

UFYB 82: Generating Positive Emotion



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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Welcome to *Unf*ck Your Brain*, the only podcast that teaches you how to use psychology, feminism, and coaching, to rewire your brain and get what you want in life. And now here's your host, Harvard law school grad, feminist rockstar, and master coach, Kara Loewentheil.

Hello my chickens. How are you all? Are you enjoying spring like chickens everywhere? I actually think if you listen very closely, you might be able to hear outside my window - not chickens, I live in Manhattan. They have chickens in Brooklyn, not Manhattan. But there are some kind of chattering birds on the fire escape making noise. My cat is very interested.

So, I hope you're good. I am feeling great today and I will tell you why. Because I decided to feel great on purpose. Did you know that that is a thing? It is. Thought work is not just about trying to feel less bad. I think that's what brings a lot of us to thought work is we feel terrible and we want to feel a little bit better.

But thought work is also about creating positive emotions that we want to feel on purpose. All of our actions flow from our feelings, and our feelings are caused by our thoughts, so in order to create positive results in our lives, we need to generate the positive emotion that will fuel the actions that would lead to that result.

And there are a couple of ways to do this and that's what I want to talk to you about today. The simplest is just to focus on the connection between thoughts and feelings. So, most of us don't decide on purpose how we want to feel during the day. We go into the day and we're like, well, I guess I'll see what happens to me.

Before thought work, we were like, well, who knows what will happen? Feelings will just happen to me. And then after we even know about thought work, we often still are sort of like, well, I'll see what the day throws at me and then I'll manage my mind about it. So it's like we know that our

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feelings don't have to happen to us, that we aren't powerless, but we still are sort of waiting to see what happens and then thinking we'll manage our minds.

That's different from deciding on purpose to create a positive emotion that you want to feel, and that's what I want to invite you to do in this episode. And this episode is going to be on the shorter side because on some level it's quite simple but it's also really revolutionary if you practice it.

So that's what I want you to think about is creating a positive emotion on purpose. So the idea that you could get up in the morning and just decide this is how I'm going to feel today. Like, I'm going to feel motivated today, I'm going to feel inspired today, I'm going to feel grateful today, I'm going to feel peaceful today. Whatever it is that you can decide on purpose ahead of time how you want to feel and not just when there's a stressful situation coming up.

Of course, it's always our thoughts, not the situation, but you know what I mean. Not just like, preparing for something where you imagine your brain will create negative emotion and then you want to be ready to counter it. That's what most of us do, even after we know about thought work. But what if you just decided that rather than prepare for the worst or see what the day throws at you, that you were going to on purpose create positive emotion?

That's what I want you to think about doing. So let's say you picked the emotion that you wanted to feel and it was grateful. Real gratitude. Not pretend I think I should feel grateful. We don't do that. Real gratitude. Thoughts create emotions. So you would need to decide what to think throughout the day, what to look for in order to feel grateful.

So what if you decide to practice thinking, "I have a lot to be grateful for." Now, before we are off to the races, you got to check in with your body first.

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See if that thought creates the feeling that you want. Sometimes thoughts sound nice and they sound like they would create the emotion you want, like on paper, but they don't actually create that in your body.

It's just like if you've ever met someone who on paper seemed like they should be a great friend or a great romantic partner for you, but then you weren't attracted to them, you weren't interested in them, didn't really move you. Or like a book where it has all the elements of books you like but then you start reading it and you just meh.

So you have to make sure the thought actually creates a feeling in your body for you. So you check it. If it feels good to think, "I have a lot to be grateful for," if that feels nice in your body like warm, or expansive, or calm, or peaceful, or happy, whatever it is, then you would practice that thought on purpose all day long.

And what's beautiful about this is that your brain will start to look for things to be grateful for, if that's the thought you choose. If you commit to generating the positive emotion of gratitude all day for yourself, your brain will start looking for evidence to feed that. Your brain is - one of my students said recently, it's not a truth-determining machine, it's an evidence-finding machine.

So your brain will start looking for evidence for this thought. Your brain likes to have a job, it likes to spot patterns. And so when you give it a thought to create on purpose and an emotion to create on purpose, it will do that. So what I really like about this exercise is that there are ways in which this is a lot easier than changing a negative thought to a positive one.

So most of us come to thought work because we have negative thoughts and then we're trying to change those to positive. When you are trying to change a negative thought to a positive thought, the negative thought is already there and the neural pathway is already there. And so it's like,

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you're not starting from neutral. You're starting from negative and then we got to get to neutral and then we can get to positive.

It's like we have to spend some energy dealing with the negative thought that's already there. But when you set out to create a positive emotion from scratch, you're not responding directly to a negative thought. You're just coming up with a positive emotion you want to generate. It's like you're starting with a clean slate.

