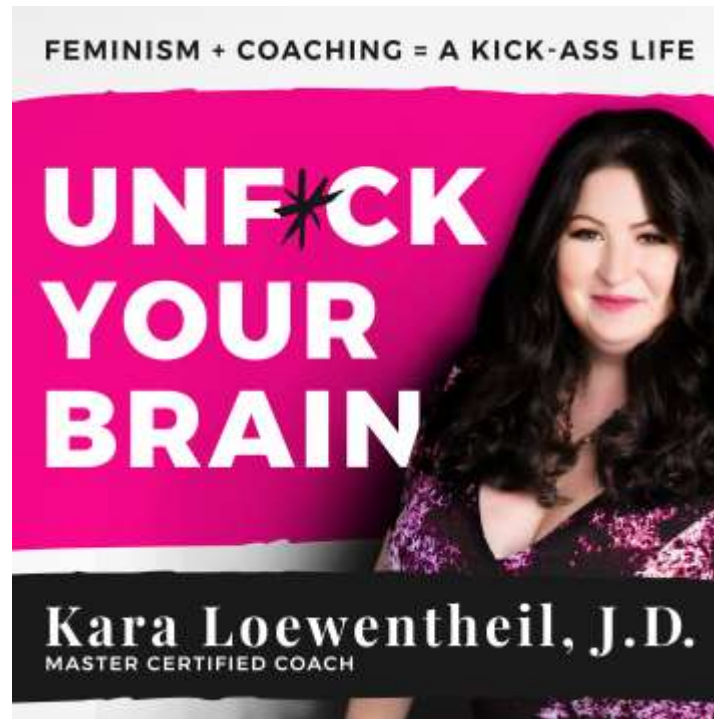


UFYB 51: Listener Q & A Vol. 4



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

[UnF*ck Your Brain](#) with 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 chickadees. It's time for another installment of listener questions and answers. It's like a flowing river. The more I paddle some down or I bail some out and more comes in, which is great. I'm always happy to tick at your questions. Here's a couple things I want you to know. Number one, it's not guaranteed that if you send in a question that I will be able to answer it. I get a lot of questions and I pick the ones that I think are going to be most relevant to everyone and everyone's going to learn from.

I also pick the questions that are clearly defined so that I can answer them. So if you want to send a question to be considered, that's awesome, I totally encourage you to do that. But the more specific you can be, a question about like, a specific concept and how to apply it to a specific situation, that's the best thing I can answer.

I get a lot of questions that are like, here's my whole history of my body image, what should I do about it? And like, that's not really a question for me to answer. Like, thought work in general. All the tools I teach, that's what you should do for that. So I totally understand the desire to like, tell me the whole backstory and ask me how to handle it, but there's only so much I can do in a podcast. It's obviously not the same as coaching.

So if you want your question answered, the best practices are keep it concise and make it specific. And then I will be best able to answer it and it will be most helpful for everybody else, which is part of how I pick the questions. If you want to send those in, you just send them to info@redesignyourmind.com.

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Okay, let's get started. "Hi Kara, I recently started a new job. There's a long tenured employee on my team who is very senior, and although not in management role, he comports himself that way. Everyone in the office defers to him, he is clearly season-liked and respected. This guy has been doing the same thing for the last 30 years the same way. I have much more current experience and I've been trained in some of the newer tech tools that serve our industry. This guy is kind of a dinosaur. My issue is that he sees himself as my mentor and coach and is constantly explaining, teaching, and lecturing me on every possible topic. I am working hard on my thoughts to focus on the fact that his intentions are positive and he thinks he is helping me. He seems a little unnerved by my technical prowess and verbal skills, and I do not want to alienate this guy. But if he explains to me how to send an email one more time, I am worried I will lose my temper. I feel patronized and minimized and invalidated. I also recognize that those feelings are caused by my own thoughts about this. How is the best way to deal with older men who relate to accomplished younger women colleagues in this way? This is not the first time I've experienced this, and I might mention that I am not a kid out of school. I am 52 years old."

Okay, so here's what's going on here, right? This question asker, writer, says, "I recognize those feelings are caused by my thoughts about this." But you don't really recognize that because your next sentence is how should I deal with older men who relate to younger women in this way, which shows me that you still think that he's the problem. Your question isn't how do I deal with my own thoughts about this. Your question is hey, he's relating to younger women colleagues in this way that is bad, what do I do about that?

And I think that you are probably trying to - what I call silver lining it, which is you want to keep your belief that he is patronizing you and then you want to try to feel better about it. That's just not that effective. You can try. I don't

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find that it really works. So your problem here is not him, right? It's your thoughts about him.

And one of the things I want you to think about is that you are really upset that he doesn't respect you but you don't respect him either, right? You call him a dinosaur, say he's patronizing you and minimizing you, that he's afraid of you, he's unnerved by your technical prowess and verbal skills. You really look down on him. And then you're very upset that you think he's looking down on you.

