

UFYB 45: Constraint



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

[UnF*ck Your Brain](#) with Kara Loewentheil

UFYB 45: Constraint

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. So I have a super exciting announcement today, which is that the podcast has hit one million downloads. That is craziness to me. Because actually, we've hit one million just since November of last year when I transitioned from *The Lawyer Stress Solution* to *Unf*ck Your Brain*. Which means that this little podcast has had a million downloads in its first year. And there's still three months to go to its first birthday.

So that is just fucking wild and I'm so grateful to all of you for listening and sharing and following it. And so to celebrate, I am doing an exciting giveaway that ties into today's topic. But you will have to listen to the episode to find out what that is and why.

So I get asked pretty frequently what I think has made my podcast and my business successful so quickly, and there are a couple of things. I mean, obviously, managing my mind overall is the most important thing. But one aspect of managing my mind that has made a huge difference is constraint.

So that is what I'm going to talk to you about today. Constraint means constraining, right? It means limiting the number of choices available to you in any kind of given arena or area of your life. It means deciding ahead of time what options you have and then only giving yourself those options. And it's no accident that I am teaching this after I taught about restriction two weeks ago, I think. Because if you don't understand restriction and allowance, you actually cannot practice constraint effectively.

If you don't understand how restriction and rebellion go together and you don't understand how to practice truly acknowledging your own choice and agency when you make a decision, then you're just going to use constraint

[UnF*ck Your Brain](#) with Kara Loewentheil

UFYB 45: Constraint

as a form of restriction and then rebel against it. And that's going to be totally counterproductive.

Constraint is not about restriction. Constraint is about choosing for yourself what you're going to do, but choosing ahead of time. So when we talked about restriction and rebellion and allowance, what we talked about was recognizing that you do have agency, you are always making a choice about how to respond to external circumstances and that even if you don't like your options, even if they're not the ideal choice you'd like, you are making a choice. And so operating from that place of allowance and taking agency for your choices rather than telling yourself there isn't enough or you can't do this or you shouldn't do that and rebelling.

So once you acknowledge - once you're in allowance and you take responsibility for that choice and that agency, then you can start to practice constraint, which means making those choices but ahead of time for yourself. So constraint requires using your prefrontal cortex to make decisions and a plan ahead of time.

When you leave decisions until the minute you need to make them, you spend a lot of mental energy worrying about them, right? Or deciding what to do. If you decide ahead of time, you cut down on that energy. You will still sometimes need to use mental energy to manage your brain because it's going to object to the plan because that's what brains do, but at least you've made the decision.

So you can think about it this way, constraint is important for the same reason that when you were in school they taught you to write an outline before you write the paper because if you just sit down and like, free associate a paper, it's going to be all over the place. You do an outline ahead of time because you use the prefrontal cortex to decide what I need to communicate, what's the best order, what's my plan, how am I going to do it. Then when you sit down to execute, you just have to execute. You

UFYB 45: Constraint

don't have to make any decisions, you just have to write. Separating the planning from the execution is crucial.

It's actually interesting. When you look at like, personality tests that people take to see what their strengths are, planning and execution are considered two totally different strengths. Some people are really amazing at planning, some people are really amazing at execution, some people are good at both, maybe some people are not as good at both, but all of us, for all of us, they're actually two separating things. Planning and execution. And constraint is making the plan and taking the decision part out of execution so that when it's time to execute, you just do what you've decided to. Because the part of your brain that handles planning, that handles execution are different.

Using constraint allows you to use them separately at the parts at which they excel rather than try and use them both at once, which just creates like, confusion and paralysis. If you think about it, so many of us spend so much brain energy each and every day arguing with ourselves, negotiating with ourselves, debating with ourselves about what to do or not to do or when should we do it or when should we not do it or do we really have to or should we. All of that emotional energy is spent debating with yourself, and it's such a waste of brain power.

But it happens because we haven't made our decisions ahead of time. So just think about something where you're always negotiating with yourself. It can be work or personal. It happens everywhere, but for a lot of people, it comes up especially around eating or movement or basically anything you put your moral self-worth on, right? Your self-improvement on creates a lot of internal negotiation, especially when you are trying to restrict, when you're operating from restriction, there's all this rebellion and negotiation.

