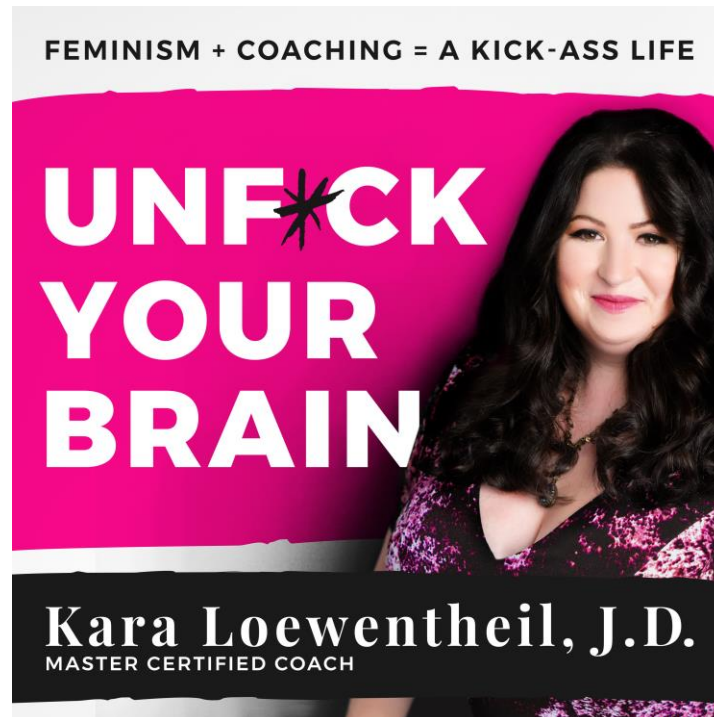


UFYB 25: How to Make Decisions



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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Welcome to Unfuck 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 here's your host, Harvard law school grad, feminist rockstar, and master coach, Kara Loewentheil.

Hello, my chickens; how are you? I am apparently living in a tropical monsoon, which I don't understand because I live in Manhattan. But there is like, flooding here today. I was woken up this morning by one of those loud buzzing alerts on my phone about flash flooding, and I just kind of feel like you should be allowed to opt out of those if you live in a sixth-floor apartment like I do. Like, I'm not flooding, don't wake me up.

Anyway, that's okay. I am still pretty jazzed about life. I am safe, I am dry, I have iced coffee. Apparently, my apartment is not flooding. Think we're going to be okay. And I am kind of still jonesing on my energy from yesterday. See, yesterday I had a few client and consultation calls and it was just one of those days that like, blew my mind.

So first I did a coaching call, and I had the gift of a really vulnerable and willing client who shared her past experience of sexual trauma with me. And she'd been carrying this heavy burden with her for years and it was really impacting her current relationships and her connection to herself too.

She was doing what a lot of survivors do I think, which is try to keep herself safe by disappearing and hiding. And you know, I was just really kind of - I don't even know what the right word is. Maybe it's like, honored, but she just really was open with me and allowed me to go deep with her quickly and we really rewrote her story about her past and about how she could feel safe now in a pretty short session. It was really powerful.

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And one of the things we talked about, which I should probably do a whole podcast about it at some point is the idea that being safe is just a feeling created by your thoughts. I've been thinking about that a lot recently about all the different ways that we kind of try to create the feeling of safety for ourselves by accumulating boyfriends or money or friends or family members or pillows, whatever it is that we think will make us feel safe.

So I'm definitely adding that to the list. I think we have to talk more about that, although that's not going to be today's topic. So I did that session with her and I think that was really amazing, and then I also did a few consultation calls with new clients and I had one in particular that just really reminded me why I do this work.

When I talk to one of you who like, has loved the podcast and resonated with everything in it and is scared about whether she can change but is really willing to be brave and try, it's just truly such a gift to be the guide on that journey. It's a funny thing because like, I remember how impossible and treacherous the journey seemed.

I remember not being sure if I would make it, if really my brain could change. I just had so much doubt and fear and confusion, and my coach was able to hold this space for me and now I do that for other people and it's just such a funny contrast because like, I'm not worried at all. Like, I know that this work works. I know that my clients are going to get where they want to go, I know they're going to make it to the other side, they're going to make it up the mountain, they're going to see the change. Their life is going to be so much better on the other side.

