UFYB 64: How to Believe Harder

Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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Welcome to *Unf*ck Your Brain*, the only podcast that teaches you how to use psychology, feminism, and coaching, to rewire your brain and get what you want in life. And now here's your host, Harvard law school grad, feminist rockstar, and master coach, Kara Loewentheil.

Hello my chickens. It's been so long since I talked to you all. It's been a while since I recorded a podcast because I was off for three weeks for my own version of winter break. It was really lovely, I spent a week in Paris and then I spent a week in New York just kind of hanging around and seeing friends and family, and then I spent a week in New York really starting to work again but also getting my space decluttered and organized.

Just really excited to start 2019 with no distractions and a great organizational system. So highly recommend that if you haven't. Anyway, that's not what this episode is about, that's just where my brain is at today.

So here's what I want to talk to you about. I'm going to start today by telling you about my trip to Paris because my trip was so fascinating from a confidence kind of thought work perspective. So as y'all know, I'm a pretty confident chicken, that's kind of the whole point of this deal we got going here.

But that requires a caveat, which is that I'm pretty confident, very confident in English. I speak French at a kind of - what would be the right level? Like, rusty proficiency. Like, I can get through my daily interactions in Paris just fine, and I probably understand 70% to 80% of what people say to me, depending on the context, how complicated it is, and I can generally make myself understood, although it's - I mean, Parisians are total accent purists and I have confirmed this with all my Parisian friends so I feel comfortable saying it.

Other foreigners in Paris who I spoke to in French who weren't Parisian were from other countries who also spoke French totally understood me.

UFYB 64: How to Believe Harder

But every time I spoke to a native Parisian, they would act like I was totally unintelligible. But you know what, I respect that. Like, the New York snob game is strong also so I have no problem with that. I respect the purity.

Anyway, the point of the story is that it was totally fascinating to watch my brain suddenly feel insecure and out of place and scared about going places and doing things. And all of that was because I was going to be doing it in French. And I have traveled to a lot of places where I don't speak the language at all, like not even close, and in those places I'm fine.

So it's not like oh, we go from super confident in English to sort of confident in a language that I sort of speak, to zero confidence in a language I don't speak at all. It's not linear like that. In fact, when I don't speak the language at all, I'm not nervous or insecure because my thought when I don't speak the language at all is just well, the only way we can possibly communicate is if this person speaks English so I hope they do. That's it.

Whereas in Paris, my thoughts are different. So I'm actually like, totally confident in English, I feel okay if I don't speak the language at all, and then I'm insecure if I speak the language but not fluently. And the difference is my thoughts.

So in Paris my thoughts were, "I should be able to have this interaction in French," and notice how should is in there. Always a bad sign. "People won't understand me, people will judge my French, people will think my accent is bad, I won't be able to communicate clearly."

So this experience showed me a couple of things. Number one, of course, it's always true, your thoughts create your confidence, which I knew before I went but I've gotten used to thinking of myself as a confident person. But the truth is like anyone else, I'm only confident when I am thinking thoughts that create confidence.

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

UFYB 64: How to Believe Harder

And it was just a reminder to me of why I don't teach that we have immutable personality traits. Am I a confident person? Yes, when I'm thinking thoughts that create confidence. When I'm thinking other thoughts that don't create confidence, if I don't think those thoughts or I think other thoughts that create insecurity, then I'm not a confident person. It all depends on what I'm thinking.

And it also showed me something specific about my confidence, which is that I have subconsciously based it in part on being able to communicate. So part of my confidence comes from believing that I can communicate, I can advocate for myself, I can understand what's going on around me, and I can demonstrate that understanding.

And in English, I believe when I'm speaking English that other people can hear and understand that I'm competent and know what I'm doing, even though of course I have no idea what they actually think. But in French, I don't believe that I'm communicating that and so I feel insecure and I feel tongue-tied, which again, is fascinating because of course I have no idea what people are thinking about me in either country and I can't control what other people think about me in any language.