And if you aren't managing your mind, like I said, constraint can bleed so easily into restriction and rebellion because you aren't choosing your

[UnF*ck Your Brain](#) with Kara Loewentheil

UFYB 45: Constraint

constraints ahead of time with full allowance and taking full agency and ownership. That's why sometimes you make decisions ahead of time and then you find that you negotiate with yourself anyway. So you have to make your constraint choices from that place of allowance. That's the paradox. You have to be fully owning your autonomy and your allowance and then choose to limit yourself for good reason.

But, number one, the good reason to exercise constraint is not because not eating carbs will make you a better person, right? Constraint is not about, "Oh, let me limit myself so I can feel okay about myself." That's not what constraint is about. Constraint is about I want to achieve or accomplish this, I want to build this habit for my - whatever reasons I have that aren't about being allowed to feel okay about myself, right? What do I need to do to make that happen? Like, what can I see is the plan I need to be on?

If I want to run a marathon, I can't just be like, "I don't know, I'll just run sometimes when I feel like it," right? I have to be like, this is the plan, here's constraint, I am not going to practice swimming right now, I'm going to practice running and here's how much I need to run each day so I know I'll get there. I'm deciding that ahead of time, I'm making the plan ahead of time with my prefrontal cortex, then I'll have to just execute it.

But you have to understand this: the second thing to understand is even if you make your decision from full allowance and ownership, you're in the perfect state of mind - there's no perfect state of mind, but you're in a good state of mind to make a decision, to exercise constraint, to use your prefrontal cortex, even if you make the decision or the plan, exercise the constraint at that point, that does not mean that your brain will not complain at the moment you have to actually execute.

So a lot of perfectionists are great at making plans but number one, the plans are too ambitious, number two, we put our self-worth on the plan, which makes it impossible, and then number three, when our brain does

UFYB 45: Constraint

start piping up at the time of execution about how it doesn't want to do that, we listen to that and we think it's important. We take our brain complaining to mean something. We think we should listen to it. We think that our brain's complaining is a reason not to do whatever we've committed to doing.

But your brain is going to complain. Like, that's just a given. That's just going to happen. If I told you that when you execute your plan you're also going to burp beforehand - that's kind of a gross example but let's go with it - because you just would be like, oh, okay, so then when the burp came you'd be like, oh, this is the part where I burp for a while, oh, now I'm going to do it. It wouldn't be a reason to stop. You wouldn't be like, I can't run the marathon now because I'm burping or I can't get on this consultation call because I'm burping.

You would just understand like, oh right, Kara told me that would happen, it's going to happen, it's not got to do with anything, I need to keep going. But when our brains basically burp up the whining and complaining and negotiation that we can totally predict, we still take it totally seriously like we've never heard it before and we give in to it. So it's really important to be specific with your constraint. Your constraint can't be like, if my brain doesn't come up with reasons not to do it, then I'll do it. Or I'll do it as long as I feel like doing it when the time comes.

Constraint is like you do it. Sometimes with my clients I'll say, okay, you've set aside this time to do this thing. Now, if you don't do it, fine, but you're not allowed to do anything else. See how powerful that is? Oh, I want to record my podcast, here's this hour where I want to record my podcast. If I get to that hour and I don't want to record the podcast, then I don't have to. I always do have autonomy, but I'm not allowed to do anything else. I'm not allowed to watch Netflix, I'm not allowed to check my phone, I'm not allowed to read a book, I just have to sit and stare at the wall for an hour.

UFYB 45: Constraint

That's constraint. Ideally with constraint, you get there and you're like, oh, time to do the podcast, my brain's making a fuss, so what? I keep going. Sometimes it's harder than others, and when that happens, what I really recommend is that you be like, alright, we don't have to - it's sort of like what you actually do is when you're really struggling with the execution, you take yourself back to that place of agency and allowance to make the choice, right? You sort of remind yourself like, I don't have to. I could just not. But I'm not allowed to do anything else because I'm exercising constraint and I have assigned this time to this thing that I want to do. And so if I'm not going to do it, then I'm not going to do anything else.