And they're so tortured about it and they're so worried and I'm not laughing at them or you. I know a lot of my clients listen to the podcast. I love being there with you but it is just such a funny thing, like I wish I could - sometimes I just wish I could like, connect our brains for a minute and be like, "I just want you to see what I see. Like, the certainty I have that you

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are going to be able to think differently and you're going to feel better, and your life is going to be so different, you're just not even going to recognize the person you are now." Like, I wish I could just let you see what I see when you're so in it and so in the suffering and the pain and the confusion, the doubt, and the fear.

So anyway, I just - it is such a kind of gift to be the guide on that journey and on this consultation call yesterday, the client and I were - we were like, vibing so hard that I started developing weird psychic powers, and like I guessed a couple of totally random things about her life without meaning to. So I would just be riffing and use something random as an example of what might happen to a person and she would be like, "Oh my god, that happened to me yesterday."

It was really crazy. Like, you know, you guys know I am not a very woo-woo chicken, personally. I am pretty analytical and empirical, but there is something that happens when the vibe is right that it just flows. That always happens to me with clients who have like, listened to the podcast and immediately felt like I was in their brain, and that everything I said described what was going on for them.

No offence, but if you listen to this occasionally and you're like, "Whatever, some of this is okay, this lady seems pretty weird," like, then probably we're not soul mates, right? Like, you don't want to be my soul mate either and that's fine. I'm glad you listen occasionally and you're hearing this. I hope it's helpful.

But if you're one of those people who listen to the podcast and like, kind of fell weirdly in love with it when you found it, like, that is a sign from the universe to you telling you that this kind of thought work is what you need to change your life. Or if you don't believe in signs from the universe, it's a sign from the non-lizard part of you that desperately wants you to give it some support and tools so it can shush that lizard up.

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So I'm saying all of that to kind of let you know that when you're trying to apply these tools and you're trying to learn how to manage your mind and you're thinking to yourself like, "Does this even work? Like, how do I know?" Truly, if you feel called to it, it's the right tool for you.

That's as woo-woo as I get, but I really believe that's true. It's just like you might have a physical craving. Like, if you are craving meat, you might need iron in your diet, right? If you find this work and you're just like, "What the fuck? This is blowing my mind, how did I not know this, I need to learn everything about this immediately," this work is for you.

Like, people who don't resonate with this work don't respond that way. So you can have some faith in that. It's hard to trust yourself when you don't know how to manage your mind, and most of you don't know how to trust yourselves, but I'm telling you, you can trust that. And if you have that feeling about through work, about the way that I teach thought work, then it's the right work for you.

And when your brain and your lizard brain wants to be like, kind of throwing confusion and doubt at you and trying to convince you to like, not do thought work and stay mad at other people and blaming them, it's trying to tell you that maybe it doesn't work or maybe your brain is broken or maybe you're the one person who can't change, if you feel that pulse of this work, then this work is for you.

And I don't think it's mystical, I don't think it's like manifestation, I just think, you know, we recognize what we need and if it like, clicks with you, then it's automatically going to work better for you because you trust it and it make sense to you. Alright, enough mysticism, that was a long introduction. I just had a lot to say from my heart and mystical little chicken soul to you guys today.

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So we're not going to talk about universal vibes. Some of you are like, "Oh my god, if she starts talking about chakras I'm getting the fuck out of here." Don't worry, I'm not going to talk about chakras. I am going to talk about Greek myth today. You know, totally normal, but for a reason.

So I got some emails from some of you after last week's episode that you wanted more teaching on how to actually make a decision. So you understand confusion wasn't real, it isn't real. I'm having a little tense problem today. But so I got these emails saying like, "Yeah, I get it. Confusion isn't real, I understand it's a lie, but I still don't understand how I'm supposed to make the decision. Like, I'm on board that I should just make a decision, but how?"

So that's what we're going to talk about today and it starts with Odysseus, obviously. Where else would it start? So how many of you know the story of Odysseus? My parents are going to be so thrilled that my Ivy league education is finally coming to bear on my life coach career.

So the Odyssey is a Greek epic poem, and in the poem, Odysseus is traveling all around the world on adventures, you know, he's just like the Jack Kerouac of his time, while his wife is sitting at home trying to hold off rapacious suitors. But that's like, another whole issue. There's some interesting feminist retellings of the Odyssey.

