

## UFYB 88: Complaining



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Kara Loewentheil**

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## UFYB 88: Complaining

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 today? Are you feeling amazing? If you think you are not feeling amazing, if you think the world is not amazing, I want you to get it out of your system right now because today we are going to talk about complaining.

And I love this topic because it's really deceptively simple. Most of us think that we don't like complainers. We talk about how other people are so negative or they have such bad attitudes. We've all done that, whether we're talking about a coworker or a friend or a family member. But guess what we are doing when we do that? We are being negative and having a bad attitude.

Complaining is something we all claim to dislike in other people but most of us are complaining all the time. Now, sometimes we know we're complaining. When we say things like I hate my job, there's just no one good to date, just feeling really discouraged, my partner doesn't help enough around the house, my kids are so messy, my parents don't support me.

We think these are facts for sure. We don't realize they're optional thoughts, but we do realize we're describing things that we think are negative. But often, we don't even realize when we're complaining because a lot of time when we are complaining, we think we're just stating facts, like the weather is gross today. I have a ton of work to do. That person is out of touch. Another date ghosted me. My Facebook ad funnel isn't working.

We don't think we're complaining because we think we're just describing things that are true and justified. I actually was hanging out with a coach

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friend, a friend who's also a coach - not the other week really, couple weeks ago. And I said something to her about complaining, that she was complaining, and she said, "No, I don't complain. I'm negative but I don't complain."

When I said I don't think there's a difference, what do you think the difference is? She couldn't come up with one because there isn't one. When you're indulging in your negative thoughts and you're voicing them to yourself or others, you are complaining. I think we kind of delude ourselves sometimes because the word complaining sounds sort of trivial, like it's not a big deal.

So we think if we're talking about something big and important, it's not complaining. Like if I say I have some kind of illness, like I have Lyme disease or my partner cheated on me, or my mother never loved me. Those are not my thoughts, just to be clear. But if we have those thoughts, we don't think those are complaints because we believe our own thoughts and we think they are very serious, and we think complaining is trivial.

So I think we hide from ourselves a lot of different ways that we're complaining. If it seems like it's just a fact we're stating, if it's a big important thing. But if you're thinking or expressing a negative opinion, you are complaining. Now, I'm not saying that you shouldn't complain. You get to decide what to think. It's always up to you. If you want to complain, you can.

But I think it's really powerful to start paying attention to how often you complain because when you do, you're going to realize that you are complaining all the fucking time. Seriously. All the time. Most of what your unmanaged mind thinks, most of the thoughts you come up with unintentionally are complaints because your brain, especially your lizard brain, what we call the primitive part of your brain thinks its main job is to point out to you everything that's wrong.

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Anything that could potentially be a threat. And that means a threat to your emotional or physical health. So your brain basically is constantly looking for what's wrong and should be different. So why is this a problem? First of all, it just doesn't feel great. When you complain, you're basically whining, and whining feels like whining. It's unpleasant to listen to. When somebody else whines, it's unpleasant to listen to.

Same is true for yourself. It feels kind of depressing and grimy and needling and annoying even when you're doing it to yourself. Just imagine how it feels when you're around kids who are whining. The second problem with whining is that it just teaches your brain over and over to look for and focus on what's negative - what you think is negative. It's not actually negative.

Your brain gets into complaining loops and habits, and then cognitive bias kicks in and you just see more and more of whatever you're complaining about. And third and maybe most insidious I think because it's so subtle, complaining involves a heavy dose of self-pity. Complaining is like the gateway drug to full on victim mode.

When we are complaining, we're really thinking poor me, I don't deserve this, everything would be better if this thing was different. I don't like the way things are. Byron Katie always says when you argue with reality, you lose, but only 100% of the time. Complaining is arguing with reality. Feels terrible.

And I think sometimes we also delude ourselves because in the moment, complaining can feel good for a minute. It feels like "venting" and if we can get someone else to agree with us, then we're validated. But ultimately, it doesn't feel good. If you notice how you feel physically, energetically after you've done a lot of complaining, you usually feel physically pretty low, like the energy's kind of been sucked out of you because you've just been producing irritation or frustration or annoyance or sadness or self-pity like all these negative emotions in your body from complaining in your brain.

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And so that's why I think self-pity is so insidious. And it's very different from self-kindness or compassion. We were just having a really interesting discussion about this in The Clutch the other day and I sort of - we were nerding out over the thought work, which is my favorite because I am a thought work nerd. This is what I like to talk and think about all day.

But the difference boils down to whether the emotion feels kind, whether it feels nice, or whether it feels sad. Self-pity is sad. Feels sad, and complaining is on the way to self-pity. So I think there are a lot of good reasons to stop or reduce your complaining. It's a pointless use of energy. It primes your brain for negativity. It feels terrible to you, and it disempowers you. So there's really nothing good about it.

