

UFYB 97: Unconscious Commitments



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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? I wish you could see me. I'm sitting literally with my hands under my legs because my podcast producer told me I keep hitting my desk. Someday when I move someplace that is not Manhattan, maybe I will have my own little podcast studio. I'm sure Oprah doesn't record in her apartment. I'm sure Oprah doesn't have an apartment.

Okay, I'm a little punchy. You can tell. I have just been working on the finishing touches on the planning for Clutch College, which is the first live event that I'm hosting for The Clutch. So much fun. I've done retreats in the past, some of you have been to them, where we coach but we also do kind of vacation, tourism stuff which is totally fun.

But this is going to be three full days of thought work immersion. I'm so excited to teach and coach and go deep with some of you. I have to say, it really relates to actually the topic of the podcast today. It's been so interesting to create The Clutch and watch the process of how people learn and engage with thought work on a bigger scale.

I think that because *Unf*ck Your Brain*, which was my small group program, the last group is going through it now, because it was smaller, there's more kind of hand-holding and leading people along. And there's totally a place for that. It's amazing to get to work with people that closely and intimately, and that's one of the reasons I'm doing this live event, and I'm sure in the future I will have other ways of doing that.

But one of the kind of beautiful things about The Clutch is that while obviously I'm there and The Clutch coaches are there, my team is there,

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and everyone is there to support each other and teach and coach and help you, it also really requires you to commit to yourself. We're coming up on about five months now since The Clutch launched and of course, people have quit along the way.

But it's so amazing to see that the women who have committed and stuck with it and continue to show up for themselves are seeing such dramatic change. I think it is kind of a timing thing. One of the reasons that *Unf*ck Your Brain* was six months is that I think that of course, when you start managing your mind and a lot of you have had huge success just from the podcast, I get messages all the time.

So of course things happen faster than this, you can make progress right away, but I do think that around four to five months is kind of when your brain just starts to coach itself. And that's really one of the reasons *Unf*ck Your Brain* was six months long, that my group coaching was because when I did the original group, it was three months or four months I think, and when we got to month three, I was like, they are not ready. This was not enough time.

And I actually offered to extend it by a month and I think all but one person agreed because everybody felt the same way. Like, it was not quite enough. But then we got to five, six months, people were like, yeah okay, I think I got this. Obviously, some people really love thought work and want to keep exploring and keep expanding their life and keep growing. There's always more work to do.

Like, to me, obviously it's my favorite thing to do and I have a lot of clients who went through *Unf*ck Your Brain* that worked with me one-on-one who are now in The Clutch because they want to keep doing the work. But the point is just sort of around four to five months I think is one of the big turning points where your brain starts to coach itself.

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It's just been amazing to watch and I'm so proud of the women who have stuck with that because I really think that what success comes down to in any area of your life, but how you show up to thought work is how you show up to everything in your life. And I think that what success comes down to is the willingness to be uncomfortable.

I think about students of mine who quit or gave up on themselves, or who can't tolerate the discomfort of not doing it perfectly or not having a magic pill, or not being amazing at something right away or things not working the way they want them to immediately and I have so much love and empathy for them because I used to be that person. I know exactly what that feels like.

I cannot tell you guys how many things I signed up for, coaching or otherwise, and never did how many goals I set that I never met, how many plans I made that I failed at and then gave up on. I quit on myself so many fucking times before I discovered thought work that it just seemed like a way of life. Like I thought that was just the kind of person I was. Like I'm someone who starts and doesn't finish things. I'm someone who gives up on things.

But what I now know and what this version of thought work and coaching that I do taught me was the only reason I was quitting was because I didn't know that I was supposed to fail and feel uncomfortable. So it's like I would fail or feel uncomfortable and then my brain would say oh, that means it's not working.

Like there's a problem. Something has gone wrong. It's not supposed to be this way. And what I didn't realize is that failing and feeling horrible is a normal part of what it takes to succeed. It's like it's just a part of life sometimes and it's for sure a part of learning something new or succeeding at something new.

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So I really think what has changed in my life is being willing to be uncomfortable and stick with something. I learned that with thought work, then I learned that with my business. I'm learning that right now with running. Being willing for it to suck and not stop. Not make that mean it's going to suck forever, although honestly, even if it did suck forever, it might still be worth it.

Being willing to fail and not give up. I think that I used to quit as soon as I failed or noticed – thought I failed or thought something wasn't working. I just didn't question that thought. And even now, there are things in my life that I'm working on that I don't have figured out yet, that I'm still practicing, and I see that thought coming up again. I see my brain saying well, you tried a lot and you still haven't successfully done it so it's time to give up.