And you can play with that in other realms. Like if your goal is I want to eat a vegetable at every meal and you get to your meal and you're like, I don't want a vegetable, play around with it. It might be interesting to be like, okay, but then we're not eating anything else. Not from a punishing place. It's from a like, that's fine, you have a choice, self, but this is the priority and we've committed to doing this so if we're not doing this, we're not doing something else instead. We're not going to watch Netflix instead of recording the podcast. We're not going to eat cake instead of the vegetable. I could eat cake and the vegetable, but I'm not going to just negotiate and give up and put it forward and not really commit or create commitment to this thing that I've decided to do.

So constraint really means I'm going to do what I said I was going to do no matter what. And if you occasionally have to give yourself the option of like, do that thing or do nothing, you'll find you just decide to do the thing, usually because you really are creating constraint. You're like, listen, fine, there's two options. Do the thing or nothing, but we don't have the whole world of options of what to do with ourselves right now. We're constraining. The option is the podcast or the option is the podcast or nothing.

The other thing about constraint that I sort of alluded to just now is that it makes you get really specific. A lot of people fail at reaching their goals

UFYB 45: Constraint

because they have not made them specific, because they haven't exercised enough constraint on the goal. So they decide they want to eat more vegetables, but they don't make a specific commitment of how many and when.

So just saying I want to eat more vegetables, it's way too vague. Constraint would be I'm going to eat one vegetable at every meal. Or one vegetable two meals out of the day, or one vegetable one meal of the day, or once a week. I don't care how many vegetables you eat, that's up to you, right? But the point is you get really specific and measurable.

Or people decide they want to make \$100,000 in their business, but they don't get specific about how they're going to do that. They're like, maybe it'll come from here, maybe it'll come from there, maybe I'll do that. When you don't have that constraint and you haven't decided how you're going to do it, you haven't made that specific plan, then you don't know how to execute, right? So then that means when it like, comes time to go to work the next day, you don't know what to do next to get towards that \$100,000 because you haven't made the specific concrete goals and place. That's what constraint is.

And I see this a lot around people's calendars and schedules. People work off of like, unscheduled to-do lists and then they have unrealistic expectations of what they can get done in short-term periods, like a week or a day. And that keeps them overwhelmed, but it also keeps them taking on more and saying yes to everything.

I actually was so fascinated when I had my first Unf*ck Your Brain group. There are all these modules and lessons that I like, thought people would really freak out about like, that people would be upset about the teaching that, you know, no one else is toxic, other people don't cause your feelings, or people were going to have strong emotions about the body image stuff. And yes, some of that happened, but the thing that everyone lost their shit

[UnF*ck Your Brain](#) with Kara Loewentheil

UFYB 45: Constraint

about the most was having to calendar their work. Having to put their to-dos on a calendar created the most drama in the whole program. It was fascinating.

And I realized it's because calendar constraint is basically a people pleaser and a perfectionist's worst nightmare. Because perfectionists are constantly operating on this idea that they can do unrealistic amounts of things, and then even though they're constantly like, procrastinating and avoiding and not getting them done, they prefer the fantasy world where like, someday they will and they feel better about that. And people pleasers hate to calendar because it starts to get really concrete that like, well, this is what I've assigned to do this week so if my boss offers me this thing or ask me to do this, I don't have time on the calendar, right? Or, oh, I want - I think I should spend every waking minute with my kids but I also want to go to yoga three times a week, and when I have to put that on the calendar, it brings up my conflicting thoughts about that.

So this is of course why I make all my clients do it because it brings up everybody's shit. And scheduling exactly what you're going to do when ahead of time makes you get real. Like, you got to get real real fast about your productivity, your work-life balance, your priorities, and what you can actually accomplish in one day.

So I think that constraint in the ways that I've described it has been key to my success in both of those - well, all the ways that I spoke about. So first, I created constraint in my business. For most of the time I've been working on this business, there was only one way to work with me. There was just one offer, there was just one thing. I did not create 12 different programs and try to sell them all. I didn't try one thing for a few weeks then switch when it wasn't working fast enough.

I did for a time. There were like, three months where I tried to have two niches, but even within that, there was one way to work with me in each

UFYB 45: Constraint

one. And after like, three months I realized that I couldn't do that. I could not create two niches at once. I could even have two things within one niche at once. I see so many entrepreneurs and especially coaches just because I see a lot of coaches, because that's my industry, but I see it in my clients who are starting businesses in other fields too. They choose a business plan and then it's not working fast enough for them, that's their thought, so they decide that the problem is the niche or the offer or the program, that something's going wrong. It's not working, they have to change it. They need to add things or they need to adapt, they need to offer something else, or they need to compromise. They don't exercise constraint.

