

UFYB 96: Beginner's Mind



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. It is the dog days of summer here in New York. It's the time of year that I always fantasize about moving to some perfect weather place where it's always 70 degrees and sunny and it never rains but there's no drought magically, which is actually, now that I'm talking about it, I think kind of how we think about life. We think that there's some perfect life where we can just have the good and not the bad.

We do this with our jobs, with our partners and with our family, and even with ourselves. We want to keep what we think is good but get rid of what we think is bad. And what we don't realize is that it's like an ecosystem. What do you get if there's only sun and no rain? That's a desert.

Now, there's nothing wrong with being a desert. Deserts are beautiful and wonderful, but a desert is just one kind of experience and it has its own limitations, just like a rainforest does. You can't have lush plants and no rain. You can't have all sun but no sunburn. Nature's ecosystems work together. There's the positive and the negative, which are just thoughts we have. It's the ying and the yang, the black and the white.

And that's how I like to think of other people and myself as well, that we're all part of a whole. So you can't have your partner's creativity without their absent-mindedness. You can't have your best friend's sense of humor without her sarcasm. You can't have those adventures with your sibling without them also spontaneously changing plans.

A person, a climate, it's an ecosystem that all goes together. If you choose to love it that way, it feels so much better, I think. And that's true for yourself also. Even if there's something that you want to change about your

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thought patterns or actions, how can you love it the way it is now as part of your full self?

So maybe you take things too personally, but you also have a really lively imagination. Maybe you look for the worst outcome too much, but you're also really good at planning things. You might decide to shift one of those things, but can you love them as part of you even while you shift them?

That actually is not the main point of the episode and doesn't actually even have to do with it but as soon as I started complaining about the weather, that's what came to me so I thought I should share. And I think that's actually what happens when managing your mind becomes a way of life. It's actually hard for me to complain now because my brain just starts to coach itself on its own, sometimes against my will.

Sometimes I'm like, I want to complain and my brain is like, okay, but you could just think this instead. And that is not natural. That is the result of working on this skill for years. So anyway, today I'm going to teach you about beginner's mind, and if you think you already know what that is, you should still listen. And if you think you're not a beginner, you definitely need to listen because it's actually for you.

But also, I need to remind you and myself, stick around at the end of the episode because I have a giveaway. A free thing that I'm giving away that you might want. I like giving presents. I like giving presents to people and now I like giving presents to podcast listeners. I actually have a couple of different giveaways this fall that are super fun. But they're all time limited so make sure that you listen to the end of the episode in case you want what I'm giving away, other than this genius content that you're already getting.

Okay, let's get it together, Kara. So let me tell you about beginner's mind and why it's so important. So this is a concept that I first learned in yoga, which is the idea of always coming to the mat with a beginner's mind. Now,

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the way I'm going to use this, if I say anything that you don't think is what beginner's mind means in yoga, I am sure you're right. This is a concept that I am borrowing and using in the way that I think is most useful for thought work.

So beginner's mind, as humans, we always want to be advanced, I think. So in your yoga practice like anything else, you can get distracted by trying to achieve and advance. So you start focusing on what advanced posture you can get into and how far you can push yourself, and what new fancy thing you can do.

Obviously, I am all about growth and evolution. I am all about accomplishing new things to blow your own mind. That is my jam. There is nothing wrong with wanting to improve your skills and advance your abilities, and get better at doing things and accomplishing new things.

But I think what we always skip over and don't understand as humans is that the way to get good at advanced stuff is to get great at the basics. That's true in yoga and it's true in thought work, and it's true in life. If you do not have a good solid downward dog, you're not going to get into crow pose. If you don't have a good bridge pose, you're not going to get into wheel.

We don't like spending time in the basic poses. We think it's boring and we want to do the fancy stuff. But if you can't turn off your phone for 20 minutes to get some work done, you are not going to have a perfectly managed schedule right away.

The problem with the human mind is that we find the basic boring because we think we will find the advanced exciting. We're always looking for that thing down the road that's going to be perfect and exciting. We think that when we do the advanced thing, the heavens will open and angels will sing

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and our parents will finally love us the way we wanted them to. Life will be perfect forever and ever, we will ride on a unicorn into the sunset. Amen.

So we're in a rush and so we show up already bored with the basics, already thinking that we know how to do them and we don't need to pay attention to them. We have been to 10 vinyasa classes so we already know the sun salutation. We think they're just something to get through on our way to over there where we think it's better.

And I see this in thought work. So sometimes people would start *Unf*ck Your Brain*, which is my six-month coaching program that's wrapping up now but we spend the first month learning the coaching model I teach, which is called the model. It's what you learn if you work with me in any way. It's the first thing I teach you when you join The Clutch, I even teach the basics of it on the Ask Kara Anything webinars. It's fundamental.

