I'm a big frameworks person, so I'm really excited about the thoughts that you've brought to assistant principals and to learn a little bit more about this idea of builder ship.

Speaker 1 :

I'm a builder ship evangelist. So I'm so happy and excited every time I get to talk about it. Because, you know, a lot of times people look at, you know, leadership frameworks and build your ship frameworks and other frameworks and they think, oh, that's reserved for the person in charge. I mean, think about the whole term. Leadership, the leader is the one in front, and there isn't room for more than one leader. So the moment we take a leadership construct and we adopt it as an assistant principal, as an instructional coach, it immediately leaves us out of the equation because there can't be more than one leader. But when you're a builder, there can be a lot of different builders. We need a lot of different builders in order to do the work. And so there's room for everybody. And so that's why I'm so excited to talk. Specifically the assistant principals about this idea of builder ship because when do you think about leadership? There isn't room for us. We're trying to knock that mean not literally but we're you know, it's almost as if we're positioned like we wanna knock the principal off the platform so we can get there one day or we want to get our own schools so that we can do things we've always wanted to do. But when you're a builder nobody has to move because you can build wherever you are. And so I think that's kind of one of the main. Differences between leadership and builder ship that creates space for other people.

Speaker 2 :

Yeah, i love that and especially that thought about getting our own school because the thing that prepares us to be a principle isn't the assistant principal ship right and there's a lot. That's one of the big tensions. It's a very different job and so if you're waiting to get your own school what are you doing to actually develop the skills you'll need as a principal and the thing I like to tell assistant

principals as well is you have to lead now lead now from where you are. And so yeah, we'll dig into that. But before we do, tell us a little bit about your leadership journey and how you got to where you are today.

Speaker 1 :

So I was a English teacher at high school. English teacher and then. No good deed goes unpunished. And education. So if you're good at your job, they immediately take you out and put you in a vastly different job. And so I've been, you know, a teacher and been doing a lot of work to really increase equity and access for all kids to honors and AP courses, rigorous courses, and then really doing a lot around ensuring that every child was successful in my classroom. So my vision for my classroom as a teacher was I didn't want to have any failures. And so that's where I spent a lot of my time working to try to figure out how to keep kids from failing. That has been a big mission of mine throughout my career. I believe every child deserves to be successful in school. And so I just started living that vision out in my classroom, and it got noticed. And so then I was asked to be an instructional coach. But I wasn't ready to leave the classroom yet, so I negotiated an opportunity to teach three classes instead of five, and then the rest of the day work as an instructional. Coach and support other teachers. And I did that for a few years and the pressure kept melting for me to go into administration. So I negotiated a an administrative role that was really focused on instruction at the high school I was in. And I went on an interview because what happens is you put yourself in a pool, right? And so I went on an interview because I was in the pool and I got called and I didn't know how to say no and accidentally got the job. That story, if you want to hear it, crazy story. But anyway, I accidentally got the AP. And so I became an assistant principal of a middle school. And in that role I went through three principals in three years. So I worked when the principal who hired me, I worked for him for about a month and then he got another job and then the second principal came in. He was a first year principal. I broke him in and then he got immediately promoted to another job and then I got my third principal. He was a first year principal and. Then I left. And so, you know, I spent the majority of my administrative career as an assistant principal, and I was actually about to be offered a principalship in my district. You had to go through at least three years as an assistant principal before you could become a principal. And even then, you know, you also had to like give a blood sample, you know, get a lot of recommendation from your ranking, senator. I mean, it was just a, it was hazing, really, in order to get that principal job. And everybody was kind of desperate for that principle yep and I was with my Superintendent, my area Superintendent. I was supposed to be shadowing him as part of my training, but he took me to a school and he showed me around the school that I thought I was shadowing him for a visit. I didn't realize I was on a job interview. And at the end of that visit, we get back to his car and he turns to me and he says, So what do you want to do next year? And the right answer was, Sir, I want to be a principal. And then he would have said, well, good news, we have a job for you. I didn't realize that was what was happening. So I told the truth, which is that I wanted to resign and write a book. And so as soon as I said it, you know, it was something that been brewing in me for a while, but I had never said it aloud. But as soon as I said it aloud, i panicked and I said, ohh, no wait i know the right answer. And he goes, no, let's explore this a little bit. He gave me a month to think about it and I didn't take the full month because once I said it, I realized that was my truth. And so I resigned. That was in February. I sent my letter of resignation in. I finished the year until June, and then I resigned from the school district and settled in to write a book. And it was very scary. Because i didn't have an agent. I didn't have a book contract yet. I didn't know what the book was gonna be. I didn't have another job or anything lined up and I just took a leap of faith. But because it was the thing that I was meant to do, it didn't feel scary. It should have been scary, but it wasn't. Felt like I was finally stepping into my purpose. And so I did write a book. That book became never worked harder than your students. And that became a huge bestseller. And then I started mine steps and that was over. 16 years ago and so now, ironically enough. I spent the majority of my time supporting and training principles, even though I never was a principal myself.

