

UFYB34: Living with Intention



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

Hello, my chickens. How are you guys? I am amazing. The sun is out. The weather is beautiful and for the past few weeks, I have been working on kind of redecorating my apartment. I've lived here for ten years and I basically never updated anything after moving in. I was a social justice lawyer – they don't make a lot of money, but it's all relative. Then I was an academic and I took a pay cut to become an academic and then I was starting a business.

So I've lived here for ten years and I've basically never updated anything after moving in. And so once my business started really taking off, first I did what most entrepreneurs do with extra cash, which is I paid off the debt that I had taken on to start the business and I reinvested in the business itself and I hired help, I have an amazing team now and that kind of thing and this redecoration project is the first big thing I've invested in that's not the business.

So today, the designer came over and she was helping me arrange things and unpack things and just set things up because obviously, if I could do this myself, then I would not need her. But here's what I've discovered during this process, y'all; I'm very picky and don't figure it out myself. Like you cannot send me online and be, like, find stuff for this room.

But if you send me 20 links, I will be like, I hate 19 of these, but this one is fine. So I have very strong opinions once I'm given a set of options. So anyway, I outsource lots of things in my life to experts; one of the things I highly recommend doing because it frees up your brain space to do the things that are your zone of genius and you actually create more of whatever it is you want that way; money, time, creativity, whatever it is.

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Anyway, so the apartment looks amazing. I'm obsessed with it. I have one last piece coming. If you follow me on Instagram and watch my stories, you might have seen a photo of a New Yorker cover I took where the cover is a woman with an eyeball for a head who is observing a brain on a couch and taking notes. It's obviously perfect for my job and the colors even match my color scheme. Obviously, the universe sent this to me.

So I'm waiting for that. I ordered a framed version from the New Yorker. By the way, you can just do that. All New Yorker covers are available framed from the New Yorker website. The world is amazing.

But okay, there's the thought work point to this. I'm not just rambling about my living room. So I have been loving the new space so much. And of course, I know our thoughts come from our feelings; that's what I teach. So I've been thinking about why I like it so much. And this is me – I encourage you guys to do this too. You know, a lot of people just want to do thought work when they feel bad to get out of it, right, and we talk a lot about how there's nothing so wrong with feeling negative emotions, right, they're a part of life, but you can also reverse-engineer when you're happy, right.

When you feel loving, when you feel joyful, when you feel satisfied, what are you thinking? Like, see what those thoughts are so you can think them again later on purpose and you learn about yourself that way. So I've been kind of looking at why am I so excited about this and some of it is the thoughts I have about having earned it and what it symbolizes to me. So that's part of what creates a feeling of satisfaction when I look around; that I've changed my money mindset, that I have brought so much more money into my life and that I am able to really earn it and spend it and invest it in things that matter to me and that I have total autonomy and control over that.

Because for so long, my story about money was that I was bad with money, I didn't have any control over money, money was something that other people decided how much I got of it, so it's not about the material wealth.

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And in the scheme of the world, I'm not talking – I didn't like cover my apartment in gold like a Russian oligarch who buys a Central Park apartment. But relatively for me, it symbolizes that money mindset shift and all the work I did to create it.

And then it also pleases my aesthetic preferences, right. I have thoughts that I like the way it looks and also, we added plants. And I'm a firm believer that, as animals, humans should be around plants that make us happy. But I think that the biggest part really has nothing to do with the specific items that are in here and it really applies to any room that you put together on purpose.

And that's what it is; it's that it's put together on purpose. There is intention behind what was selected. And stay with me, I promise I'm going to bring it back around. You can trust me with the ball. I'm taking it to the goal.

So in the past, I, quote en quote, decorated. I wouldn't call it decorated. I just sort of accumulated things with a geological sediment approach. Like I had one layer of things and then I got some new things and the new things went on top of the old things. And over time, you develop either a better archeological record, if you're the earth, or a living room if you're me.

And it's completely different to create a space with an intention, thinking about how all of the parts of the space fit together, thinking about space and color and texture and layer and function and imagining how I want the space to feel and then creating that feeling and arranging objects with intention and truly choosing what to keep and what I don't need.

I probably got rid of like 25 Hefty Bags of stuff during this process. Not just from the living room. I'm not a hoarder, but from kind of all over. And I haven't even done the kitchen cabinets to the front hall yet. So that's what I want to talk about today; how to live with intention.

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What does it mean to live with intention? Why does it matter? How can we get better at it? Living with intention means living on purpose. So many of us just go through life without really making decisions for ourselves or understanding why we make the decisions we've made. We do what our parents think we should do, what society tells us to do, what our friends are doing.

And then we wake up in our 20s or our 30s, 40s, 50s or 60s, like at any point really, and we think, "Wait, what? Is this my life? How did I get here? Is this what I even wanted?" Living with intention is scary because it means taking responsibility for yourself and your own life. It means letting go of the rulebook that society and your family gave you.