But I am not going to give up because I'm willing to keep failing as long as it takes to succeed. I'm willing to be uncomfortable. That is the secret to life. And what I'm going to teach you about today is going to help you understand why you sometimes have such a hard time achieving a goal or changing something about yourself and why that's so uncomfortable.

Now, let me be clear. Knowing why something is uncomfortable, I would say makes it 30% less terrible. But it's still uncomfortable. So I think sometimes you all are like, okay I understand, it's supposed to be uncomfortable, and then you think that means it won't be uncomfortable, and then when it is you freak out.

That not how it works. It's just you get a percentage reduction. It's still going to be uncomfortable. So that's why today I want to teach you about a concept that I call unconscious commitments. It's totally connected to our habit of quitting on ourselves and our unwillingness to feel uncomfortable. But I have to kind of lay some groundwork and then I will circle back to explain how it's all related.

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So I talk a lot on the podcast and in my teaching about how we learn to commit to things and see them through. So let's call those our conscious commitments. A conscious commitment – I feel like I'm like Gwyneth Paltrow who got made fun of for conscious uncoupling. I feel like that's what I'm saying right now.

So those are our conscious commitments. Conscious commitments are the commitments we make on purpose. So most of us are consciously committed to quite a few things in our lives, like we've consciously committed to not cheating on a spouse, or we've consciously committed to showing up every day at the job that we agreed to take.

Or if we have a hobby we do consistently, we're consciously committed to doing that. We make a lot of conscious commitments. Some of them we keep, and some of them we don't really keep, which I'm going to explain and come back to in a minute.

What we don't think about and what's driving most of our lives are our unconscious commitments. And it's a huge oversight because I think we have way more unconscious commitments than we have conscious commitments. So, some of these we would totally want to keep. Most of us are unconsciously committed to putting on clothes before we leave the house.

We never explicitly agreed to do that. We didn't sign on the dotted line. We didn't promise someone we would do it. At some point, we just learned that's what's supposed to happen. We unconsciously committed to it. Most of us are unconsciously committed to feeding ourselves enough to stay alive.

We never voted on it. We didn't promise it to someone. We just show with our actions that that's very important to us and that we will do almost whatever it takes to make that happen. And those are probably good

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commitments. It's probably safest for us to put on clothes when we leave the house and definitely if we want to stay alive, being unconsciously committed to eating food and drinking water so that we can stay alive is pretty important.

But we have other unconscious commitments that are not so harmless and I think actually can be quite harmful. So for instance, we have unconscious commitments to stories about ourselves. We may be unconsciously committed to believing that we are unlovable. We may be unconsciously committed to believing that we can't have what we want.

We may be unconsciously committed to believing that we don't have enough money and there isn't enough out there. We may be unconsciously committed to thinking that it's too hard to change or we're not able to change. We have a lot of thoughts that we have committed to unconsciously.

You never stopped and asked yourself well, is believing that I'm unlovable a good story that I want to commit to? Do I want to double down on this? Do I want to show up for this story every day of my life? You didn't ask that. You just unconsciously married yourself to it.

I think most of us are unconsciously committed to not feeling uncomfortable. That is a very important unconscious commitment for a lot of us. How do we know that? Because we'll do anything we can think of to avoid it. We'll eat when we're not hungry. We'll drink until we black out. We will spend money we don't have on stuff that we don't need. We will watch Netflix while scrolling our phone at the same time. We'll quit trying to do anything that's hard or that we're failing at.

We'll go to the gym a couple of times then we'll stop. We'll start doing thought work and then we'll stop. We'll start all these things we want to do, but as soon as we get uncomfortable, as soon as we start to feel like

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maybe I'm failing, maybe I'm not doing a good enough job, maybe this isn't working, as soon as we start to doubt and fear, we'll give up.

Because our misery is comfortable to us. We're more comfortable sticking to our unconscious commitment. We'd rather be committed to feeling comfortable, even if comfortable is kind of miserable. It's still familiar and the same and it doesn't require a lot of brain power, and we are used to it.

It's super important to understand and recognize these unconscious commitments because those unconscious commitments are the reason that you have trouble acting on your conscious commitments. I'm going to say that again. Those unconscious commitments you have that you're not aware of, those are the reason that you have trouble and struggle and fail and give up on your conscious commitments.

