

UFYB 78: Resisting V. Allowing Negative Emotion



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

Hello my chickens. How are you all? So before I get going, I have to ask you a very important question. Have you joined The Clutch yet? If you have been snoozing on the podcast news or you've been jumping around and you missed it, The Clutch is a brand-new thought work party, let's call it that, that I've just opened up.

It's the online home for all you podcast chickens where you can get bonus listener Q&A episodes every week and podcast discussion questions workbook every week, a live coaching call every month, there's lots of bonus self-coaching resources in there, including you start off with a five-week self-coaching shortcut course, which teaches you the self-coaching shortcut, the basic coaching model you can use on anything.

And of course, tons of support from your fellow chickens and there are some Clutch coaches in there to help you work through your self-coaching questions and I'm hanging out in there too of course. It's the best place online basically, and it's less than most people spend on coffee and booze every month, and a way better way to spend your money.

Well, coffee is crucial, but it definitely will feel better than booze. Darwin agrees, as you just heard my cat. So, one of the reasons people come to The Clutch and to the podcast is because they are experiencing a lot of negative emotion. They're unhappy, to put it simply, in one way or another.

Maybe not overall or all the time, but they're experiencing more anxiety or insecurity or fear or guilt or shame or confusion than they want to have in their lives. And that's why today, I want to talk about a crucial distinction in

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dealing with uncomfortable emotions, and that is the difference between resisting and allowing.

And this is something I've been kind of working on in my self-coaching recently at a deeper level, so it's really been on my mind. So I've been doing a lot of deep self-coaching on my thoughts about romantic relationships recently. I've been talking about it over in The Clutch.

I can't sort of get into all the details here but the basic situation is that it's an area that I've done a lot of work and I'd made a lot of progress, but I realized recently that I had sort of plateaued. This is something I talked about in the podcast I did on the top three lessons that I learned this year.

I've been talking a lot recently about thought work plateaus, how to know when your thought work has gotten you to a certain point, but now you're kind of stuck and you don't even see it. And so the thoughts that have gotten me to that thought work plateau had really worked for a while, especially because I was in a long-term relationship for the last five years before recently.

But now that I'm not anymore, all sorts of thoughts and feelings were getting stirred up. Of course, things changed, my brain changed. So I've been doing thought work on it, I've been working on it, but especially recently, I was still feeling quite a lot of anxiety and having a lot of ruminating thoughts about it.

And over this weekend, I realized that my biggest problem wasn't the anxiety or the thoughts. It was my belief that they should not be happening. So I was making the anxiety and repetitive thoughts mean that something had gone wrong. They shouldn't be there, I hadn't gotten to the right place in my self-coaching, I was missing something, I wasn't doing it right, I needed someone else to tell me how to do it right.

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And I realized that I subconsciously believed that if I was on the right track, I would feel totally fine and calm. So I kept turning it over and over in my mind, trying to think my way to the place where I would feel totally calm and certain and not have any doubts.

But then I was driving home, I had actually gotten a massage, which I get a ton of good ideas during body work. The body and the mind are so connected. And I realized, oh my god, of course, I'm making this elementary mistake here.

I'm trying to up-level my thinking in this area and do things a different way, so it's supposed to feel like I'm dying. I should feel crazy right now. This is totally normal. I learned this lesson really thoroughly in my business and I apply it there all the time.

I expect that any time I do something new in my business, I'm probably going to feel like I'm dying, and my brain is going to lose its shit with objections and fears and anxieties. But that never derails me in my business, my professional life because I just have decided ahead of time that's fine. I don't make it mean anything.

I choose my path, I choose what I'm going to do, and then I just know my brain is going to be like a fussy, colicky baby that cries all the time. So when that happens, I don't make it mean anything. I'm just like, oh, hey brain, what's up? Right on time with a feeling like dying. Great.

When I decided to launch The Clutch and it was this new big thing and a whole different format and of course my brain had a million things to say, but I never made those mean that maybe I made the wrong choice or I didn't understand how to coach myself or I wasn't doing it right or things should be different because in my business life, I have really internalized the idea that I'm going to have a lot of doubts and feel kind of nuts and my

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brain is going to try to kill me sometimes and that's totally fine, nothing's gone wrong, and I just stick on my path.

And so I realized that I had to extend that to this other area of my life. I'm trying to evolve my thoughts and feelings and actions and results in a new direction in my love life. And you know, this work always goes deeper and deeper. I talked about actually in the podcast about my three lessons from the year, I'd done a ton of work and my love life was in a great place and my thoughts about that were in a great place.

There was nothing wrong at all with where I was, but I still want to take that work deeper and get to know myself on a deeper level and create something new and different for myself. So I'm still trying to level up with my work there, even though it's not - when I started this work it was going from being unhappily single to having a partner, feeling okay about myself, whether I had a partner or not.

And that's all accomplished, so it's a deeper level of work I'm doing, but the same principle applies. If I'm trying to level up with my work in any area, my brain is going to lose its shit. And that doesn't mean something's wrong with where I am now. Just means that I'm trying to blow my mind by evolving to a whole other level of thought about this area, whatever it is, and so of course the lizard brain is just going to like, start lizarding.

Of course my brain is freaking out, of course it's creating all sorts of anxiety and doubt and confusion and despair for me. My brain does not want to leave the cave. It doesn't want to spend the energy changing. Your brain basically thinks that if it spends five cents of energy throwing a tantrum, you won't make it spend a dollar of energy actually changing things. So it thinks we should keep the energy.