Speaker 2 :

That that's a conversation we can have. I haven't been either. And you know, you can have that kind of idea, imposter syndrome. But I want listeners to hear this. I think sometimes when you haven't been a principal, you listen much more closely to principles that you work with and you're not overlaying. This is how I did it when I was there, right? You know, you have to learn and you really have to listen and ask good questions in order to do that. And that's the thing I always try to be. Upfront about I put out lots of stuff, but it's all stuff I stole from people who are much better at it than I am.

Speaker 1 :

I mean, here's the thing. I went through three principles in three years. And in a way one of the things that I did in my role as assistant principal was to help train the principal. So I, you know, I had one experience, principle and then two first year principals. And I remember taking one of the first year principals aside and saying to him, you are doing my job. You are an AP last year and you are trying to still be an AP in the principal's office. I can do my job. I need you to do the job with the principal and stop being the best AP in the building and start being the principal because there's only one of you and you've got three AP's here. We can handle the other stuff and that, you know, just the idea that as an AP, if you're, if you are, if you're watching what's happening, you can learn so much. About the job, by seeing yourself in that supportive role but not checking your, you know, checking your own powers of observation at the door there, there's so much you can understand about the job. The challenge is the way that we are mostly trained to be AP's is that we are trained to kind of take on the jobs nobody else wants. And then when we get into the principals office we still try to do those jobs and try to be the principal and we can't do both and what we should be doing. Say piece, especially if you're an aspiring principal, is to even approach the work you do as an AP in the same way that you would do as a principle that you own that work. You see yourself as the person. Who is setting the vision for that work? Whether that work is the master schedule, whether that work is disciplined, that you're setting a vision for the discipline in alignment with your principles vision. But you own that work, and you treat that work as if it were your own school. Because then you build the muscles of truly being the person who is the builder in the building. That you know the builder in chief in your school building, and those skills transfer over to the principal ship when most of the other skills we learned as an AP don't transfer.

Speaker 2 :

I think that's a segue into talking about builder ship and what that means and what those foundational pieces are. Before we do that, I always like to start with celebrations. We've gotten ahead of ourselves. What are you celebrating, Robin?

Speaker 1 :

Story of my life, right I've I was getting ahead of myself.

Speaker 2 :

Do you have a celebration?

Speaker 1 :

Oh, OK, so talk me through what a celebration means. Is it something that I'm excited about or what do you mean by celebration?

Speaker 2 :

Yeah, I think anything you're excited about and feel good about. I know you know, we worked so hard and things can be a grind and sometimes we get into meetings we get into. Trainings or whatever. And we just go. And so one of the things I try to do, I guess culturally, is to make sure that we always pause and celebrate something that's good.

Speaker 1 :

That's funny in mind steps we have a weekly meeting where everybody comes together and the first thing we do in the meeting is that we go around and each one has to share a win for the week and it's the hardest part about our meeting. I think that as a culture we don't especially in education we don't take time to truly celebrate the things that are happening and that's why I think a lot of us are so burned out. It's because we're so focused on the problems that. Me forget all the good things that we do. So for me the thing that I'm celebrating right now is that we have just started builder ship university and we have cohorts of principals and assistant principals who are going through the process to learn how to become builders and apply builder ship to their schools. And we have started a wins channel and we have so many wins coming in that wins channel. People who are even just starting you know they finally have developed their vision for their schools and. Being it, they talked about how starting the school year with a clear vision was such a different feeling for them this year than last year when they were just starting school. You know, doing the things that you do when you start school, just that simple shift made a huge shift in the way the first weeks of school have felt for them. And so that's what I'm celebrating right now, is that there's so many people who are finding their vision for their schools and how just doing that and nothing else is changing everything.

Speaker 2 :

That's great. That's awesome. Good thing to celebrate. Ok, builder ship.