So I definitely had to do some self-coaching while I was in Paris and come up with some new thoughts to think on purpose. So I practiced thoughts like, "It's brave of me to travel alone and try to communicate in a language I don't speak fluently," or, "A taxi driver doesn't have to know I'm brilliant to get me where I want to go," or, "The only way I'll get better at French is to practice it," or, "When people respond to my French in English, it's because of their own thoughts. They might be thinking they want to practice their English or show me that they know it rather than thinking that my French is bad."

And the thought you can always use all the time, "The worst thing that can happen is a feeling of shame and I can handle feeling shame." So I'm

UFYB 64: How to Believe Harder

telling you this story because what I want to teach you about today is how to believe harder. And this story is an example of me practicing believing harder.

I had a set of beliefs that were working well for me to produce confidence, but then when I transported them to another context, I had a whole new set of thoughts that I had to deal with. And really, it was an old set of thoughts that I had kind of put on the back burner. I have actually had this problem every time I go to Paris, but this was my first trip alone in a few years where I really had the brain space and time to work on it.

And the reason that I wanted to talk today about believing harder is what I see happening with thought work often is that people come up with a new thought they want to believe, they think it once, and then they want that to work like magic. So yesterday I taught the Unf*ck Your Body Image master class, which was amazing. We had so much fun.

And if you missed it, you actually can still get ahold of it if you go to www.unfckyourbrain.com/bodyimageclass. You can actually sign up to get the recording and the workbook. There's a bonus workbook and there's a bonus video where I answer questions like a Q&A. So if you're upset that you missed it you can actually still totally take advantage.

But the point it I coached a few people live on it and one of the things I noticed was that several of them were already working on new thoughts from listening to the podcast and they were practicing what I teach, but their problem was that they weren't believing them hard enough.

And so that really told me that I needed to teach you guys and talk to you about believing harder. How to believe new things and believing harder. And I see three main mistakes in thought work when people are not believing hard enough.

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

UFYB 64: How to Believe Harder

So the first is that we expect that we can think a new thought once and then angels and unicorns will appear and heaven will open and music and light will shine down and everything will change. But that is not how it works. First of all, when you come up with a new thought to practice, it doesn't make your old thoughts go away.

So I think sometimes we think it should be like a scene in a movie wedding where the priest says, "If anyone knows why these two should not be joined in holy matrimony, speak now or forever hold your peace," it's like we have the new thought and we're like okay, any objections, brain?

And we think only if our brain is quiet and has no other thoughts, is that a good thought to work that. That is not how this shit works. This is not how any of this works. You have to work at thinking your new thought and focusing on it. It takes effort. Your brain of course is going to have a million things to say and objections and other thoughts it wants you to think.

Your brain is never just going to be like, nope, no objections, go ahead and get married. You have to focus on practicing the new thought, and it takes work. The thought will not do the work for you. You have to do the work to think the thought. You have to practice focusing on that thought and repeating it to yourself.

Because if you don't do that, you are making the second big mistake I see, which I call making out with your old thoughts. So this is what I mean by that. You come up with a new thought that feels a little bit better than your old thought, and then you think that new thought once and then your brain has objections and then you make out with those objections.

That's what I call it when a negative thought comes up or an objection comes up and we swivel around and we're like, "Great point, brain, let me think about that a whole bunch, let me think about that negative thought." So I call that making out with the thought.

UFYB 64: How to Believe Harder

Think of thought work like you're on a date. You're on a date with a nice stable person and you're having pleasant conversation. It takes some work to get to know someone new, it might feel a little awkward, and then your ex saunters into the bar, and they're like the worst kind of ex.

They aren't nice to you, they don't return your texts, they eat all your food, they leave crumbs in your bed, they slept with your sister, whatever, they're terrible. But they're familiar, and being with someone familiar feels easy and it feels comfortable. So you run off and make out with them and you leave your nice new, slightly awkward but much better for you date all alone.