So that is generally the case. Often when we think someone else is being rude or being disrespectful or being whatever the thing is, we are mirroring that same behavior or that same characteristic. It's just projection. So I would work on your thoughts about his behavior. Not oh, it's bad behavior and how do I deal with it, but I have a story about this guy, I want him to respect me but I don't respect him.

It's very difficult to get someone to respect you when you don't respect him. And you really can't control whether he respects you or not. But so long as you don't respect him, you will not feel respected because you are the one generating your emotions. So your thoughts generate your feelings and when you are thinking thoughts that are disrespectful, that disrespects someone else, that look down on them, very difficult for you to then feel the emotion of respect or connection.

Okay, "Hi Kara, I'm listening to your Q&A podcast right now and I wanted to submit a question for your next round of Q&A. A lot of the questions seem to be from people that are feeling the victim of their situation, that someone else or something else has done something to them. But how does one approach thought work for when you have done something that you feel is morally wrong? I have a hard time forgiving myself for the mistakes I've made in the past, and in my mind, I continually punish myself by reliving these moments and using those situations as evidence that I'm an

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unworthy, bad person. I understand I need to do work around this but that doesn't change the fact that I feel what I did was wrong. For example, let's say you murdered someone and feel a great amount of shame around it, how do you choose new thoughts?"

So I think this is a great question, and the first thing I want to point out is you don't feel something as morally wrong. You believe it's morally wrong. You have a thought that what you did was morally wrong. And then you feel shame. So here's the thing about shame: shame really has nothing to do with what we've done. Guilt is sometimes specific to a thing we did. Shame is a feeling we have when we think about who we are. When we have a thought that there's something wrong with us, that we are unworthy, that we are unacceptable. That's what creates shame.

So I think that's where your work is. You can have made a decision in the past that you now - that you wouldn't want to make again or that has contrary to your values now, and you can acknowledge that. But when you feel shame and you can't let go of that, that's because you're making it mean something about you as a person, that you're not worthy, that you're not okay, that you're not worth forgiving, that there's something wrong with you that you're a bad person.

Those are the thoughts to work on. So developing that compassion and forgiveness for yourself, that's where that work is for you, and recognizing that even if you did murder someone, you still have the choice of what to think about that, what to think about your past self.

One of the things I love about thought work so much is that once I understand that my thoughts create my feelings and my actions, any time I'm like, why did I do that thing? I know the answer is just a thought I had at the time. It's not my personality, it's not like a deep characteristic, it's not because I'm a bad person, it's not because I can't control myself. It's not

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any of these sorts of like, stories we have about what's wrong with us. It's just literally a thought that led to a feeling.

Like, if you did murder someone, you had a thought that led to a feeling that led to the action of killing them, right? And so you can see that that's why that happened. And you might not want to do that again, but that doesn't mean that you necessarily have to tell yourself that you are worthless or not worth redeeming or can't change or are unworthy, whatever these thoughts are that are creating shame.

So I would encourage you to think about the distinction between the thing you did and the human that you are. And I think that distinction will help you let go of some of that shame.

"Hi Kara, I am one of the few roosters that listen to your podcast, and I have to say I'm obsessed. So much so that I've just been listening to them on repeat in order to make them stick for the last month. One thing I wanted to ask you was in regards to finding evidence that you're lovable. As of currently, I feel unattractive and not at an ideal weight. I know these things are superficial but I just don't think people are interested in me anymore. And for some reason I think getting back what I once had will make things right again. I guess I was wondering if there's any wisdom you could share from your teachers. Thank you for everything you do."

Well, I don't know if this comes from my teachers but it comes from my experience. If you have the belief that people are not interested in you, that is all you will see. But there's no such thing as feeling unattractive. That's not a feeling. That's a thought. You believe you are unattractive, you believe you are not at an ideal weight, as if that's a real thing that exists. And because you are loathing yourself, you assume everyone else thinks the same way about you.

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So you say, "I know these things are superficial, but I just don't think people are interested in me anymore." You're reporting that to me as though you're accurately reporting how you look and that it's superficial but other people just aren't interested in you because of it.

But that's just a story you have. The reason you are not seeing other people be attracted to you is because you don't believe it's possible right now. So number one, you're showing up in the world as someone who doesn't think they're attractive, and number two, if somebody even is attracted to you, you won't even literally notice it.

I always remember when I was doing this work, I like, realized that there was this category of interactions I would have with men in like, public, standing in line somewhere, whatever, where they had for years been flirting with me and I had not registered it because I had the story that no one ever hit on me in public.

And I was so committed to that story that even when men would flirt with me, I literally did not perceive it as flirting. Like, I had - my story was so strong that someone would have to be like, "Hello, I am officially hitting on you." That's what would have had to happen to maybe shake my story and then I would have thought it was a joke. So when you have the belief that you are not attractive and people aren't interested in you, that is all you're going to see.