Speaker 1 :

So build a ship was a concept that I was first introduced to, and I think 2009 there's an economist named Amir Haig and he wrote an article and that was the first time I'd heard the word builder ship. And in that article he said something that just stopped me in my tracks. And I couldn't stop thinking about, which is he said, bosses say go and leaders say let's go. And I've heard that before that's, you know, that's a great distinction. But then he said. Elders say come and in that one simple sentence, I'd started to see the answer to some of the problems that I've been frustrated about. Education, you know, I was trained to be a leader. And the problem I've already talked about one is that there's only one leader, right? So there's not room for more than one. The whole concept of leaders, you're in front, everybody follows you. But the other problem is that when you're a leader, you can only move as quickly as the people you're leading. And that's why I think. So many leaders are frustrated because if you're calling yourself a leader, you can't leave people you have to wait for people to catch up. So leaders always want to go further than their people are ready for, and then they either push or pull them to the destination and it's a disaster. But when you're a builder, you don't have to wait for anybody to get started. You go out and you start building 1st and you build something that is so compelling that when you say come and invite people to what you're building, they come on their own volition. And when they do come, they pick up a hammer, they pick up a chisel, they start building with you. And so that's when I started to figure out, well, how do you do that? How do you say come. And so the framework, you know, the idea of the framework started in 2009 and here we are in 2022 and we have a completed framework. And it took years of just working in schools, supporting people, trying different things, seeing what worked to be able to come with the framework. And so now we have the framework, the builders, your framework, and there are four things you have to do. The first thing is you need to have a clear and compelling purpose, and that's your vision, mission and core values. It's not the way we've been taught how to do vision, mission, and core values. Your compelling purpose is that you have to decide that you're going to build something where 100 % of your students can be successful. And so your vision is about 100 % success. Your mission is about why that vision is so important and that your core values define what's non-negotiable in the work that you're doing to build that. Once you have that, the next thing you're going to do is you're going to get your people on board, and how do you get your people committed to that compelling purpose? And therefore things you're going to do feedback, support, accountability and culture, that's the only four things you can do to positively influence your teacher's behaviors. So that's where you're focusing on, and it's not feedback the way we've been taught. Or, you know, accountability. The way we've been taught send the builders way

and it's all Invitational. It's not you going in, pushing into a classroom and telling a teacher all the things the teacher did wrong. It's about you partnering with the teacher to figure out what's the next one thing the teacher needs to be doing right now in order to help that teacher grow into the builder that teacher needs to become in order for 100 % of your kids to be successful. So there's a totally different conversation around that. It's a totally different level of support and accountability around that. The third thing is that then you need to figure out what's the right pathway. Right now, you know, an education, we are so guilty of throwing spaghetti against the wall, trying to do all the things and then hoping something sticks. Well, builders are a lot more intentional. They're not doing all the things. They're figuring out what's the one most important thing we need to be doing right now. And they stay focused on that. And that's why builders have so many success stories because they're not trying to do all the things and burning out in the process. They're being very intentional about what work they choose to focus on right now that will move them towards their vision. So being a builder is very focused. And then the last one. That's your plan and it's not so much about writing a plan. We're good at that. We all write sip plans, right? We never follow up. It's really about how do you execute. In a disciplined and consistent way so that you don't feel out of control, you don't feel disorganized, you're just making this steady progress towards your goals and you're seeing victory after victory after victory. And so those four pieces we, you know we've been working on saying this is what it's going to take and then working on training and support around how to do those things and put that install that builder ship system into the work you're doing in schools so that 100 % of your students. To be successful.

Speaker 2 :

That's awesome. Thank you and thanks for presenting that in such a clear way. So one of the things i'm really intrigued about because I'm a huge advocate that leaders need to be developing our people. You know, principles have two jobs really, right keep everybody safe in school and provide opportunities and increase opportunities for student success. But we don't, principals don't teach students. So the way we do that is by developing teachers. And so I'd like to translate that. You get 2 jobs, keep everybody safe, grow your teachers. And you have some of that emphasis on people with freedom, support, accountability and culture. So can you talk a little bit more about that specifically from the assistant principal role in developing those people and those four elements?

Speaker 1 :

So one of the things that I think is really important is that we're intentional about helping people grow. You know, a lot of times we say, ohh, we had to help our teachers grow. And so that translates into, you know, we think getting into more classrooms. But if you're getting into more classrooms and you're not providing feedback that's helping people grow, you're wasting time, right? A lot of times we're like, oh, we need to support our teachers. We need to take things off their plates. What do you take off their plates? You know, do you take the thing that's what that's making them actively, actually effective. How do you know that? So we're not intentional about the support. And so whether you're a principal and assistant principal and instructional coach, the first thing is you have to understand why do we want teachers to grow? And if teacher growth is just driven and, you know, for the sake of growth, then you get people developing a lot of skills that don't move the needle for kids. So you want to be intentional and very focused about that, which is why you have to start with a vision. So whether you're an assistant principal, an instructional coach or principle you have to start with what is the vision for your school? What is 100 % success look like? And so whether you're an assistant principal and your chart in charge of the math department, you're going to ask that question in the math department. Because I'm charged with math. I'm in charge of math department. So what does 100 % success look like for our students when it comes to math? And then once you've determined that, then the idea is, OK, let's take a look at the teachers who are in the math department what is the one thing that these teachers need to do right now to get them closer to that hundred % success goal? And you focus only on that, so you're not going in and checking 25 things off of a list and leaving the paper in the classroom when you leave. Instead, you are working with the teacher to say we're trying to get 100 % of our students in math to do X. Let's