Now, notice this is not the same as resisting the old thoughts. When your ex walks into the bar, you don't start screaming. I'm not saying you should start screaming, "Oh my god, get out of here, how dare you, you know you shouldn't be here, things are going wrong," and then barricade the door with chairs and throw a smoke bomb. That's actually just making out with a negative thought in a different way.

You're still focusing on the negative thought or the ex-partner instead of focusing on your nice new date who you're still getting to know. So when you practice a new thought, old thoughts will come up. The first mistake is thinking that they won't, and then the second mistake is when they do, turning around and making out with them instead of allowing them to be there, like your ex can be in the bar, they're going to be in the corner doing something else, and you're going to focus on your nice new date who's in front of you.

Old thoughts come up, it's normal, and your job is to practicing focusing on the new thought. And then the third mistake I really see people make is expecting this to be easy or comfortable or feel natural. Hey, it's not. It's going to feel super awkward and weird and uncomfortable.

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

UFYB 64: How to Believe Harder

Think about if you never workout and then you try to attend CrossFit or a belly dancing class. Your body is going to be like what the fuck is happening? You're not going to be good at it. It's going to be awkward and uncomfortable and clumsy and it might hurt and you're going to want to tap out four seconds into it, and thought work is the same.

You have to really commit to working on believing. You cannot just think a thought every few days and hope that it takes. That's not how it works. You have to be willing for it to be messy and hard, and honestly, sometimes not see a lot of result right away.

Believing is hard work and most of us are not believing hard enough. It isn't easy. If it is easy right away, you are probably just pretending to believe and not really learning how. There's a big difference between pretending to believe something you don't believe, which that's just pointless, and working hard at believing something that you can believe, but that hasn't become your default belief yet.

That's where the work and the practice is. Practicing believing a thought that feels - it's like a baby deer that's just born and is like, super fragile on its little spindly legs, it could be knocked over very easily. It's very susceptible to being eaten. It's very easy to catch prey. It's like a fragile new awareness, and you have to practice nurturing that awareness and strengthening it.

You have to practice believing that thought. It is not enough to just come up with a thought and think it once and then want the thought to do the work for you. The thought is just the tool. You have to do the work.

It takes patience and practice and commitment. It is not infrequent that my clients will come to me or people write into the podcast and they'll say I don't know what happened, this thought, it was working and now it's not, it just stopped working.

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

UFYB 64: How to Believe Harder

And I know what that means is that they stopped working. What they're really saying, even though they don't know it is I stopped working. I stopped working on believing this thought. I stopped practicing this thought. I stopped practicing it ahead of time, I stopped practicing it when I needed to. I stopped working on this thought and now I'm blaming the thought for not working.

The thoughts will not do the work for you. The thought is the tool. You are in charge of it, you have to practice it. It's so easy to just tell ourselves what we believe is just so much easier to believe and it's so hard to believe new thoughts. It's supposed to be hard. What else are you doing with your life?

Honestly, for all of us, there's nothing better you can be doing than practicing believing new things and you have to be willing to believe harder. It's going to be uncomfortable, it's going to be messy, you're not going to be good at it right away, it's not going to feel great, it's going to feel very tenuous at first. That's what it's supposed to be like.

If it feels easy, you're doing it wrong. I'm not saying you can't ever have shifts in awareness that do feel like a beautiful magical gift. That does happen, but if you tell yourself that you totally believe something and yet you're not creating that in your life, then you're lying to yourself. You don't believe it. It shouldn't feel easy.

Believing new things on purpose is work. It's going to feel like work. That's the good news. Because the good news is if it feels terrible sometimes, you're doing it right.

So that is what I want to recommend to you all as your goal for 2019, my chickens, for myself as well. Believe harder. Be willing to believe the things that are like a stretch to believe, that you can only barely believe. Be willing to believe those things and be willing to practice and practice until you truly believe them. That shit will change your life.

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

UFYB 64: How to Believe Harder

Alright, have a beautiful week my dears, and I'll talk to you 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.