So if we are trying to stop drinking, let's say – this is always my example. Even though I'm not a stop drinking coach and I don't even drink that much but I feel like so many people do. It's so normalized. So if we're trying to stop drinking, we may berate ourselves for not being committed because we say we're going to drink less and then we don't follow through.

But what we don't see is that we are committed. We're just unconsciously committed to something else that is incompatible with our conscious commitment. So if you try to consciously commit to drinking less but you are unconsciously committed to never feeling lonely at night, to not being present with yourself when you feel that way, to not being uncomfortable that way, and alcohol is how you keep that commitment to not feel uncomfortable when you're alone in the house at night, your conscious commitment to try to stop drinking doesn't have a chance.

Because you're not even aware that you have this very powerful unconscious commitment, so you can't possibly change it. They can be changed once you know about them obviously, which I'm going to talk

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about in a minute. But if you don't know about that unconscious commitment you have, then of course you can't do something that pulls against it because you haven't been able to loosen its grip or break it down because you don't even know about it.

Let's say you're trying to focus and be more productive. You may have a conscious commitment to sticking to your schedule, but you also have an unconscious commitment to answering any text or email that comes along. And you're so committed to that practice that you will do it even at the expense of your own productivity.

How do we know? We know because you always do it. You know intellectually that constantly checking your phone, responding to texts, responding to emails all the time keeps you from getting stuff done. But you're unconsciously committed to doing that no matter what, usually to avoid whatever you'd feel if you didn't do it. And so making a calendar for your work does nothing because you haven't uncovered that unconscious commitment.

Those are really concrete, but I think they show up in really fascinating ways that aren't as direct also. So if you have a side business or a hustle or a coaching business, or whatever it is, you might have a conscious commitment to make a certain amount of revenue in your business.

But if you're unconsciously committed to never making more money than your parents did or not being rich because of what you think about rich people or what you think other people will think about you, or if you're unconsciously committed to the story that you're not good with money, if you're unconsciously committed to being in debt. A lot of people are unconsciously committed to being in debt.

That's why they will pay off their credit card and then just run it up again because they're unconsciously committed to being in debt. So their

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conscious commitment to get out of debt isn't strong enough to override that unconscious commitment when they don't know that it's there.

Your unconscious commitments usually take priority over your conscious commitments because they're unconscious. They've been around longer so right now, they're stronger and because they're unconscious, you don't even understand what's happening. You just feel like you are acting against your own intentions or that you have no willpower or no self-control.

You just think about it this way. If you set a conscious commitment and there was nothing pulling against it in the other direction, there wouldn't be any resistance. It's like resistance is like drag. If you're trying to sail one way and there wasn't an anchor pulling you the other way, there wouldn't be any resistance.

It's only when you have an unconscious commitment that's creating drag that a conscious commitment becomes hard to implement. So some of our unconscious commitments I think are just kind of products of evolution. Many of us have an unconscious commitment not to expend energy that we might need later to run away or have sex or find something to eat.

So if you consciously commit to going in the gym without understanding this unconscious commitment that will keep you on the couch, it's going to seem like an uphill battle. And then I think some of our unconscious commitments are stories about ourselves. If you consciously commit to dating to find a partner or you're unconsciously committed to your story that you're unlovable, there's no way you'll find a partner.

The important thing to understand in addition to just understanding that unconscious commitments exist and why it's important to see them is that an unconscious commitment does not evaporate the minute it becomes conscious. That's just when the work starts. So recognizing an unconscious commitment is when you can begin to change your commitment levels.

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When you find one, it's like 100% committed to the unconscious commitment and you're zero percent committed to the new conscious commitment. Once you see that, that's when you can start working on adjusting those levels.

If you're trying to build a business or a side hustle but you're unconsciously committed to believing it's too hard or feeling too busy, that unconscious commitment is going to be holding down the scale whenever you try to work on your business.

So you have to recognize that unconscious commitment and then you have to start work on shifting those thought patterns. Most people I think live their entire lives based mostly on their unconscious commitments. They are unconsciously committed to playing small. They are unconsciously committed to not drawing attention to themselves.

They're unconsciously committed to not believing in themselves. They're unconsciously committed to answering any urge they have. They're unconsciously committed to never feeling uncomfortable. They're unconsciously committed to trying to control everyone else's thoughts and feelings.

So many of us are unconsciously committed to believing the worst about ourselves. How many of you listening have that unconscious commitment, that whatever you could believe about yourself, you'll always pick the worst thing? Most of you, I would bet.