take a look at your practice right now, and let's look at the one thing that's standing in the way of you getting there, and let's remove that barrier from your practice. To make you more effective. And the idea is that you want to help every teacher grow at least one level. In the most critical area for their practice every single year. And how many people can really say that they're doing that support, that they're giving teachers the feedback that giving teachers is doing that. But when you're a builder, that's your goal, that's what you're tracking, that's what you're striving towards. And then if you do that intentionally, that's what you see. You can see tangible growth from every teacher you support, and you can see them moving from one level to the next level in that area in their practice every single year. And the result is your students. Are getting closer and closer to that 100 % success goal.

Speaker 2 :

I've had conversations with assistant principals and when we talk about coaching and developing teachers and I think when you think about coaching cycles, you're bringing a different level of intentionality to that where you can focus on specific things. But we've also had the discussion of coaching with a capital C versus coaching with the Little C where coaching with the Little C really is more that opportunistic short stuff where you're not as you're being intentional and you're coaching. It is not part of the bigger plan and assistant principals talk a lot about the challenge of having that consistency and building that intention. So for assistant principals that want to be more intentional in the teachers that they're working with. What suggestions do you have for them on doing that what? What are the steps? What does that process look like?

Speaker 1 :

So I'm gonna be a little counterintuitive here, because I don't think they're separate, right? I think that if you are working to move every student to success, there is no separation between coaching with the capital C using your rubric, and doing the evaluation cycle and coaching with the Little C, the day-to-day work you're doing. I think that the problem that a lot of assistant principals and coaches have when they're working with teachers is that they have never spent time interrogating. The rubric that they're being asked to use when they have to coach with the capital C, so they don't understand it well enough to be able to leverage that same language when they're coaching with the little C and that's why it's so overwhelming because you're trying to do 2 separate things. They're one and the same. And the first step, you know, one of the things that we spend a lot of time doing with assistant principals and principals is helping them understand how to make that rubric work. A lot of rubrics are awful. They're terrible and the state rubric that we're given, so we just kind of. Dismiss it. But if we mind that rubric, especially because we have to use it anyway, we can find a way to take that rubric and make it work for both of our objectives, fulfilling the evaluation cycle needs and helping teachers grow. And so if you spent time understanding that rubric and understanding not just what are the characteristics for the designation of ineffective or effective or highly effective or whatever name your rubric calls it, but really understanding, what does it take? To help a teacher move from one level to the next level. Then your conversations, whether they're formal or informal, become more about teacher growth and serving students than they do about fulfilling the requirements of the evaluation cycle. And so you don't have to straddle 2 worlds anymore. You turn the thing that you have to do into the thing that you want to do anyway, so that you're always, every conversation helping teachers grow. And they're not. Regretting that you came into their classroom and they're not nervous when they see you coming. In fact, they become partners in those conversations and it actually becomes this collaborative effort on behalf of kids rather than what I call the feedback dance that we all endure every year so that we can check off. I went into the classroom and did one informal, one pre conversation, one post observation conversation, two formal observation conversations and here's your results for the year. Congratulations, you get to keep your job.

Speaker 2 :

So I want to quote again what you just said about you need to turn the thing you have to do into the

thing you want to do. Yeah, I just, I think that's incredibly powerful and we're talking about it in the context of. Observations for teachers. But we can take that idea into so many places. And I was in a school the other day and. They have. There's a new math program and there's a new reading program, and there's about three other initiatives coming in, some state, some district. And just listening to how much you know what the expectations are and how much is coming in and I think one of the things that we talked about was. That when these external things come at us all the, I don't want to say flavor of the month, but I guess that's part of what it is. When these things come at us, we do have choices to make. I think that the initial thing is I have to jump, but part of what I hear you saying is if I'm a builder, I have that vision. And so it's not me conforming my vision and me conforming where we're headed as a school to these external mandates, mandates and programs that are coming in. It's looking at those programs and looking at what are the pieces that actually align with what we're doing. And so then how do we take those people pieces, emphasize those and leverage those. I think that's something that a lot of times we like to follow the rules and you can't tell people. It's hard to tell District office people, no. But when you can turn it to looking for the things that are consistent so that you're doing what you want to do, I think that's a really powerful idea.