So, point is somebody would come into *Unf*ck Your Brain* or will come into The Clutch already knowing it. They've worked on it with me before or they learned part of it somewhere else or whatever it is, and then they'll message me and say I already know the model, so what should I be doing?

That always makes me laugh, not at them of course, it's a totally understandable question because if we think if we intellectually understand a concept, then that's it. We get it, we're ready for the next thing. We think if we can name the five lines of the model, or if we can answer a quiz about each one, then we get it, we're ready to advance, we want the next thing.

But you could study the model for a lifetime and still learn new things. I learn something new every time I do a model. I learn something new every time I think about the model, every time I teach the model. If I think about the best coaches I know, the people who have the most successful businesses and are doing the deepest coaching and teaching work, which

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really go together in my experience, they are the people who are always willing to be blown away by the basics over and over.

So for instance, we teach that our thoughts create our results, those of us trained in the work that I use, that's 101. Your thoughts create your results. I was recently at – this was maybe six months ago. It was one of the ones last year. So I was at a mastermind meeting and my colleague Jody Moore said your thought line will always end up in your result line, and all of us master coaches who are like, master certified and all making a million dollars or more and we're like, wait, what? I need to write that down. What are you saying?

She was just saying the concept that we all know and teach, that I teach on the podcast, that your thoughts create the results in your life, but she said it in a slightly different way and we were so ready to think about it all over again in a whole new way. That's beginner mind.

We know these concepts, we teach them, we don't assume that we're already experts. We are showing up with beginner minds. We're excited to learn that very basic thing all over again from a new direction or in a new way. Human brains like to be right. They like to be the expert. They like to already know the answers. It's because your brain thinks that's safe.

If you already know who's dangerous and who's friendly, if you already know what berries are safe to eat or not, if you already know which animals will bite you, then you can relax. That's what your brain thinks. It doesn't actually relax but that's its premise.

So your brain likes to think it already knows the answer. And then we think well now I need something more advanced. Now, I want to be clear, there are advanced coaching tools that are super powerful. That's why I have live events for Clutch members, that's why I've done retreats, I've done advanced trainings for my clients, that's why I had a six-month in-depth

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program. There are for sure tools that level up your thought work and your life that you can't learn or use until you know the basics.

But that doesn't mean the basics are ever autopilot or not important. It doesn't mean there's ever a time where you aren't going to learn or benefit from approaching with a beginner's mind. We think we want to know everything, that we always need more information and more stuff. But I find that thought work has been a process of continual unlearning for me.

And that's beginner's mind, never assuming I already know the answer. Practicing curiosity instead of certainty. If you think you already know the answers to your thought work then you don't because if you already knew the answers, you would have different thoughts.

So many of us want to be the best in the class, we want to get 100 on the test, we want all the gold stars, we want to know all the answers ahead of time. That's not about learning. That's about ego. If you really love learning, then you don't want to already know the answers.

And that's okay, it doesn't mean anything about you as a person. It just won't help you learn either because if you already have all the answers then you're kind of fucked. Because there are things in your life and your mind you want to change but if you already know it all, then there's nothing to change.

Beginner's mind is about always showing up with curiosity. It's about learning the same concepts over and over at deeper levels. I hear from a lot of you that you listen to the podcast episodes over and over again and you learn something new every time. That's totally beginner's mind. Not just thinking oh, I know what she teaches about love, I got it. I intellectually understand the one takeaway. Listening and relearning all over again.

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The more you can cultivate beginner's mind, the deeper your learning. The basics of thought work, which I would say are non-judgmental observations and acceptance, differentiating between thoughts and reality, and creating what we want in life and purpose. Those are the projects of a lifetime.

Probably many lifetimes. This is not something you learn once and done. I always love when I see Clutch members post about how they're going back to week one. Week one in The Clutch is where I teach you how to process your emotions so they're less intense and overwhelming.

And what's so kind of adorably hilarious about this is that this is not something you learn for one week and then you're done with it. It's a process. It's a tool you're going to use for your whole life. You are always going to be having emotions and processing them is always going to be useful.

It's not like I have to go back to week one, I didn't become a master of it in seven days. It's something you're always going to be doing and learning. That's beginner's mind. The best reason to cultivate a beginner's mind is that a beginner's mind is what keeps you present with your experience. A beginner's mind is what keeps you present with the now.

When you show up to the mat for yoga practice with a beginner's mind, you don't go on autopilot until you get to the one or two advanced poses. Think about how people do that. 90% or 95% of your practice is going to be the basics. So if you show up only focused on that one or two advanced poses and are in a hurry to get there and ignoring the rest, you're missing so much opportunity to learn.

If I show up to a coaching call and I'm just focused on showing off my advanced one coaching tool I can do or coaching somebody to total resolution, which happens occasionally when you get coached live but not

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always, I'm going to miss all the amazingness of all the coaching I do along the way.