Changing your weight is not going to solve your problem. If you manage to change your weight, you may then have different thoughts about yourself and so you'll feel more confident, but the changing the weight didn't do it, and here's what most people discover: they lose weight or get plastic surgery or change their hair, whatever it is they do, they feel good for like, 10 minutes to three weeks - that's not a scientific estimate but that's about what happens - and then their brain finds some other part of their body to obsess about.

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Because if you are believing that you have to look a certain way in order to be loveable, your brain is not changing the circumstance, does not solve it. Your brain just attaches to a different thing. So that's why I don't recommend changing that circumstance to solve your thoughts and feelings. You have to work on your beliefs about yourself and other people being attracted to you.

Also, I want to commend you for listening to the podcast because you guys would not believe how many emails I get from men who are mad that the podcast is for women. And they want to know why it's not for men, which I just am like, are you for real? Like, women have been learning from and making do with lessons and material and learning that was directed at men for thousands of years, like, since education was invented.

So you guys can listen to the podcast, you can apply the women examples to yourself. Women have been doing that with examples about men for millennia. So good job, rooster, on listening to the podcast and managing to apply it to yourself and not writing me an email about why isn't it for men.

Okay, "Hi Kara, still binging on your podcast and I listened to the Q&A one today, it was so good. Anyway, not sure where you want us to send questions but I have one I'd love to hear your thoughts on. I'm doing a lot of your recommended work around managing my thoughts and making decisions. Where I seem to get lost is how to deal with the actual behavior, specifically with my spouse. So a situation happens, I react emotionally, but I pause to check in with myself before responding. I realize that my thoughts are producing the bad feeling. But there's still an underlying situation that needs my response. So number one, how do we take this to the next step and actually work through problems with people or spouses, and number two, tips on not getting lost or caught up in the drama that can ensue when you're arguing. Especially if the other person doesn't get these principles. Any advice is appreciated. I'm seriously obsessed with this work and just want to be your intern."

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My god, an intern would be fun. Okay, so here's the thing: often, if you actually manage your mind, there is not an underlying situation that needs your response. Like, often, actually nothing has gone wrong. So if your spouse is like, why didn't you take out the garbage? That's not an underlying situation that needs your response. Even if your spouse is upset with you, you don't necessarily have to respond in any particular way.

So I just want to sort of push this question or to really see if she's working on her thoughts before she responds because I think that you are still believing that there's a problem or something you need to do probably more often than there is. When you say actually work through problems, I mean, what if you just said you were sorry and took responsibility?

That's always an option. It's fascinating to just say like, you're so right, I'm really sorry. Like, our brains are like, what? We don't want to do that because we don't think we were wrong, so we don't want to say we were wrong. Like, how outrageous. But what if you did? What if when somebody was upset with you, you just said, "Oh my god, I'm so sorry?"

I'm not saying you have to do that. You can not do that at all, but I just think it's a fascinating thought experiment. Like, why are we so adverse to that, right? We really think we have to work through the problem, like we have to get them to understand our point of view, and we have to reach like, an agreement about what's going on or what happened and that's not necessarily true.

Sometimes if you just let go of your emotional investment in a situation, you are able to really see where you did contribute to it more clearly or just apologize either way. Like, there's lots of different options. Or just keep doing whatever you want to do and just not be upset that they're upset. Like, not take on their feelings. Allow them to have their own feelings, allow them to be upset with you and not try to solve it for them.

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Because other people will think you can solve it for them but you can't. Everybody who's been in a fight with a partner has been on both sides of the experience of someone apologizes and the other person is still mad for days. Like, we've all been both the person who apologize and it didn't solve it or the person who stayed mad even after they got an apology.

And that's because the other person's words they say with their mouth does not change our emotions. Only our thoughts do. So your spouse does not need to understand anything about this. They do not need to listen to the podcast. They don't have to know their thoughts cause their feelings. You need to work on your own thoughts, stay in your lane, take responsibility for your thoughts and feelings and question your kind of premise that there is an underlying situation that you need to do something about because often there isn't.