Speaker 1 :

Yeah, I mean, here's the thing that you know when you when you're driven by a vision bigger than I want the promotion or bigger than, I hope they consider me principal material if you're driven by a vision for success for 100 % of your students. And you're making choices based on that vision. They're always gonna be the right choices. And here's what also happens the side benefit is you do get the recognition. The side benefit is people do leave you alone because you're putting up the results. It's hard to argue with the results. Like there are people who go rogue and don't show results and then they get, you know, their hand slapped. So I'm not telling people to just go rogue, right? I'm not telling people to just say, you know, take a district mandate and, you know, pick and choose because. That can get you into a lot of trouble. What I am saying though is that if you can take that district mandate. And turn that mandate, take the intention of the mandate, which usually starts out with a pretty noble intention. Take time to understand that intention and what it's going to mean for kids and implement that mandate in a way that's in alignment with your vision. You do 2 things. You a you actually fulfill the requirements of the mandate and stay on the good graces of the people who are making decisions about your future. But more importantly, be you have done something better for kids and the more you show, you know that we have some people now who've been in build ship university for a year or two, and they now talk about how the district leaves them alone. Because they're they the proof is in the pudding if what you're doing is working and serving kids. People leave you alone because it's working. They're not like they're not gonna take. And then you have more leverage to be able to say we're gonna do this, we're not gonna do this because you you've already demonstrated that your focus is on success for kids, and you have the results to show it.

Speaker 2 :

One of the best principles I know. Doesn't respond email You know, there are a few, but if you want to get in touch with him, emails not the way because he doesn't do email, because he's out in classrooms working with teachers. So it's interesting that people, I think. If you're doing it right and executing on that vision and making a case for that, there's I think we get more latitude than what we think we can get.

Speaker 1 :

You know, one of the things that I think is a skill that assistant principals should develop and will actually serve them beyond the assistant principalship. Is this idea of selling your ideas and your vision. You know, a lot of times assistant principals get frustrated because they have ideas about how to you know help the school and make it grow. But their principal doesn't want to hear those ideas and so they they're frustrated because they feel like they have to do things the principals way and nobody's hearing their ideas and you have ideas for something better and it's not the idea that's the problem is that we never get good at selling our ideas. Whether you are an assistant principal,

whether you become a principal one day. You have to sell things to the district. The idea about why we're going to do something or not doing, or you have to sell the idea to parents or to your community. We need to get good at selling our ideas, and the assistant principal is the assistant principal. Ship is a great way to practice that. You know, how do you see something that needs work in the school and how do you present that idea to a principal in a way that the principal sees not only the merit and the idea, but is willing to take the risk of implementing your idea, even though they're the ones who are going to be ultimately responsible for its success. If you learn how to do that, then you can go anywhere and be whether you're whether you stop at the principalship, whether you choose a district office role, whether you do something separate, where you start your own business, you can go anywhere with that.

Speaker 2 :

Yeah, yeah. So I guess do you want to, do you want to dive into that a little bit more? Or the other direction we could go is having that collaborative conversation with teachers and how we work that together so that they understand like, I'm here to help you, I'm here to serve you. How what does that conversation look like?

Speaker 1 :

Well, so they're essentially the same conversation, right. So we can talk about both. One of the big mistakes I think people make is they are so busy trying to sell the idea and why it's a good idea. Whether the idea is, hey, I think we should do something different in our school or the idea is, hey, I think you need to do something different in your practice that we don't consider the person in front of us. And I heard Donald Miller who if you haven't read his book, he really should. It's building a story. And he's a, he's a, he's a, he talks a bit, he's a marketing expert now, but he's a former author. And as an English teacher, this relates to me because I it was really relevant to me because I love this idea of archetypes, and he talks about how human beings process ideas through stories. And we're always telling ourselves a story, and the story we're and the stories we're telling ourselves about the world, we're always the hero. So if somebody cuts you off in traffic, the story we tell ourselves is they're a jerk. And I've been wrong and aggrieved and so we're always the hero when you're trying to sell your idea to somebody else. The thing that we forget is that we are not the hero of their story, they're the hero of their story. So a lot of. Once we go in and talk to a teacher. And we walk into that conversation thinking, you know, they're so lucky I'm here. We don't, we don't. We don't admit it. But we're they're so lucky I'm here because I've figured out what they need to do through my expertise. And now as a hero, I'm going to come in and show them now again, most of us would never ever admit to that because we're, you know, we're humble and servants and all of that. But ultimately, that's how that conversation comes across. So why should I listen to you? Because that hero you that you're not the hero of my story. I'm the hero of my story. And in my story I'm doing my best. And you're in here interrupting, wasting my time on this stupid conversation when I could be grading papers. And so you have two competing stories. The answer is not to try to wrestle them out of their story and try to drag them into your story where you're the hero. The answer is to step into their story. And the place where you step into their story is not as the hero, they're the hero, but the more powerful. Character is the guide. So think about any movie you've ever seen, right? There is a hero and you should be heroes, a mess. The heroes trying to get something. That's what makes the story compelling. You know, Luke Skywalker is you know, kind of toiling away on this planet. And then the guide comes Obi Wan Kenobi and then Yoda. And they showed, they showed them how to awaken the force within him, and he becomes even a bigger hero, right? The most powerful person in that movie, it's not Luke Skywalker, it's Obi, Wan Kenobi and Yoda. You're the guide. And so if you see yourself as the guide, when you walk into that teacher conversation and instead of trying to be the hero and show the teacher the way, right, we step into the story, the teachers telling themselves they're working hard, they're doing the best that they can, and we walk in as the guide not to rest them out of the practice. I mean, nobody gives you their worst performance when you walk into the classroom, they're giving you their best. So assume that and then instead of coming in and saying, hey, you're best was garbage coming in. And talking about their dreams, their hopes, their goals for