And not doing that, exercising constraint and just always being like, this is what there is, even when people asked for something else, like, this is what I offer, this is what I do. That's one of the reasons why my business grew so fast I think. I really stayed the course. Like, first you could only work with me one-on-one and now you can only with me in groups, and that's it. It's so easy and tempting to be like, oh, this person really wants to work with me one-on-one and they're willing to pay a lot for it so maybe I should just do it, but no.

Constraint is so freeing because you never have to have that conversation with yourself. You know what your time commitments are going to be, you know what you're going to be doing. You don't have to have any negotiation or conversation with yourself about it, and you make it easy for your clients to decide. Like, oh, there's just this one thing, I'm either doing it or I'm not.

I really saw because I work with perfectionists so much, like, some of the standard marketing advice is like, have three offers and everybody picks the middle one and like, the different prices help anchor it and whatever kind of sales tactics I don't use. But even just from the beginning, I was just like, definitely not because I know my brain, what it used to be like. If you

UFYB 45: Constraint

gave me three options, I would agonize about what the right one was and probably choose none of them, right? Perfectionist constraint is so important for perfectionist brain.

So fewer decisions for my clients, fewer decisions for me, more predictability for me, really clear ability to set revenue targets and be like, okay, I sell this one thing so this I how many people I need to get to that number. It's super clear and easy. That's constraint. I also practice constraint in smaller ways. Like for instance, I see a lot of new entrepreneurs kind of spin out about all the different social media outlets and ways there are to communicate with people, and I always tell them like, just pick one or two you like and just do those and like, literally forget the other ones exist.

So I like Facebook and Instagram because I like writing in longer parts and I never really used Twitter. I like writing longer posts, I never really used Twitter. Lord knows I'm never going to use Snapchat. Never even downloaded it. So I just decided I'm going to use Facebook and Instagram. Actually, I just used Facebook for like, a year and then recently I started using Instagram too. That's it. I have a Twitter account and my team posts to it and I don't even know the password. I've never logged in, I have no idea what's happening over there. I don't have Snapchat, I don't ever vlog on YouTube. My blog is honestly just my podcasts notes turned into a blog. Like, I really practice constraint. These are the two to three ways I'm going to communicate with my audience. That's it. I'm just going to ignore the rest of that shit. And that has allowed me to communicate consistently and build that audience rather than running around to 10 different platforms and not really being able to focus on any of them.

So that's some of the ways that I created constraint in my business, and then I also created constraint in my own life to build my business, and this is also really important because self-improving perfectionists want to fix all the areas of their life at once. So it's kind of really - it's the minimum

UFYB 45: Constraint

baseline idea, right? I really focused on building my business as my main goal. It's not going to be that way forever, but for the last 18 months or so, like, this has been my number one priority. And that doesn't mean that I killed myself for it. Like, obviously that is not what I teach. I had plenty of downtime, I spent time with family and friends and loved ones, I read novels. Like, not you have to hustle until you die mentality at all. But just this is my main focus.

So I was not like, also, I'm going to learn how to run a marathon during this 18 months, right? Also, I'm going to learn how to play the cello and become an accomplished cellist during this 18 months. Like, one main project. And that can be in your personal life. Like, for people who - sometimes I have clients who feel like I am - really want to get married and have kids and there's only a few more years biologically, I'm like, great, then this is your main priority for this year.

Really, like, your job is not - you're going to do your job obviously, you're going to care about your career, care about your friends, but you are not going to try to like, jump your career to the next level and try to find your partner and have a baby all in one year. Pick one thing.

And it's cyclical, right? Like, I - now I'm still in love with my business and coaching and all of you and doing all that, but it's now hit a level where I'm starting to be able to be like, okay, I have more bandwidth for like, self-development and other areas, and maybe I'm going to have a different priority for the next few years. You guys are always my priority but anyway, you get the meaning of what I'm saying, right?