Anyway, so one - we're going with the traditional telling right now. So at one point in his journey, Odysseus goes through a straight, it's like a passageway kind of on the sea, where there are sirens. So sirens are mythical creatures who lure men to jump off their boats by singing these irresistible seductive siren songs.

If you've ever heard the phrase the siren song of whatever, this is where it comes from. They are these mythical creatures who sing these intoxicating songs that make men go crazy, and the men jump off the ships to try to find

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the sirens, and you know, do whatever with them, and then they die. They jump off the boats and they get bashed on the rocky shores of the cliffs by the sea and they drown.

So Odysseus has a novel solution to this problem. He wants to hear the siren song, but he doesn't want to die. So he has his men plug their ears with bee's wax so they won't hear the song, they won't be tempted, and he tells his men to tie him to the mast of his ship. And he tells them, "Don't untie me no matter what he says or does," - no matter what I guess he says to them, what I say or do, but don't untie me.

Like, as soon as I hear the song, I'm going to lose my shit, I'm going to tell you to untie me, I'm going to threaten to kill you when this is over, I'm going to beg you, I'm going to say a million different things, don't untie me no matter what I say or do until we're out of there. Right?

So talk about commitment. So why am I telling you this story? Because I think the story of the sirens is the perfect analogy for how we should approach making decision in our lives. So Odysseus makes a decision. He wants to try something new and brave that no one else has done before. And he wants to experience something amazing and live to tell the tale when no one else does.

But he knows that he's going to experience regret about his decision. He knows he's going to want to change his mind. He knows he's going to hear voices that tell him to give up. He's going to hear voices that say like, "Don't stay on the mast, don't stay on the ship, come over here, hang out with us. Let's have a lot of sex," like, whatever the sires are saying, right?

In our day it would be like, Facebook and Netflix. So he has himself tied to the mast. He commits so strongly that giving up is not even an option. He creates a situation in which he cannot give into regret. He cannot change

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his mind. He cannot follow the voices he hears that are trying to draw him off his path.

This is not how most of us make decisions, right? In fact, most of you, most of us go out of our way to not make decisions at all. I find my clients get decision paralysis about like, whether to try and make partner or where to go for a haircut. I used to too, and I still do a little bit. I can hear the ghost of that voice. I no longer let it slow me down, but when I have two choices for something, I can hear the ghost of that part of my brain freaking out.

So last week we talked about confusion and I'm talking about decision making this week because the two concepts go together. The reason that you are unable to make decisions about the future, the reason you have commitment issues, the reason that you go back and forth mentally between different options forever is that you are afraid.

It's not because there are good arguments on either side. It's not because you're confused. We covered that part last week, right? It's because you are afraid. You think you're afraid because you might make the wrong decision. That's why you think you're afraid.

But that's not true. You are afraid that in the future you might have the thought, "I made the wrong decision." And then you will feel regret. That's it. You're afraid that in the future, you may have a thought or a feeling you don't like. You're afraid of your unmanaged mind.

And I talked about this on last week's podcast, right? I'm just giving a kind of brief review of this part in case some of you are skipping around, which is actually totally fine. But if you like this podcast and you didn't listen to last week on confusion, you should go listen to last week on confusion too.

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You are afraid that you will have the thought in the future that you made the wrong decision. Inability to make a decision stems from believing that you won't be able to manage your mind in the future. All of you are afraid of what you'll think and feel.

Now, some of you are saying, "No, I'm afraid I won't be able to pay my mortgage, that shit is real." No, incorrect. Your mortgage does exist, yes, I agree. But not being able to pay your mortgage, meaning not having the money in your bank account to pay the amount of your mortgage is just a circumstance. In fact, even the phrase, "Not able to pay my mortgage," is a subjective interpretation.

If you don't have the money in your bank account at any given moment, does that mean you really can't pay it? What if you borrow money? What if you get a loan? What if you cut back elsewhere? What if you get a roommate?

You see how the way you phrase what you think are true things actually impacts the emotional weight they have. But regardless, like, I'm going to give it to you in this hypothetical conversation as a fact that there could be a situation where you can't pay your mortgage. So what? That is not a thing that has to cause any particular thought or emotion.