their students, and how you can support them in achieving those dreams in their hopes, that's a different perspective in the conversation that makes the feedback you give them so much more desirable. Because instead of coming in and giving them feedback on how you can make them better because you're the hero, you've walked into their story. You've treated them as if they're the hero and that you're the guide and you're giving them something that helps them achieve what they. Always wanted to achieve anyway. Same thing is true when you're selling to your principal, or to your parent, or to a student. That's the missing piece. If you can take yourself out of the hero spot, let them be the hero and you put yourself in the guide position. You will always be able to get your story across in the way, or get your advice or your ideas across in a way that people can welcome them.

Speaker 2 :

And I think that's even more important today than it's than it's been before because of the COVID has, I think, put a lot of pressure on people. You know, we've got the mental health issues of kids, but also of families. And one of the things that I think we have an opportunity to do at this point is to understand that. We can't separate our social selves from our professional selves and our work. It's been one of the things that I've been trying to dig into was I've always been one of those pragmatic people. Like, I just want to come in and roll up my sleeves and all right, let's get to work. But I think that whole idea of understanding people and understanding their stories. Not only their professional stories, but their personal stories as well. It's just become so important because we found we can't just leave it all out there. We're going to bring things in to the work environment with us and so taking that time to understand where you are professionally and what you need and what your aspirations are professionally is really critical. But I think there's also a role for understanding that socially. And who am I as a teacher? And what am I carrying into my classroom as a teacher that maybe you don't know about, but it is going to influence our conversations and the way I take what you say exactly.

Speaker 1 :

Ok.

Speaker 2 :

I think. Are there is there anything else that you'd really like to emphasize before we start to wrap this up?

Speaker 1 :

You know, you talked a lot about this idea of your authentic self, and I just did a podcast on that idea. It pains me to see people who are aspiring principals who feel like they have to ball themselves up and fit themselves into the role. And I get it right, a lot of districts send that message. Even in my own district, my former district, that was the message. We you know the lot of the training was really about how to become the districts idea of what a good principle was. And so people feel like they have to leave themselves and. Become this idea. You have to dress differently. You have to talk differently you know and everybody's kind of preening trying to show that they can they're good principal material. And the danger of that is that when you do that, when you, when you get so good at being this idea of assistant principal or principal or an administrator, that you stop being yourself. Then when you finally get what you want, you can't enjoy it because you know you got it by being somebody else, and so the only way to keep it is to continue being somebody else. And so I see a lot of people who want to be principals. Who get there and. They don't enjoy it. They spend all this time trying to be something that they don't enjoy being. You owe it to yourself. You owe it to us. You owe it to the students and the families you serve. To instead of trying to be some cookie cutter version of what somebody else's idea of an administrator is. To be yourself, but not just yourself. Your best self. That's the that's the ultimate role. That is, that is the ultimate way of doing that. And so I would encourage people to stop trying to be what the district or the coaching program say you need to be and focus on being the best version of yourself you can be. Because then anywhere you

go any role you step into you'll enjoy it because you can. You're you. You're you know you've got there by being your best self. But even more importantly, if you take time to understand who you are and start and practice being your best self, you'll know when a role is not the right fit. You know some people are so desperate for a principal ship, they'll take any principal ship, whether or not it's a right fit for who you are and the work you want to do for kids. But when you are practicing being your best self, your authentic self, you'll know what's the right fit. You'll know when it's the wrong fit. You'll know. You'll know where you can best serve. Where you where will be least served or best served by your best self. And so I really want to encourage people, especially those of you who are aspiring to principalship someday. Focus on being your best self, because if you can do that, you can really step into that. The role will be the right role will be waiting for you.

Speaker 2 :

It's so critical and I appreciate what you said about people wanting to hurry up and get in the role and if it's not the right role. Who do you become?