You don't have to deal with the inertia of the old negative thought because you're not replacing a specific thought. You're not trying to counter a particular problem thought. You're just starting from zero to create a negative emotion.

So it's almost like just starting from neutral. So it saves us all that work of getting from negative to neutral, so it can be just really good practice for how different thoughts can create different feelings and can be a little bit easier to access than when you are trying to change an existing negative thought.

You can do this with any positive emotion. You could decide that you want to feel friendly and then you would go through your day thinking about what you could think to feel friendly and looking for opportunities to practice that thought. Or you could decide you want to feel love and you could pick one or a few particular people to focus on that or you could think that you just want to feel love for the whole world, and then you would go through your day looking for things to love and for reasons to love the people around you.

Or let's say you want to feel motivated and you decide in the morning that's the feeling you want to create today, and then you spend your day looking for opportunities to be motivated and thoughts you can think to create motivation. So that's one way to do it. You just decide what emotion you

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want to pick, and for those of your perfectionist chicken brains that are now like, but what's the right one? What would be the better one? It doesn't matter at all.

This is like getting a new car and learning like, well, how does it drive in the city, how does it drive in the country, how does it drive in the rain? You just pick any positive emotion that you think you might want to feel and work on generating it, and there's no right or wrong or better or worse. You just experience that, see what it's like. You can try another one the next day.

So that's one way to do it. You just decide what the feeling is and go from there and you just pick that feeling based on what seems interesting or fun or challenging or different for you. The second thing you can do is try to work backwards from a result that you want to create in your life.

So I have taught about this on the podcast before in terms of what thought you need to think to create a result. We talk about that a lot. Your thoughts will create your results. And of course, to create any emotion, you are coming up with a thought. The thought creates the feeling.

So if we focus on creating an emotion, we are going to be working on our thoughts. But it's a little bit different to ask yourself what do I want to feel instead of what do I want to believe. Because when we ask ourselves what do I want to believe, we're sort of up in our heads and it's all kind of theoretical and this is how I see a lot of people end up trying to practice thoughts that they don't actually believe or that don't actually feel good to them just because it sounds good, like looks good on paper.

But if you ask yourself what do I want to feel, you're really getting into your body to really summon up the physical sensations and emotion that you need to create, to fuel your action. So I think it really centers you in your body and makes sure that the thoughts that you're picking actually produce the feelings you want.

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So let's say the result you want is a \$100,000 coaching business. Rather than ask yourself what you want to believe, like I am open to believing I can have a \$100,000 coaching business, that's kind of what we would come up with. You can instead ask yourself what you want to feel.

Do you want to feel motivated? Do you want to feel excited? Do you want to feel on fire with purpose? Whatever it is, you figure out what that feeling that you want is. And then you can work backwards and see what you would need to believe to create that emotion and practice creating it all day.

So again, we're talking about how to create positive emotion through the day. So you wouldn't just work on it for the few minutes that you're working on or thinking about your business. Instead, you would focus on creating and generating that positive emotion throughout the day.

So it's a subtle tweak, but focusing on the positive feeling you want to generate rather than the thought you want to believe will help you get more into the embodied experience of the emotion and will help you distinguish between thoughts that actually work to produce it and thoughts that just sound good or that you think you should believe or you wish you could believe.

It's really a great way of taking responsibility for how you feel during the day and taking on your day proactively, using thought work to proactively produce positive emotion and positive results, rather than just using it to deal with it when your brain starts to try to kill you. Proactive, not reactive is another way to talk about that.

And if you think that this sounds like fun but you want some help with it, we're going to be working on it this week in The Clutch. So if you're listening to this podcast the day it comes out, which is Thursday, May 23rd, and you sign up tonight for The Clutch, you'll get a workbook to help you

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through this exercise tomorrow, because on Fridays we send out the podcast bonus pack to all Clutch members.

That's where you get the workbook for the podcast for the week and you get a bonus listener Q&A podcast every week. That all goes out on Fridays. So if you sign up today, you will get tomorrow's, which will give you a workbook to help you with this process of generating positive emotion, deciding on purpose how you want to feel throughout the day.

This is a great month in The Clutch. We're doing positive feelings this week, next week we're working on thought ladders, and the webinar and the live coaching call this month are all about what we talked about on the podcast a couple of weeks ago about how to cultivate curiosity instead of judgment for yourself and how to tolerate negative emotion.

So if that podcast was really powerful for you and you know you need some help with that, this is a great month to join The Clutch. It's www.unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch. And of course, if you're listening to this after the 23rd, you should come sign up anyway because whatever month it is, we are digging deep into podcast topics, we are learning how to coach ourselves, we're blowing our own minds over there. It's so great. www.unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch. I'll talk to you all next week.

Thanks for tuning in. If you want to start building your confidence right away, you can download a free confidence cheat sheet at www.karaloewentheil.com/podcastconfidence.