



Assistant Principal *Ex*celeration

Show Notes, Episode 26: Courage with Mary Hemphill

About this show:

Are you living your leadership journey courageously? Before Dr. Mary Hemphill became the Director of Academic Standards for the North Carolina Department of education she was a passionate and innovative principal. Before that, she was an assistant principal with the courage to stand up for her convictions. The assistant principalship is loaded with values conflicts. How do you stay true to your values amidst complex power dynamics and competing interests? Mary helps us figure it all out in this week's episode.

Notable Quotes

Dr. Mary Hemphill

"Being blessed enough to serve low-socioeconomic communities, affluent communities, rural communities, and urban communities has been amazing"

"I am absolutely celebrating the evolution of education, and not the revolution, because, you know, at the end of a revolution, you lose people... so I am absolutely celebrating evolution right now and that fact that there are some fantastic educational leaders who are ready to lead the charge"

"Whenever you put a good person in a bad system, the system will always win"

"When you are an Assistant Principal and particularly when you become a Principal, you have to decide before you sign your contract, you have to decide before you interview, what hill you do you want to die on, what do you want to fight for, because when you are in a the moment with a parent, or a board member, or a superintendent, that is not the time to make those decisions"

"Every great educator knows that moment when they just have to ask yourself 'am in a position to just adopt a child?' today is the day I need to make that decision"

"My values for me were that I will always be a voice for the voiceless, which means I will not allow another human being to be taken advantage of if there is access and resources that I can bring in to help that human being"

"Those are the tough days that you don't have a methods course on, and you don't have an evaluative course on, and you really have to dig inside yourself and say 'what matters right now, in this situation, with this little person'"



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“For me, this wasn’t about a choice of whether or not to write that child up, for me, this was a culture choice. I was not brought into that school to be a disciplinarian, I was not brought in to do busses, and I was not brought in to do books. I was brought in to help with the culture, and the only way to turn the culture around is when the adults are emulating and modeling for students the type of behavior we want to see, from amazing local and global citizens.”

“If I show you disrespect, then I get upset with you for showing me the skill that you have imparted onto me, that is coercive power there”

“Is sacrificing this one conversation with this one adult going to save 80 children and the rest of the staff? Because if that is the case, then I am willing to go to bat for that, because I have my data in order, I have good exemplars, but I also have a solution that is going to help the school overall”

“**Checklists will never grow teachers; it is conversations that grow teachers.** And the other piece of that is really understanding and trying to figure out how to leverage those conversations in a way that removes excuses, because angry, hurt educators are always going to try to find and excuse for why they are the way they are”

“We talk with leaders a lot of times about how to literally sit in the silence or sit in the space where the student ‘doesn’t know’. That requires you to not live and take up residence in your office. Because when that child says ‘I don’t know’ that is your greatest opportunity to say ‘let me tell you something, I want to celebrate you’ ... So, it’s not that I don’t know, maybe you haven’t been celebrated in this area.”

“When we model productive failure, we reposition adults and we reposition students to see their reality in terms of the ways they contribute to the community. That is what students are seeking. They’re seeking their place, they’re seeking their tribe, they’re seeking their group, they’re seeking those people who are like-minded to them, and adults are the same way.”

“Being courageous means asking the questions in a productive way”

“They are modeling what they are seeing, and if they are seeing it at home, that is one thing, but the only things we can control are what is happening in terms of the interactions in this building, so let’s make sure we shore that up before we say it is a student issue”

“You have to put in the protocol if you are going to protect peoples’ time and you have to show them what that looks like and sounds like so that they can respond accordingly.”



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I never had a parent who argued with ‘the principal or the teacher is where the children are and working on making things better for children’. I have never had a parent buck me on that, but you have to set up those protocols to protect that time”

Frederick

“The assistant principalship is loaded with values conflicts. How do you stay true to your values amidst complex power dynamics and competing interests?”

“The worst thing as a new AP, as an aspiring AP, is to jump into a situation that is toxic. Because its hard already and it isn’t the busy stuff, it is your spirit and the values that are going to suffer”

“You can’t coach 3, let alone 30 teachers at a time and there is a lot of stuff that you have to let go of. You can’t get to that right now. But you have to identify the one [teacher], and I do think, so many times, the one is the one is the one that is hurting kids and the one is where it is just an intolerable situation, not just for the kids, but for that person. Because if I am a teacher and I am disrespecting kids every day, then I am hating my job”

Paraphrase of five key points about a teacher who is struggling and maybe even harming kids:

1. When a teacher is hammering kids, it is a sign that they are hurt, angry, or afraid. A hammer won’t help them. Understanding this reframes how we *support* struggling teachers.
2. Asking struggling teachers to observe a teacher that is doing those things well bypasses the struggling teacher’s ability to blame kids.
3. Covering a class so that teacher can go observe immediately puts us in the role of supporting that teacher, not attacking them.
4. Having the teacher go observe and bring back positive ideas gives the teacher agency. This is especially powerful for teachers who may have had their agency stripped away.
5. Having a teacher bring back positive ideas from an observation is great accountability. There is no escape from that conversation.

“We have a moral obligation, not just to take care of those kids, but to take care of those teachers”

“Every great principal that I have ever had a conversation with has said things that indicated their sense of urgency for instructional time. The best principals are really laser focused on instructional time”

“Are you as an Assistant Principal communicating consistently with kids, with parents, and with your teachers, that urgency and the critical importance of every minute of instructional time”

Links:

<https://www.frederickbuskey.com/apex-members-page.html>



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Mary's website: <https://www.bealimitlessleader.com/about>

The One Minute Meeting: <https://www.amazon.com/One-Minute-Meeting-Creating-Student-Stakeholders/dp/1516545559>

Mary's email: Mary@thelimitlesslady.com

My email: frederick@frederickbuskey.com

The Assistant Principal Podcast website: <https://www.frederickbuskey.com/appodcast.html>

Sign up for the daily leadership email: <https://mailchi.mp/c15c68e6df32/specialedition>

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