Speaker 1 :

And, then I think also that work of authenticity, that's the work we do everyday. People like to think of authenticity and ethics as being these big inflection points. At some moment comes and I have to make this decision, but you already made the decision and if you sold your soul to get the job, you already made the decision.

Speaker 1 :

That's so true. And you have to be careful, right, because the decisions you make now influence the kind of principle you're gonna be one day. And I don't think people realize that, you know, they that people tell themselves once I get the principalship, then I can be. If you're not doing that now, what makes you think you're gonna do it then? And so you now's the time. You're right. The decisions. That you will make as a principle you're already making as an assistant principal. They're already being made. I love that idea and I think that if more people realise that. Then the their experience as an assistant principal would be so much more gratifying. And so that's why I say bloom, where your planet right now you have something really important. That you can offer your students and their families and the teachers you serve. And don't ignore that. Don't blue it's not just grow where your planet bloom where your planet. It does two things. First of all, it makes your work so much more fulfilling and rewarding right now. Secondly, it does change people's lives for the better. But thirdly, this is almost counterintuitive. By blooming where you're planted, you get more recognition than if you try to conform into what the district wants you to be anyway, because there's only one of you. And when there comes a space that you're supposed to occupy, you're the only person who can fit it. And you become the only option. And once you do that, you have to worry about competing for a job. You don't have to worry about, you know, hoping you're the best. You're the only option. And so it's the right fit for you. It's the right fit for the school. And that's where you can truly be happy in your profession, even now. You don't have to wait until you become a principal. That's where you can make a difference, even now.

Speaker 2 :

And I can imagine some people out there saying, well, in my district, if I don't do this, then I won't get the job.

Speaker 1 :

I mean, do what, right? Like, what is it that you have to wait that you think you have to do? You know, and when I was in assistant principal, you know, we had an expectation about dressing professionally, right? But it didn't mean we all had to wear the same outfit. We just had to make sure that we were dressing professionally. In my district, there was an expectation, you know, as an assistant principal, you know, this is weird because I haven't heard too many people have this experience. And when I was assistant principal, you were an ap, one then you could. If you did well,

you could become an app two and then certain number of people got invited to be an AP three. But you had a week long summer training all day long. Every month you went to a training where you learned something else about the role. You had a mentor of a retired principal who's your personal mentor. And then every six weeks or so you have to present a packet to your area Superintendent, your principal and your mentor that demonstrated your work. Ok, so that. If you don't do that, you don't get the job. But there's so much nuance in how you do that. Like one of the expectations was that, you know, when do you have that meeting? You had to serve meals. People would cook, people would have catering. You know, who has time to? I'm working. I don't time to cook for these people. So I would just ask. I would call their secretaries and say, what does he eat for breakfast every day? Eats a banana and a yogurt. What brand? And I would just come in a banana and a yogurt and no elaborate breakfast. This is what your secretary says. You eat every day. They were happy. I was happy. Mobic catered meals, you have to do this packet. Some people would send, you know, it would be a dissertation. It'd be hundreds of pages of work demonstrating their work. And I sat down with my committee and I said, OK, what is it that you need to see from this packet and how can I show that to you in a way that's most efficient? Because part of being a principal is disseminating information in a way that's efficient. Nobody wants to read 100 page packet. So let's figure this out. And I worked with my team to figure out how to make my professional development. Work for me. The last packet I submitted was a one page packet. Everybody else is doing hundreds of pages. I did one and I didn't do it to be cheeky. I did one because that's all we needed for the work. So yes, there are requirements that you have to do. I couldn't say I'm not going to do a packet. I couldn't say I'm not going to do these meetings. I couldn't say I'm not going to feed people. But how you do that, there's a lot of latitude there. So a lot of people think that they have to do something. And my question is always do you really and do you have to do it that way? And once you get good at being who you are, you will find a way to meet the requirements of the district or the program, but in a way that best serves your students and in the best way that serves you. And if you're constantly looking for that, it doesn't feel like I have to anymore turn the thing that you have to do. That's what being a builder's all about, right? It's not about passively kind of taking everything everybody dishes out at you, building says take. You know, always say take whatever brick people throw at you. And use it to build. So as a builder you're always thinking about, OK, does it have to be done this way? Is there a better way? Can I build uses to build something better? And when you do that, you don't have to do anything, you want to do it because you're building?

Speaker 2 :

We make a lot of assumptions about the systems we're in and what the systems want from us. And I think in your story, what you show us is a lot of times our assumptions aren't correct. But many of us don't know because we never ask but. To bring us full circle. When you have that vision, when you have clarity of purpose, and when you can enact your authentic self, then that's when you start asking. And oftentimes the answers are going to surprise us and we're going to be able to do more than we thought we would or we're going to be able to educate up the people and build them around us and find those ways to execute.