That rulebook is so heavy. It can be suffocating. You want to put it down, but you're scared of not knowing the right answer. It means, at least while you have a rulebook, you know the rules. When you let go of the rules, then you're in charge and you get to decide.

And it's so liberating, but for people pleasing perfectionists, like most of you, it's also terrifying because if you're responsible, what if you make the wrong decision? That's what your thought is. You don't want to be responsible for your own life. You don't want to make your own decisions because what if they're wrong? What if you fail? What mean things are you going to say to yourself if you don't get what you want?

So I don't pretend that living with intention is like an Instagram paradise, right. It can be overwhelming. You decide to live with intention and suddenly you have a lot of decisions to make. Think about it like redecorating a room. While you're following the path of what you already have, there are constraints.

There's already stuff in the room and all you can do is work around it. But if you start from scratch, you have to make so many decisions. What do I

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want this room to look like? How do I want it to feel? What is its purpose? What about all the stuff that's already in here? Should I keep it? Will it work in a new way? How do I know if I love it or need it?

Now imagine that room is your life. Most of us never even ask ourselves these questions. We just do what we're supposed to do. We go to college, we go to graduate school, we get married, we have kids. We might like or love any of these things, or maybe we don't so much, but we don't even think about what we would do otherwise. And that's not because there's something wrong with us or we're weak or small-minded.

The social pressure on women to conform to this path, especially to get married and have kids, is so strong. If you don't, you're not only carving out your own path, but you have to overcome all the internalized judgment you have about yourself for not doing what everyone else does. Just for today though, let's imagine, what would it be like to live on purpose? What would it be like to live with intention?

Most of us don't pay attention. We don't live with intention. We don't make decisions about how to spend our time or what we want to create. We get through a stressful day and then we collapse on the couch with Netflix and a bottle of wine, or three bottles of wine. I think attention and intention are kind of the same thing really. You have to pay attention if you want to live with intention. You have to pay attention to yourself. You have to pay attention to others.

You have to pay attention, not to what other people are thinking about you, just to being present; to really seeing people for what they are, being attuned to the reality, not just what you want to see. You have to pay attention to what's going on in your brain, to the choices you're making, to what's unfolding in your life while you have your hands off the wheel.

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Now listen, for some of you, living with intention might mean you have to get divorced and quit your job and move to Costa Rica to start a surf camp. Like, that might happen. And actually, that sounds really fun. I don't know why we would be scared about that. But it doesn't have to be that extreme. What would your current life look like if you lived it with intention? What if you could decide on purpose ahead of time how you would spend your time, what your romantic life would be like, the kind of parent you want to be, what you want to create in the world?

What if you could plan your days, your weeks, and your life so that you are conscious and present and living on purpose? What would that be like? I am not going to lie to you, it is challenging. On some level, day to day, it's easier to numb out. That's why most people choose that option because a slow death of wasted time feels easier at any given moment than living with intention and purpose.

But at the end of your life, will you look back and think, I'm so glad I watched all that Netflix, I'm so glad I did what other people expected me to do even when I didn't really like it, I'm so glad I didn't go all in on myself on this one wild and precious life, as a poet calls it? No, you will not. Spoiler alert, I can tell you now, none of the studies of what people say on their deathbeds are, "I'm so glad I lived my life according to what other people thought."

So how can you start living with intention? If you want to live with intention, you have to plan. You have to engage your prefrontal cortex. So notice that living with intention is different than living with presence. Presence can only happen in a given moment. Presence is about paying attention to where you are and what is happening rather than retreating to your mind. So this is a way that attention and intention are different.

They're the same in a sense in that they both entail bringing your awareness to something, but attention means bringing your awareness to the present moment. And that's what presence is; really being present in

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the present moment can only happen in each moment. In each moment as you bring your awareness to what is around you, that's paying attention. You can't really do it ahead of time or in the past or in any other dimension.

Intention requires planning and foresight. Intention happens ahead of time. Intention is what creates a plan and a plan is what ensures that your intentions are carried out. So if you want to live with intention, you do have to have a vision and you also have to have a plan.

For vision, you have to think about the life you want to live. What do you want your work life to be like? Do you want to be working? Your relationships, do you want relationships? Do you want to be married? Do you want to have lots of exciting lovers? Do you not really actually care about love or sex at all and you just keep going on dates because society tells you to? There's no right or wrong answer.

What do you want your living space to be like? Do you care about that? Maybe you don't really. Maybe it really matters to you. What about your family? Do you want to be close with your family? Do you want a family of your own? What does that look like? How do you want to spend your time? How do you want to think and feel? What is your vision for your life?

You need a vision. You also need a plan to carry it out. Now listen to me, my perfectionist chickens. Most of you are amazing at creating elaborate plans and then not following through on them, right. Eating plans, exercise plans, hobby plans, house organizing plans, there is nothing a perfectionist likes more than an elaborate plan she's never going to actually do.