So the next obvious question is how do we stop. When I have a client that complains a lot, I like to prescribe a complaining diet. It's the only kind of diet I recommend. I'm going to teach it to you guys, and there's a reason this podcast is so short is that I don't want you to overcomplicate this or try to overthink it. I just want you to practice complaining less and see how that feels.

So here's how a complaining diet works. You just stop complaining. That's it. But it is way harder than it sounds. I would say that my ambitious clients think they're going to start out with 24 hours and they usually make it about seven minutes before they complain. Complaining is so second nature to us that it's actually quite challenging to stop.

So here are the rules. You don't complain. Not to yourself, not to other people, not to your journal, not to your cat. You don't complain about anything or anyone, including yourself. Self-critical thoughts or thoughts that you think are just facts about yourself that are negative are also complaining.

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Now obviously, you cannot stop a thought from coming into your mind. That's why I don't teach that thought work involves not thinking certain things because in order for your brain to see if you're thinking something or not, it has to think it. So we don't work on not thinking things. We work on thinking the things we want to think. We don't work on not thinking the things we don't.

So the complaining diet doesn't mean you can't have a negative thought for 24 hours or seven minutes. We can't prevent the original thought from coming up, especially because right now you've trained your brain to complain. But when the thought comes up, if you are doing a complaining diet, you just dismiss it. You don't engage it or indulge it. It's off limits.

It's like you see someone - you're walking with your partner and you see someone cute on the street and you're monogamous. You look at them, you might register they're cute, and then you're like, that's it. You don't run over and make out with them. You don't ruminate about how hot they were and what's the next chance you can try to jump up and make out with them.

You don't engage or indulge it. It's off limits. You just tell yourself, oh, we're not complaining today, or we're not complaining this hour. Whatever it is, and you move along. So the thought comes up and you're just like nope, we're not going to think that. Because here's the thing; here's what happens, you guys.

A negative thought, a complaint comes up, and then you engage it. So your brain might say oh, my boss is so annoying. And if you are not paying attention, what you do is you start having a conversation about that with your brain. You're like oh yeah, he is so annoying. Here's this annoying thing he did today, and that annoying thing he did yesterday and the week before, and remember that time we talked to Brad about how annoying he was. That was also annoying.

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You engage the thought, you make out with it, you sort of - sometimes I think it's like often we've had a sequence of thoughts that all go together. So we press play and then we watch the movie. Or we hear the audio of all those thoughts. So the thought may come up that your boss is annoying, but if you're trying this complaining diet, you just see it and you're like oh, we're not doing that. What am I thinking about instead? You don't engage with it.

You definitely do not voice it to someone else or text it to someone else, or write it down, even if it's on a hidden Post-It note that you are just fondling under your desk. No complaint fondling. So when you start trying this, you are going to fail almost immediately. That's okay. It took me a long time to work up to 24 hours without complaining.

The good news is it's a very cheap endurance sport that you can start at any time. It's free. So if you set out to not complain for an hour and you make it for six minutes, that's fine. You just start again. Remember, it's not whether a complaint comes up in your brain. Thoughts arise, we can't control their first appearance. We can over time reduce it by creating new neural circuits, but we can't push it away or control whether it floats up.

It's whether you wave the thought along or you stop and engage with it and have a whole conversation with it and think more about it and find more evidence for it. If you say it out loud, definitely a restart, right? So that's your homework for the week. If you find it really challenging, you are not alone. It's totally normal.

And learning how to manage your mind is really what changes the default patterns of your brain from complaining all the time, from negative to positive. That's what we are doing in The Clutch. It really takes consistent accountability and support to rewire your brain. So I want you to come join us. We're going to be working on how to stop complaining for the next week.

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If you join today, which is July 4th, you will get the complaining diet workbook that's going out to Clutch members tomorrow. It's [www.unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch](http://www.unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch), or just /88. It's the episode to the podcast and the link is in the show notes. It's July 4th, so let's liberate our minds together and let's liberate ourselves from complaining. I'll talk to you guys next week.

If you're loving what you're learning in the podcast, you have got to come check out The Clutch. The Clutch is the podcast community for all things *Unf\*ck Your Brain*. It's where you can get individual help applying the concepts to your own life.

It's where you can learn new coaching tools not shared on the podcast that will blow your mind even more, and it's where you can hang out and connect over all things thought work with other podcast chickens just like you and me. It's my favorite place on earth and it will change your life, I guarantee it. Come join us at [www.unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch](http://www.unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch). It's [unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch](http://www.unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch). I can't wait to see you there.