Speaker 1 :

You know, there's let's talk about something, a really practical way of doing it, and we've started doing this, I've started doing this personally a lot, and it helps me to challenge assumptions. Whenever you have an assumption about something, whenever you feel like you have to do something, write down the assumption right? So I have to turn in this packet. I have to do whatever assignment my principal gives me and then start challenging the assumptions. So say, write the opposite. I don't have to do the packet. Ask yourself a question. What would it look like if I did the packet my way? What would it look like if I didn't do the packet? Could I still achieve what they want me to achieve if I didn't do the packet at all? Do I really have to take this role on, or is there somebody else that would be better doing it? And all you do is you take that assumption, write it down, and then look at it from 25 different angles, even if it's even if it feels ridiculous? And when you do that, you'll find that a lot of the things that you assume to be true aren't true, and you'll also

find a solution. That helps everybody get to the same goal, the thing that they intended to happen as a result of that thing anyway. But do it in a way that makes more sense for you and for your kids.

Speaker 2 :

Thank you for that. We're going to start wrapping up. So I have three final questions for you. And the first one is, what's the part of your own leadership that you're still trying to get better at?

Speaker 1 :

So I'm mastery driven and sometimes. I'm pushing for things because I'm thinking about it from a mastery perspective, and I'm not paying attention that other people are not driven by mastery other. Some people are driven by relationships, some people are driven by autonomy, some people are driven by purpose. And so slowing down enough to realize that the I, all the ideas that I have and all the things that I'm trying to do, I have to make sure that I'm also understanding there are other perspectives out there and considering those perspectives. As well. And so it's a constant struggle for me. I give people too much you know because I'm like you gotta have it all. Not everybody needs it all. And so being able to take all the things that I that I have in my head and. Happened to somebody else's story outside of my story and into somebody else's story so that it can give people a thing that they need to be better. That's something that I still struggle with.

Speaker 2 :

And if listeners could take away just one thing from today's show, what would that be?

Speaker 1 :

That. If he how you identify is important. If you identify as a leader, then it limits what you can do. If you start thinking about yourself as a builder, it opens up all kinds of possibilities because instead of being limited by how fast people are moving behind you or how much people let you occupy that leadership box with them, as a builder you can start building wherever you are and so rethinking how you identify how you think. About yourself changes how you see the role that you're in right now and changes what's possible for you in that role.

Speaker 2 :

And then anything else that you'd like to toss out there for the audience?

Speaker 1 :

I think we've done enough for today. I don't know.

Speaker 1 :

I'll open up a new can of worms.

Speaker 2 :

Ok, Robin, this has been great. And you have a podcast, you have builder, ship university. There's a lot you're doing. So tell listeners how they can reach you, how they can find out more about you.

Speaker 1 :

So there's two big things. One is the podcast. Every single week is school leadership reimagined and I started the podcast. Because not everybody can always come to all the workshops that I'm doing and I wanted to find a way to give people professional development for free. So the podcast is just me. I'm not interviewing anybody and every single week I'm teaching on a particular topic. So school leadership reimagined is a great way to learn more about this process. And then when you're ready to actually start being a builder, even as an assistant principal, we have several assistant principals inside of build should university. Right now that number is dwindling because a lot of them because of the work. They've done there, have become principles. But if you're ready builders ship University is a great place because when we and builder ship university you get three things. First of

all, it's a mentorship, not a training program. So in builders ship University I am mentoring you on how to become a builder and taking you step by step through the process. The second thing you get is community because you're with other builders and we have something called office hours and we get together every single week and people just come and they talk about the challenges they're facing and they're with the tribe of other. Elders who are supporting them and building them up and sharing resources and you know like we have somebody recently say this is my professional church. I come here to get made hold hold again. So when you're ready, builder shipuniversity.com is a great place to come to join the next cohort and inside of bullshit university. And I mentor you through the entire process of becoming a builder.

Speaker 2 :

And i've listened to the podcast a couple times, and so I do recommend it for people. I think you're I love how you focus on a specific topic each episode. And because you have a framework, there's consistency in the message. So I do recommend that to people.

Speaker 1 :

Thank you yeah well, thanks for joining us.

Speaker 1 :

Thanks for having me.

Speaker 1 :

All right, if you enjoy today's podcast, please subscribe and rate the podcast. I'm always trying to improve the show, and you can reach me by email at frederick busky dot com. If there's more that you if you like more of our content tailored towards the needs of assistant principals, you can go to my. website@frederickbusky.com that wraps up today's show. I'm Frederick Buskey, and I hope you'll join me next time for the Assistant Principal podcast cheers.