They're a way to stay safe and feel like you're changing, get that emotional payoff ahead of time without actually ever going through the discomfort of implementation. I'm going to say that again. If you find that you make a lot of elaborate plans ahead of time and think about them in your head and never do them, it's because you're getting the emotional enjoyment of

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thinking you're going to change and feeling good about yourself in that sense ahead of time without ever actually going through the discomfort of changing.

The problem with this is, number one, nothing actually changes. And number two, you don't develop integrity in your relationship with yourself and you don't develop the skill of being present with and experiencing discomfort and moving through it, which is the only way you ever get anything worthwhile in life.

When you make a lot of plans and don't keep them, you don't trust yourself to do what you say you will, for good reason because you often don't do it. But then you shame yourself for that and you tell yourself you need more discipline and you turn it into a whole emotional drama, all of which prevents you from figuring out what's actually going on.

The real solution is, number one, make more realistic plans. Start small. And two, do your thought work so you know what you need to think in order to actually follow through. So, if you want to live with intention, you do need to make a plan and have a vision, but I want it to be a realistic plan. Don't plan to run a marathon overnight.

Think about it, when you're building trust with a new person, you build it bit by bit, right. The first time you hang out, trust is built when they show up when they say they will and they listen to what you're saying. And then you have coffee for an hour and then you part ways. And that trust is built up again the next time you meet up, or they say they're going to send you a book recommendation and they actually do, right, or they tell you they're going to call you and they do. It's built up slowly.

You don't meet someone right away and then say, I need you to show me you're trustworthy by saving my life in this elaborate manner, right. That's

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not how this works. Same with yourself – you’ve got to build that relationship of trust with yourself little piece by little piece.

So start out building accountability with yourself in small ways. And you know, accountability is a word that is pretty intense for some people and they’re used to it meaning shame, and I really just mean trust and integrity. I mean, learning to have a relationship with yourself where you do what you say you’re going to do, not because it makes you a better person, not because discipline is a quality that gets you into heaven, just because it’s going to make your life a lot better.

It’s just going to make things easier and you’re going to be able to achieve your goals if you know that you’ll do what you say you’ll do and you know that you’re willing to go through discomfort to carry out your own vision and dreams. But you’ve got to build that up slowly.

You do need that bigger vision. You do need to know where you’re taking your life and why, right. The Ancient Greeks called it the good life. The job of a philosopher was to have a theory of the good life. I think we all should have a vision of the good life for ourselves, but we overestimate what we can achieve in a week and we underestimate what we can achieve in a year, much less a lifetime.

So have that vision, create those big intentions, but then create small daily intentions. You don’t need to know the whole path. You don’t have to know every step between where you are and where you want to go and fixating and focusing on that future path is just a way of distracting yourself and not paying attention to where you are now. You only need to know the next couple of steps on the path.

Carve out an hour this weekend to do something with intention. Love on your people. Take a walk. Read a novel. Have sex. Take a bath, road trip to another city, go to yoga, write a vision for your life. Whatever you do,

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choose it on purpose with intention and then while it's happening, pay attention; be there. You can't create a whole life of intention overnight, but you can create a moment of intention and attention each day, and then a few moments, and then an hour. Live your life with intention for an hour every day.

Dedicate an hour every day to the vision you have for your life and it will add up. And I want to be really clear that that doesn't mean that your vision is to become an astronaut. Your vision for your life might be, actually I like my life, I like this husband I have, I like these kids I have, this wife I have and these kids I have, I like this job, whatever it is, I just want to enjoy it. I want to be present. I don't want to numb out so much. I want to be willing to experience discomfort.

Maybe that's what living with intention is for you. So maybe that hour is just an hour that you actually talk to your spouse without defensiveness and story about them. Or maybe it's an hour where you actually read a book instead of zoning out with the TV, or it's an hour you go for a walk, or it's an hour you're just willing to sit with yourself and feel uncomfortable.

It doesn't have to be an externally grand ambition. All that matters is that you are choosing it on purpose, to develop your relationship with yourself and to create the experience of living with intention and attention. If you really want to learn how to do those two things, how to live with intention and how to pay attention, come work with me in Unf*ck Your Brain.

Feeling stuck on autopilot is one of the main reasons that women come to me for help and a large part of what I do in Unf*ck Your Brain is teach you how to be fully alive with your attention and with intention. You can apply at www.unfckyourbrain.com/program.

You don't have to make a certain amount of money, you don't have to write a perfect essay, you don't have to know all the answers, you don't have to

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have gone to prestigious schools, you don't have to impress me. All you need is a true desire to commit to living your life on purpose and a willingness to do the work. That's what comes through and that's all that matters.

Have a wonderful week, my chickens. Pay attention to your life. Live with intention and I'll talk to you 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.karloewentheil.com/podcastconfidence.