Okay, so one last one because this one's a little bit long but it's a perfect one to kind of end on. "Hi Kara, I have a problem I'd love your advice on. My ex-boyfriend was emotionally unable for the majority of the year that we went out. We broke up for two years because of distance, we moved to different countries. I always thought I knew how he felt about me deep down, I couldn't let go of the hope that we'd one day be together. So I was never ready to move on and be with anyone else because I just didn't want to. We stayed in touch during those two years and saw each other occasionally. At one point I met someone I had a lot of chemistry with and I started to feel like I was falling for this new guy, but a few months later my ex got in touch as he was going to be in my town and wanted to talk. He told me he was an idiot and he loved me and wanted to give us another chance. He knew that I was with someone else. We stayed out all night and I told my then boyfriend, the new guy, and we broke up. I moved back to my hometown, my ex separately moved back and now I know what I want. I felt the same way about him for four years through heartache and love and he's the only person I want to have a future with. I'm determined to make it work and still want to prove to him that I'm ready to do that. But it's been a

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year now since everything happened and he still isn't ready. He said it affected him deeply that I dated someone else and he doesn't know how to get past it. What I would love to ask is how can he overcome this internal block he has up and get through it? If he doesn't love me anymore then I'll have to accept that and try to move on with regret, but right now I can't and I'm giving him space to figure it out. My fear now is that he'll never address it so I'll put my life on hold again for years and he may never open up to me again. I care about him so much and I think if he's able to deal with this, he can deal with many other things he struggles to overcome. What can I do to help him or what advice would you give if he came to you with this issue himself?"

Okay, my love, you are so up in his business. You can't help him with this. You cannot make him open up to you, you cannot make him listen to the podcast to get him to open up to you. He isn't coming to me and that's the whole point.

He's not looking for an external solution to solve his problem. You are. And when you just look at the bones of your story, he has been emotionally unavailable to you, whatever that means, that's a thought, but let's say that that's a circumstance, whatever this is, the difficulty in expressing how he feels or communicating or committing, whatever it is, he has been the same way the whole time.

But you are believing that this is something to do with the fact that you dated someone else, that he's so upset about what happened. But nothing happened to him. He knew you were with someone else and he told you that he loved you because possibly he thought it was safe at that point subconsciously because you were with someone else, and then you broke up with the guy and were ready to be with him and now he's back to I don't know.

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So this has nothing to do with him. He is possibly never going to get over this, this being his own thought patterns. And you can't help him with it and it's not your business to try. I know you think it is because you love him and you want him to change his decision. You want to control his actions, you want to change his thoughts and feelings to change his actions because you think then you'd be happier.

So you're not trying to manage your own thoughts at all, but you're trying to manage his thoughts. And that is just a losing battle. You don't even have any control over your brain, you definitely can't control his brain. From your story, he sounds like he's been consistent the entire time. He has loved you but unable to open up to you, really express how he feels or commit to a life with you.

That's what I hear in this story, and you want to know how you can change him and the answer is you can't. And it doesn't matter how much he says he wants to maybe change or he wishes he could figure it out or he just needs more time. This is who he is. Now, I'm not saying you shouldn't be with him. If that is worth the price of admission to you, go for it.

But this thought, this sort of like, well, what if he never addresses it and he may never open up to me again, I don't want to put my life on hold, you got to make that decision knowing that that might happen. There's no way for you to control or prevent that. So part of making clear-eyed, mind-managed decisions about our relationships is recognizing what other people are like. When we have thoughts to clean up about that sometimes, what you're describing is a pretty consistent pattern of behavior and comments here.

This is who he is. So you have to decide. It's quite likely that this will continue for a while, if not forever, in the same vein. And is that the relationship you want? You guys, the most powerful question you can ask yourself in romantic relationships especially, is the relationship I'm having right now the relationship I want? Regardless of how long I've been with the

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person, regardless of how much I love them, regardless of how much I think they love me, regardless of how great it would be if they would just change these few fundamental things about their personality, right? Is this the relationship you want?

This is what's on offer. What you have right now, not the version of the relationship where he's a different person. Not this other imaginary version of him where he opens up a lot and is comfortable with commitment and has no reservations. That version of him doesn't exist. This is the version you have now and you cannot get him over this or get him through this. That is not your job. It's not your business and you can't do it.

You need to decide if this relationship you have right now is the one you want. And if not, what you're going to do about that. You have to get your fingers out of his pie, like, stop trying to control him, and use some of that energy on managing your own mind, making your own decisions and really being present with the reality of what you have. Not what he says might be different in the future but what has been his consistent pattern of behavior.

I think that we have things exactly backwards almost always, but one of the ways we do that especially in romantic relationships is we underestimate our own ability to change our own thoughts and feelings and lives and we vastly overestimate the likelihood that somebody else will change. So we think like, well, I love this person and I want to be with them and I can't change that, so they just need to change their whole personality.

So we like, drastically underestimate how much we can change our own thoughts and feelings, and we drastically overestimate the likelihood that somebody else will change. People are capable of huge change if they want to change and if they do the hard work to make it happen. But if they are not interested in that and they are not doing that work, there is very little chance they will change.

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So eyes in your own lane. Hands in your own lane. You got to manage your own mind about this and stop trying to change him. You only think that you need him to change so you can be happy, and you need to take responsibility for your own thoughts and feelings.

Alright, my chickadees, that's it. It's your tough love Q&A for today. I will talk to you all next week.

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