



### Episode 3 Transcript:

#### Behind the Mask.

*In this episode I will focus on the educators behind the mask - the teachers, leaders, and staff that have not only come to work, but those that have returned with an overwhelming commitment to making the reopening of America's schools a story to be retold.*

*Specifically, we will explore the stress and anxiety teachers are feeling as they navigate teaching during a pandemic. And how they have truly stepped up in BIG ways to deliver amazing learning experiences, no matter what the model f2f, remote, hybrid, or virtual.*

Engineers make bridges

Artists make paintings

Scientists make rockets.

Educators make them all . . . even from a distance.

Educators, for the most part, are “glass half full” people. They seek out the positive in any situation. They rise to the occasion when presented a difficult task. They seek out solutions to unthinkable problems. They are always working behind the scenes, typically obscene hours, to provide for their students. What people may not know is how hard teachers have had to work at staying positive during the pandemic. It has been challenging with all of the unknowns, the minute-to-minute changes, questioning which decision is the right decision, and simply concerns for the wellness of educators and students.

The White House has designated teachers as essential workers. In a CNN article posted on my website with this episode, the Department of Homeland Security guidance now states teachers are “critical infrastructure workers”. Who else is

in that category you ask? Doctors and law enforcement. The guidance states that as an essential worker you can continue to work even after exposure to a confirmed case of COVID-19, provided you remain asymptomatic. And yet, prior to the designation, teachers were ready to mask up with bleach wipes, Lysol, and antibacterial soap in hand to meet their new students and create amazing learning experiences. We have always known that educators are essential to our society as a whole, but did we have to have a designation that causes undue stress and strain on the educators that are showing up and smiling behind the mask?

We worked hard before, but this is a whole new level of hard work. Last week one of my teacher friends posted a picture of herself crashed on her couch and it was captioned Thursday night tired on Tuesday. Similarly, teachers who are retooling themselves to teach remotely or in a hybrid model are spending hours rethinking their lesson design and delivery using tech. For many, just learning the new tech is time consuming. Veteran teachers are reporting feeling like a first year teacher all over again and new teachers were never taught methodology for pandemic teaching.

I saw a great teacher t-shirt that had a picture of an iceberg on it. It stated, Teachers are like icebergs. At any one time you are only seeing about 1/10 of what they are actually doing. I have been in many schools and classrooms since our reopening as part of my work coaching leaders. I have always been in awe of teachers, but this takes my respect for fellow professional educators to a whole new level. What is so incredible, is that the halls and classrooms are filled with joy. Students are happy to be back and teachers are welcoming them with warm smiles (behind their masks) and excitement you can see in their eyes. No matter the concerns teachers hold personally, they have created classroom cultures, whether online or face-to-face, that make students know they are loved and that we are going to get through this TOGETHER.

Pernille Ripp's *Dear Teacher* post on August 28th was gut-wrenching to read and yet, as a teacher, comforting to know you are not alone. Pernille, an accomplished teacher, author, and speaker, put in words what every teacher was feeling. She described the endless hours and insane amount of work that had to be learned, or unlearned in some cases. She then ends with a plea to all teachers to reclaim their sanity and encourages everyone to set boundaries. This is something I have been preaching since March when our world was turned upside down after school closures. Now, more than ever, with schools reopened, we have to train for the marathon and not just the race. Pernille shares how she is going to rest more and rely on what she knows while not pressuring herself for perfection. I appreciate that she allowed herself to be vulnerable and wrote what many were thinking.

Allow yourself to be vulnerable. Brene Brown, a scholar who has studied and written about vulnerability, describes vulnerability as showing up. It is when we know we can't fix something, but we show up, and aligned to our values, we work hard to make things right. We take risks, and allow ourselves to make mistakes. On an episode of Soul Sunday with Oprah Winfrey, Brown stated, "You can't get to courage without walking through vulnerability". This was mentioned in her discussion of her book, *Daring Greatly*, and she emphasized that being vulnerable is not a sign of weakness. Actually, to dare greatly is exactly what our teachers are doing each and every day. They are showing up, they are taking risks, they are learning, doing, and adjusting based on errors made along the way. This reminds me of her reference to Theodore Roosevelt's famous speech from 1910 now known as The Man in The Arena where he stated,

*"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who*

*at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."*

Teachers and Leaders are daring greatly each and every day.