So here's what's magic; the moment that I accepted that I was going to possibly feel insane and terrible for a while, while I did this work and that

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that was totally fine and it didn't mean anything, all of that negative emotion vanished. I swear to god, it was like a fucking magic trick. It's 24 hours later now, I haven't had a single anxious thought about it since.

Now, this is like, pro level stuff. I've been doing this work for a while and it's my job. I coach myself more every day than probably anyone in the world. So I'm not telling you that accepting your negative emotion means that it will always disappear like that. I've been doing this work for a long time, I really learned this lesson in one area of my life already, and so it was more just like, realizing that that same lesson applied here.

If you're learning this lesson for the first time, it's not going to disappear overnight. But it still will make a big difference. So when I did first learn this lesson in my business, my negative emotion did not disappear overnight the way it did this time, but it did feel about 50% better immediately, even then when I was first learning it, to stop resisting or making meaning of my negative emotion.

So what I just described is the difference between resisting and allowing, or the difference between having a story about what your negative emotion means and just accepting that wherever you are is exactly how it should be. Because before I had this realization, I was really kind of in misery. That's a strong word but I was suffering because I was in resistance.

I was feeling anxious and I didn't want to and I thought it meant something had gone wrong. So I was feeling all over the place and resisting all of that. And as soon as I was willing to feel uncomfortable and I stopped thinking that I shouldn't feel uncomfortable, as soon as I stopped thinking that things should feel any different than they did, that misery, that suffering really went away.

I was thinking about what would be a good metaphor for this and this one is so random but this is what came to mind. Think about if you've ever gotten

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the chain for a necklace tangled. When you get frustrated and you just pull on it randomly, trying to make it untangle itself magically, you actually just make it tighter and you get even more frustrated.

When you release that tension, you let the knot go slack, you can usually separate the pieces a little bit and get it untangled. Or the other thing my brain offered was imagine the difference between trying to get a cat that hates the carrier into the carrier, versus a cat that's willing to go in. If you have a cat, you know the first one is lethal.

Allowing is what negative emotion feels like when you're willing to accept and tolerate it. It doesn't feel amazing. It's not as good as an orgasm and an ice cream sundae, I'm not going to lie to you. It probably won't immediately go away most of the time, but it's completely tolerable.

You can go about your day with it. It feels like a headache or some other small discomfort that you endure without having a lot of drama about it, without resisting. Resistance is what happens when you believe all of your thoughts and you resist all of your feelings.

It's like the volume button on your emotions get stuck at way too loud, and then all that misery and suffering comes from believing that your negative feelings mean something has gone wrong. Believing something intolerable is happening and needs to change.

And here's why this distinction is so important. Your brain has kind of this Catch-22 about negative emotion, which is that you - if you are like most people who haven't done this work with me or with another coach who teaches this - you've only ever experienced resistance. So when I say I want you to practice allowing and accepting negative emotion, your brain thinks I'm saying hey, you already feel terrible and I want you to feel even worse.

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That's what your brain thinks because your brain thinks negative emotions are suffering. And what your brain thinks that experience is is the experience of resisting the feelings. It's the only experience you've ever had. So it's like if you ate strawberries and you were allergic to them, your only experience of eating strawberries would be the allergy.

And so if I said to you hey, I have a trick where you can eat strawberries and not be allergic to them, what your brain hears is oh my god, you want me to eat more strawberries and be more allergic? Your brain only has the experience of the allergic reaction. So it can't even contemplate that there's a way of eating strawberries that doesn't feel like that.

Because in fact, what I'm saying is be willing to allow them and it's going to feel totally different. You're not going to be allergic. The volume button is not going to be at 15. It's going to be at five. But because you've never experienced it, you don't actually know what that's going to feel like and your brain thinks that it's going to feel awful.

But you really have no idea, you have no idea how bad or not bad it will even be because you've never done it. So when you fear having or allowing your negative emotion, it's because you're anticipating just having more of the experience of resisting it. That's the only experience of negative emotion you have.

So my clients struggle with this. I often tell them to practice believing that it's possible they don't even know what allowing a negative emotion would feel like. And that opens them up to the possibility that they don't actually know what would be so terrible about allowing negative emotion.

And it's interesting because I'm kind of famous for teaching a very concrete kind of thought work with a lot of focus on baby steps. That's kind of my jam, that's like my signature. Really concrete, small baby steps for skeptical brains. Probably that plus the feminism. Those are my two things.

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And this technique is a baby step, so it's totally in keeping with that. But every kind of thought work is a tiny leap of faith also. You have to be willing to believe that you might be wrong. You have to be willing to entertain the idea that you can have a negative emotion and fully experience it and not die.

And you have to believe your brain may be wrong when it predicts this doom that you're going to experience if you actually allow your emotion to pass through you. So that's my invitation to you this week, chickens. I want you to take that tiny leap of faith. Be willing to be wrong about what it would feel like, to allow negative emotion.

And if you want support or techniques or advice for doing this, you should definitely join The Clutch. Because the first thing that happens when you join is you get this five-week course called the self-coaching shortcut and the first week is all about how to allow and experience your emotions.

So if you want to check that out, it's www.unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch, or just check the show notes. Whether you do it in The Clutch, you do it on your own, obviously, think doing it in The Clutch is a little bit of a faster track, but you can totally practice this on your own. Either way, it's life-changing stuff, so give it a try. Blow your own mind a little bit. 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.karaloewentheil.com/podcastconfidence.