It doesn't mean that you don't do the other things in your life or even do them well. It just means that mentally, you're like, this is my main thing right now. I am really going to focus on this goal. I am really going to get my business operating at the level I want it to be. I am really going to learn how to run a marathon. I am really going to like, fix my relationship with my

UFYB 45: Constraint

husband and work on practicing unconditional love until I feel amazing about him. Like, that's what I'm doing right now. Everything else is still happening, they're on low burners but I'm not setting four ambitious goals at once.

I also exercise constraint by scheduling and calendaring everything. So this goes back to what I was talking about. Even free time. I like, mark off when the free time is. Even if I'm not going to do anything in the free time, like, I don't schedule things in that block, it's marked off on my calendar as that's the free time. Even though perfectionist brain fights this so hard, it's actually such a gift to know I've done my work when I scheduled it and now I can be free when I scheduled it.

It all goes on the calendar. So I calendar everything. And that brings me to the exciting giveaway. I did not forget, you guys. So to celebrate how constraint helped me reach a million downloads in this first year, I have partnered with the Day Designer to give away two of their academic year planners. And this is the first sponsored anything I've done, so I want to be really clear about what that means. I am not getting paid to do this. They're not paying me for advertising, they're not paying me to mention them, they're not paying me to give away their products. In fact, I did not even get any free swag for this. I paid full price for my Day Designer.

So I'm not getting paid, it's not advertising, and I didn't even get a free Day Designer. I didn't even get - they're like, \$55. I didn't even get a free Day Designer, but I happen to be friendly with someone who does PR for them and I was kind of gushing to her about how much I love the Day Designer because I just use it in my own life, and she was like, oh, well maybe we should do a giveaway.

So we thought it would be super fun to give away a couple to celebrate this milestone. So that's the giveaway transparency. You guys have heard that I don't have advertisers on the podcast and as of now I have no plans to. I

[UnF*ck Your Brain](#) with Kara Loewentheil

UFYB 45: Constraint

don't have like, sponsored content, you know, I don't even get free shit from companies. So if I'm ever telling you about something like the Day Designer, it's because I personally use it and am obsessed with it and I think it's a good product and you know, I think it might like, complement my teachings. I'm never going to be like, buy this car because what does that have to do with what I do, right?

So that's the transparency. I'm not getting paid for this, I didn't get a free planner. But two of you are going to get a free planner. So we're giving away two free planners to two of you guys. They're going to be from their academic planner line which means that I think they start in June or July and run through August of the next year. So we are going to get it in September and it'll be a couple months in, but they're still going to be super helpful and you'll have almost a whole year of use out of it.

And the reason that I love them and use them myself, there's a couple things. They have a full page for each day, which I just think is crucial, especially when you're starting to try to calendar things out, you really need a lot of space to practice that and they have a lot of space for to-dos and a lot of space for the day. Although, I do - I was joking with my friend that I really wished they had a night owl version because their day runs like, 7am to 9pm or something in the calendar, or to 8pm, but my day runs like, 10am to midnight. So I wish the timing was different but I understand that I am not the usual in that.

So I love that there's so much space. I also really like the quality of the paper because I do teach to calendar everything but being a perfectionist, that means it takes some time to get good at this and you're going to have to erase and redo shit a lot. So having good quality paper's really important. I've gone through some calendars where erasing like, pushed through the paper, you know? And that's no good. And I just think their designs are gorgeous. Their cover design is really beautiful.

UFYB 45: Constraint

So I'm a total genuine fan-girl, as you can tell. I have bought many Day Designers myself. So here's how it works. You have until September 20th to enter. So this podcast is being released on September 6th, so you have two weeks. You just got to go to www.unf*ckyourbrain.com/daydesigner. The link will also be in the show notes for this page so if you just go to www.unf*ckyourbrain.com/podcast, it'll be the latest episode there but it's just as easy as remember www.unf*ckyourbrain.com/daydesigner.

So we're going to randomly draw two winners and we're going to notify you the week of September 24th if you've won and then your planners will ship straight from the Day Designer. So www.unf*ckyourbrain.com/daydesigner. Enter by September 20th.

Okay, that's it, y'all. Next week you're going to have another listener Q&A. I got a ton of follow up questions and requests after the last one, so definitely tune in for that. I'm going to be answering questions about family and toxic situations and dating and people pleasing and all those good things. Talk to y'all soon.

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.