One of Angela Watson's latest posts titled, *When doing your best just isn't good enough*, was tough as well. She acknowledged that what we are doing now will not be enough for some students. That we are working hard and may not see the results we are expecting. Ouch. This is hard to hear, but we must recognize that we are crisis teaching. And while teachers have stepped up in amazing ways, we have to look at what we can do not pre-Covid and not what we can't do because things are not normal. She boldly asks, "where do we want to be on the other side of this pandemic?" I love this question and posed one similar in my last podcast. And hoping that before we return to "normal" that we reflect on what we truly want that normal to be. I think that beyond the grit and resilience Educators have shown, there have also been many aha moments. In doing things differently we have learned what may be possible. And we cannot beat ourselves up seeking perfection. That will not be possible.

She ended her post with this:

*We're all experiencing various levels of collective grief right now. Grief is different for everyone and everybody experiences ups and downs. If that's how you're feeling as the school year begins, know that you are not alone in experiencing those mixed emotions. Your kids' learning gains over the next few weeks are probably not going to be an accurate measure of your abilities or theirs. Their learning (or lack thereof) is NOT reflective of your worth, or theirs. Look back on this spring and these first weeks of school as a test of resilience and fortitude that you have passed. You did it. This is a time for going inward — to stop looking for validation from outside sources, to stop seeking out others' approval — and make peace within ourselves".*

Eric Sheninger's recent post, *Empathetic Remote and Hybrid Learning*, hits the nail on the head for how we should move forward in our work. He highlights six areas to create an empathetic teaching and learning culture and I want to point out two of them as it relates to this episode - grace and compassion. Grace is emphasizing relationships and recognizing that some students and staff may need second chances, more time, forgiveness, and understanding. Continually asking each other - Are you ok? Is there anything you need? Are you able to manage the workload? And compassion relates to actions that relieve suffering. This pandemic has rocked our world in ways we may not fully realize for many years to come. This is why social emotional learning for both adults and the students we serve is so vital. Take the actions needed to support your colleagues, students, and entire community. Let's relish in the human side of the work we do. None of us went into education for the curriculum and assessments. We went into education because it is a people business. Eric shared a quote from Henri Nouwen in his post that states, "Compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into the places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion, and anguish. Compassion challenges us to us cry with those in misery, to mourn with those who are lonely, to weep with those in tears. Compassion requires us to be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable, and powerless with the powerless. Compassion means full immersion in the condition of being human."

It is my hope that we don't lose our amazing Educators during this time. But instead, we celebrate the professionals they are. Yes, they are essential workers. They are essential to each student they teach, to the school community they work in, and to our collective future.

Although masked, educators have smiles on their faces that can only be seen through their eyes. Let us remember that "We Rise By Lifting Others." Let's lift each other up during these trying times and know that grace and compassion are key elements to our success. I firmly believe we will come out better on the other side of this pandemic with

new and innovative learning models. We just have to support each other in the interim and be relentless in our commitment to students.

Thank you for listening, and thank you for all you do!

**References:**

*White House Formally Declaring Teachers Essential Workers.* Westwood, Sarah. CNN. August 21, 2020. Click [HERE](#)

*Dear Teacher.* Ripp, Pernille. August 28, 2020. Click [HERE](#)

Man in the Arena Speech (full text). Roosevelt, Theodore. The Theodore Roosevelt Center at Dickinson State University. Click [HERE](#)

*When doing your best just isn't good enough . . .* Watson, Angela. The Cornerstone for Teachers. September 6, 2020. Click [HERE](#)

*Empathetic Remote and Hybrid Learning.* Sheninger, Eric. A Principal's Reflections Blog. September 13, 2020 Click [HERE](#)