If you show up with a beginner's mind, you're present for the whole experience. You're curious and you're interested and you're attentive and you learn so much more. And the same is true for thought work. So when you tell yourself well, I know I'm upset because of my thoughts but, that's a sign you're not in beginner's mind.

That but is you trying to skip the part where you really sit with your current thoughts and observe them with curiosity. You're up in your intellectual mind where you understand the concept, but you're not actually paying attention to it. You're not actually being with your current experience. You want to get to the next tool that will help you. You think you already know the answer so this shouldn't be hard.

But here's the thing; when we're in our thoughts, we're in our thoughts. It doesn't matter how much we've done this. Doesn't matter how advanced we are. When I am stuck in my thought, I am stuck in my thought, and I probably sometimes would have an easier time doing the work if I was new to it because I wouldn't think I already knew the answer.

What you need is to observe where you are with curiosity and compassion as opposed to assuming that you already understand it and somehow it's just not true or not working or it's not clicking. When you're impatient with your own progress or you're measuring your thought work at all really, you're not in beginner's mind.

You're thinking about the past where you are worse and then the future where you should be better. Again, being proud of what you've accomplished, that's a beautiful thing. But that doesn't come from thinking you were worse and now you're better. It comes from being proud of your effort. Not the outcome. That's beginner's mind.

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And it's so powerful in other areas of your life too. Like how often do you assume you know what other people are thinking? Probably quite often, when truly you have no idea. I heard an amazing story on NPR recently. I don't think I talked about this on the podcast yet, where married couples were asked to predict each other's answers to questions.

So here's what was so amazing. They had only a slightly better than random chance of getting the answer right. So let's say it was like, we're going to ask your spouse what cookie they liked best and you're supposed to guess what cookie they would say. So married couples had only a slightly better than random chance of getting the answer right.

But they were disproportionately certain that they knew the answer. So 50/50 would be even odds, if there's two choices, 50% chance getting it right, 50% chance getting it wrong. They would have, let's say, a 54% chance of getting it right, but then they would have a 75% belief or certainty that they knew the answer.

In other words, they only knew a little bit but they were convinced that they knew a lot. They were convinced they already knew what their spouse would say and they knew the answers, even though in reality, they only knew slightly better than just random guessing.

So what if you were curious about what other people are thinking rather than believing you already know? What if you brought beginner's mind to your relationships as if they were new and you were just learning about the person? And what if you brought that to your relationship with yourself?

What if instead of believing you already know yourself and your flaws and your limits and what's possible for you, you had a beginner's mind? You were open to the possibilities, you were curious about what you could do, or you could become instead of just assuming that you already know. Beginner's mind will change everything for you.

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Okay, so time for the giveaway. I have no transition. I have no segue. Just keep up, people. Keep moving. Here's what we're doing. I have a couple of start planners that I am giving away. There's a weekly planner, there's a daily planner, and then there's a 90-day goal planner.

So the weekly and the daily are July 2019 to July 2020. It's a little bit past July but we're not going to be perfectionists about this. And then the goal planner is undated. You can use that whenever. So, if you have been meaning to try out the planning system, I talk about in episode six, this is a good time and reason to get started, and having to use a planner that you have a blank month in is going to be good for your little perfectionist selves.

So you have until September 10th 2019 to enter and then we will draw three winners. So one entry covers being entered for weekly, daily, or the 90 goal. You can't enter for only one or two of them, it's just you enter, we're going to pick.

So here's how you do it. Text your email – remember, it's the email you already use if you're already on my list, and if you're not on my list, use whatever email you want. Text it to 347-997-1784. When you get a return text prompting you for the code, the code word is planner.

So you'll get an email confirming that you've been entered and if you win, you'll be notified by email on September 11th 2019 or the 12th that week and we'll get your mailing address from you then. So fun. If you're driving and you didn't write all that down or you are international and you don't want to text, just go to unfuckyourbrain.com/96 and there will be a link on the show notes page so you can enter to register online and the instructions for the text will be there if you, for some reason want to go to that page and then text.

So text your email to 347-997-1784. Code word is planner. Go to unfuckyourbrain.com/96 if you want to just enter online and skip the texting.

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Alright my chickens, that's it for today. Practice beginner's mind this week. Talk to y'all next week.

If you're loving what you're learning in the podcast, you have got to come check out The Clutch. The Clutch is the podcast community for all things *Unf*ck Your Brain*. It's where you can get individual help applying the concepts to your own life.

It's where you can learn new coaching tools not shared on the podcast that will blow your mind even more, and it's where you can hang out and connect over all things thought work with other podcast chickens just like you and me. It's my favorite place on earth and it will change your life, I guarantee it. Come join us at www.unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch. It's unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch. I can't wait to see you there.