What you are really afraid of is what you will think and feel about that. You're scared that you'll think, "I screwed up, I made a mistake. I don't have my shit together. Everyone will know I'm incapable of managing my money. I made the wrong decision, I let my family down. I'm a failure." And so you're afraid that you'll feel guilt and shame.

That's what you're afraid of. When you're not making a decision, it's because you're trying to predict what decision will ensure that you avoid feeling fear, shame, or guilt in the future, which is also hilarious because you're experiencing those feelings now just by imagining them in the future.

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Your brain doesn't know the difference between having a feeling now and imagining having a feeling in the future. It's all the same. So you're already feeling those things.

This is a futile exercise because you can't predict what an unmanaged brain will do. Look at your brain right now. You probably think that you feel guilt and shame and anxiety because of wrong decisions you made in the past. But that is a lie your brain tells you.

Those feelings are not caused by those decisions. Much less by them being the wrong decision. Those feelings are caused by your thoughts, and you would be having them now no matter what decisions you made in the past because your brain is used to thinking self-critical thoughts about regret and mistakes.

Doesn't matter what you decide. They have nothing to do with reality. You think now, "Oh, if I went back and made that other decision I'd feel totally different now." You would not because your brain has the pattern of thinking thoughts that create regret and anxiety and self-doubt and guilt and shame. Your brain will think those in any situation we put it in. It has nothing to do with which choice you made.

And if you don't learn to manage your mind, it doesn't matter what decision you make now. You'll still have those feelings in the future because you'll still be thinking those thoughts. And then your brain will blame your decisions for them, when really, it's your brain's fault.

You know those people who are kind of always casting blame on others, that's what your brain is like. Your brain is like, "Well, I'm not the problem." Your brain blames what you did, what you ate, how you look, what you said, the decisions you made, it blames all these other things for your feelings. Anything except for its own flawed through processes, which are what truly create the problem.

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Your brain is what creates the problem, but your brain is like, "Nah, that ain't me. That must be you or those other people's. Anybody else is responsible for this, not me." So here are my favorite set of questions to ask myself when I'm trying to make a decision.

If I knew that I could feel however I wanted, what would I choose? If I knew I was not going to feel anxiety, guilt, shame, or regret, which option would I prefer? If I knew I could feel proud of myself and happy and confident whichever decision I made, which would I choose? If I knew it didn't really matter which I chose, that it wouldn't impact my feelings or wellbeing, which one sounds more fun?

The truth is that under all the fear and anxiety, you do know what you want, but you can't get to it until you clear all that out. I work on this a lot with my clients in *Unfuck Your Brain*. They start the program having no idea what they really want and no idea how to figure that out. And it's actually quite confusing for a little while when they start to disentangle what other people have expected and try to figure out what they really want.

But they learn bit by bit that once they can manage their minds, they can tune into what they actually want. And even if you can't do that yet, it really doesn't matter. You can still make a decision. This is the weird thing. Your decisions don't actually matter that much.

This is very contrary to how we are taught to think about things. But really, it's what you think and feel that determines your experience and your reality. It honestly does not matter that much which job you take or where you live or even who you marry. I'm not saying those things don't matter at all, but what really matters is how you manage your mind. Your decisions are actually much less consequential than you think.

Because your mind is what creates your experience of the world and it creates all your feelings, and if you have an unmanaged mind, it's going to

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create the same negative feelings no matter where you are. I've had people hire me who went from job A to job B, back to job A, back to job B, literally, and then hired me in the third try at job A. It didn't matter which job this person picked. Their thoughts were the problem.

So once you decide what you're going to do, you have to just commit, and this is where Odysseus comes in. All of you want to try to pick the thing, make the decision that will prevent you from doubting it. It's like, I'll know it's the right decision when I just feel great about it and I don't have any doubt. I don't worry about it and I don't feel anxious about it and I don't regret the decision and I don't feel fear.

There's no decision that's going to be like that while you have an unmanaged mind, right? With an unmanaged mind, you just got to make a decision and then you got to commit. And even with a managed mind. Your brain will scream at you. You are absolutely going to feel doubt and fear and regret. Those are going to come up.

All of you listening to this podcast who are still learning how to manage your mind and you don't have it quite down yet, and that's okay, it's a work in progress. Even now when I make a decision sometimes I feel a little bit of fear, a little bit of doubt, or a little bit of regret sometimes.