And some of us are unconsciously committed to believing the worst about other people too; some of us in general and then some of us with one particular person. I see this all the time with our relationship with our parents or our partners or our siblings. We are unconsciously committed to believing the worst about that person. We're unconsciously committed to taking anything they do as evidence of our worst belief about them.

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I think a lot of us are unconsciously committed to being comfortable and believing we can't change. Even though it's so painful to believe we can't change, it's still comfortable because we're used to it. That's why I know right when a student or a follower or client quits on this work on themselves, it's not because there's something wrong with them. It's not a failure of willpower or character. It's just that they don't know that they are more unconsciously committed to their suffering and their story than it has to be that way than they are consciously committed to their possibility and their growth.

I was out at the beach recently with my extended family and one of my relatives, who is a coaching skeptic, let's say, said to me, "Well these benefits that your clients are getting, those are all self-reported, aren't they?" It just made me laugh so much because, like, of course, it's your experience of life, it's your self-reporting that matters, more than any blood test or anything you can measure in a lab or anything that can get peer reviewed in JAMA – although there was just an article peer reviewed in JAMA showing that coaching was effective, actually, but that's beside the point.

Thought work and life coaching are all about uncovering our unconscious commitments so that we can actually achieve our conscious ones. So just imagine what it would be like if, when you set a new goal, when you made a conscious commitment, you actually could trust yourself to follow through on it, which does not mean that you could trust yourself to do it perfectly and never fail at it.

It means you could consciously trust yourself to not give up. I just had this come up with me with myself for something in my life where I was trying to plan something every day and keep to the plan. It was not my work that I had done. It was some other areas of my life.

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And I would say 70% of days, I was able to make a plan, and I followed that plan almost never all the way. I always followed it some, but never all the way. And after about three weeks of this, I noticed that I was about to stop and give up.

I was like, well, I tried this technique, it just doesn't work. And thankfully, I've been doing this long enough that I was like, "Wait a minute, no, no, no, this is when you keep going." Of course, it hasn't worked yet, really meaning I haven't done it yet. That's not a reason to stop. That's a reason to keep going.

If I just keep going and don't make this mean anything then I don't have a problem. In that moment, I had to really see I'm unconsciously committed to the idea that if this were, quote en quote, going to work, it would have already, or that it should work in some period of time that I had made up.

And so I had to consciously commit to the idea, this is exactly what's supposed to happen, I just have to keep trying. The reason that you are not able right now to make and keep conscious commitments to yourself is not that there's anything wrong with you. It's because you're only seeing one half of the picture.

You're only looking at your conscious commitments and seeing that you sometimes don't keep them. But you have to learn to look at your unconscious commitments too with curiosity, not judgment. So you have to get curious and ask yourself, what am I unconsciously committed to?

It's like, right now for me right now, I notice I am unconsciously committed to being physically comfortable and not expending energy in the moment, more than I am consciously committed to moving. So I've talked a lot on the podcast about having hyper mobility and some chronic pain, and so overall, I always feel better the next day or later that day of I move my body.

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But the moving of my body is painful. So in the moment, it hurts, although afterwards I get a lot longer without pain. And what I notice is that I am unconsciously committed to not experiencing that discomfort and I am more committed to that than I am to doing what's best for my comfort overall, or what the me of later today or the me of tomorrow will think. A lot of us are way more committed to acting on the whims of us today than we are to what we want to consciously commit to create for our future.

So get curious with yourself about your unconscious commitments. Try to be fascinated by what you find instead of judgmental, okay. Always try to be curious. Be willing to be curious. If you want help figuring out what your unconscious commitments are and how they're holding you back, I want you to come join The Clutch so I can help you with that. It's www.unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch.

And I think we probably have a few seats left for Clutch College, which is our live event in November. But you have to be a member of The Clutch to attend. So if you've been wanting to attend a live event with me, be able to work with me more in depth, you need to be in The Clutch, unless you are already my client in some other program, because I want us all having the same set of basic tools.

I don't want anyone to show up at the event not knowing the basics. But if you join The Clutch now, you will be ready for the event just in time and whenever this comes out – I think this is coming out in a few weeks from when we're recording – we'll probably have a few seats left. And if not, there will be another event soon.

Alright, I am consciously committed to making it a life-changing three days. I can't wait for all of you who are constantly committed to transformation to come. And for all of you, I will talk to you next week.

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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. It's unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch. I can't wait to see you there.