Like, those thoughts come up. But you don't have to act on those feelings. You can recognize that they're created by your thoughts and that they aren't real. They are the siren song that will dash you on the rocks if you listen to them. They're an illusion. The siren song was an illusion. It said to the sailors, if you just jump off your boat, you're going to get to have amazing sex with some kind of mythical creature. Maybe I'm a mermaid, maybe I'm a lion, who knows what I am.

I don't think they were mermaids or lions, I forget exactly what the sirens were supposed to be. But it was an illusion, right? It was if you jump off this

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boat, you're going to have the best sex of your life with this mythical creature, it's going to be amazing.

But it was a total lie. They were just going to die. Your fear and self-doubt and regret, the thoughts that cause that, the thoughts about maybe this is a mistake, what if I'm unhappy, what if I'm terrible, what if I failed, those thoughts, they tell you that the decision is what's dangerous, and so you should change it, right? You make a decision and your brain immediately starts going, I don't know, maybe that was the wrong decision. If you make a different decision you could feel differently.

That's a lie. The decision is not dangerous. Acting on your doubt or fear or regret are what is dangerous. That's what keeps you stuck or going back and forth fruitlessly searching for an option where you won't have to manage your mind.

This is a really deep teaching so I want you to sit with it. You may want to listen to this part more than once. Once you make a decision, you do not change it no matter what feelings you have until you have managed your mind to make those feelings at least neutral, and preferably positive. You do not change it until you have managed your mind to be able to love the result of whatever decision you made.

You do not take regret and fear and anxiety as signs of anything meaningful or real. You do not listen to their siren call that if you just act your way out of them they will go away. It's a lie. If you act on anxiety and regret and you reverse a decision, I can guarantee in six months or six weeks or six days, you will be feeling anxiety and regret about that reversal.

Because if you don't learn how to rewire your brain, it will produce anxiety and regret no matter what decision you feed it. When you are trying to change and grow and evolve, when you are on an epic adventure of

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yourself, like Odysseus was, your brain is always going to react to change with fear and regret and anxiety. It's totally normal. It's not a reason to change course, it's to be expected.

It's like Odysseus knowing he's going to go through the siren straight and just preparing. It's not a reason to untie yourself from the mast. You're the heroine of your own journey, and what creates a heroine is commitment and bravery. Tie yourself to the mast.

When you ask how do I make this decision, you're asking how do I know which decision won't cause anxiety or regret. But that's the wrong fucking question because if you don't manage your mind, both decisions will cause that, will cause those feelings. They won't cause them because your thoughts cause them, but both decisions will be subject to those feelings. Those feelings will come up.

If you don't manage your mind, no matter what decision you make, you will experience self-doubt, fear, anxiety, and regret. Once you know how to manage your mind, neither decision has to give rise to those feelings. So the better question is not how do I know which decision won't cause feelings I don't like because we can't answer that one.

Well, we can answer it. The answer is any decision will cause those feelings for you now. The better question is knowing my brain is going to cause anxiety and regret no matter what I do, which option sounds like the kind of adventure I want to have? Which one matters enough to me to tie myself to the mast and not act on the anxiety or guilt or regret I might momentarily feel and to keep going?

You can work to manage your mind. That is what I teach in *Unfuck Your Brain*. The actual tools you need to change your thoughts on a daily basis. But you also have to develop the ability to commit and stick with something even though negative feelings may come up. You're still going to have to

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do some shit before you have reached enlightenment. So you need to know how to deal with negative feelings when they arise.

But here's the good news that I guarantee you haven't thought about. You're an ace at negative feelings. You've been having them your whole damn life and you're still here, right? There's no reason to be so terrified that you might feel them again in the future. Like, you are a pro at having anxiety, guilt, and self-doubt. You are an expert. You can handle it. You've been having it all along. It doesn't feel amazing but it's not going to kill you.

So yes, manage your mind, but tie yourself to the mast in the meantime. Alright, that's it for today my brave, bold chickens. I still have a couple spots for the May *Unfuck Your Brain* flock, so come check out the program at www.unfckyourbrain.com/program. It really will change your life.

And in fact, I'm going to be releasing some bonus podcast episodes in the next few weeks with interviews with my clients talking about how it did just that. So keep an eye out for those too. www.unfckyourbrain.com/program. I will see you there.

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.