

UFYB 106: Listener Q&A Vol. 16



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. So I got so many good questions last week when I did the listener Q&A that we're going to do another one this week. I just got back from my Photo Confidence retreat in Nashville, which was amazing. We had nine coaches and teachers. One person was a yoga teacher, so not all coaches, but people who are running businesses with an online component and who are kind of hiding, not putting themselves out there.

And we did a lot of work on how being scared to show up in our business is similar to being scared to show up the way we look and have photos of ourselves and put those out there and let people get to know us that way. And it was an amazing weekend.

One of my photographers who came has only been to other people's coaching retreats. She's never been to one of mine, and we had our opening kind of circle on Friday night and we got right into it, straight for the thoughts. A couple people may have cried and - not because I'm mean. Just because coaching brings up a lot.

And afterwards, she was like, wow, this is not like other retreats I've been on. You really go for it. And I was like, yeah, that's what we do here. I'm not here to hold your hand and validate you and cheerlead you. I'm here to fucking coach you and you're going to show up and bring - commit your time and your money and your resources and your energy, I'm going to show up and coach you, and that might bring up some feelings, but that's what it's for.

Nobody comes to a retreat with me just to get snuggled. And because we can go so deep so fast in that context, it was truly amazing. Friday night and all of Saturday we coached on this stuff and it was really challenging

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for some of the participants and there was more crying. There was a lot happening.

Then they did their - they each had a photo shoot on Sunday with my amazing photographer and my amazing makeup artist and hair, but of course, none of that stuff matters if your thoughts about yourself are shitty. And they really - because we'd done all that work, they had such a great shoot, and then they all loved the photos.

But one of the things I wanted them to learn and the reason I'm telling you this story is like, it's not having the perfect photographer and the perfect makeup artist and all of that who's going to make you love how you look. It's being willing to do the work and dig up and go through all that discomfort that then allows you to have the sweetness of that reward that you want.

But you can't get there by avoiding it. You can't come in - I think a lot of people came in kind of hoping that the photographer and the makeup artist would magically make them love their photos. I was like, oh no, we're going to work for that. You have to earn that experience.

They did, so I was really proud of them and then one of them actually messaged me - we wrapped up Monday morning. One of them messaged me on Tuesday morning and said, "I woke up this morning and I literally look different to myself in the mirror." She was like, that should be a testimonial. I was like, now it is one.

But it's so amazing, right? I usually teach body image work as something that takes a long time to practice and that can be true, but this was such a perfect example of how it can happen faster than that if you're willing to really kind of go all in. And I think being in that environment with each other for just a few days all day really allowed for that kind of transformation.

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So super fun, and made me even more excited for Clutch College, which is coming up. It's next week. I guess when you guys listen to this podcast it'll be in the next few days, that weekend. I cannot believe that it's so soon. I'm so excited.

Alright, that's my update. That's what's going on with me here. Let's see what's going on with you guys in your questions. Okay, so someone asked a question. "How does thought work align with mindfulness? My thought work seems to keep me in my brain a lot."

So I think that's a super interesting question, and people will also define mindfulness in different ways. Like, there are specific mindfulness meditation traditions that might define it one way and then it gets used kind of loosely in the wellness world in another way.

But my experience is that thought work allows me to be more mindful because it cleans up the stuff that was preventing me from being in that space. So for myself and a lot of my clients, they couldn't meditate in the beginning because their minds were just so crazy.

It's not that it's not possible. Of course, if you keep at it it's possible, but it was just so daunting to them. And thought work was a really kind of analytic, more action-oriented way of even thought work being the action. We're working on our thoughts, but even having something to do rather than just sit helped bring them in the door and helped them start paying attention to their minds.

So to me, in the sense of mindfulness practice being observing the thoughts and observing the internal state, I think it's completely aligned and it's actually a way in for people who have trouble accessing it through meditation. I think in thought work, we engage the role of the watcher, the same way that you do in a mindfulness tradition.

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In terms of sort of mindfulness of surroundings, like being able to be fully present without being up in your brain, I actually do think thought work allows you to do that but it's more that thought work helps you learn how to be without the constant frenetic brain chatter.

And I truly think being mindful and absorbed in your surroundings is actually still using your brain. It's just using your brain to focus on that. Like, to focus on physical sensations or what you hear or what you smell or what you taste or where you are, what the other person looks like. It's using your brain to focus on that rather than thinking, but you're still using your brain.

So that's my answer. I think that they are different in some ways and they're similar in some ways, and they can be kind of roads into each other. For me, I really needed the proactiveness of thought work and the engagement with the thoughts. I think with mindfulness, you can achieve a lot of peace that doesn't necessarily help you set goals and achieve them and kind of grow in that ways that I found thought work really helpful for.

Okay, next question. Someone asked, "How do you know when you're ready to coach?" This is such a good question. Obviously, a lot of people who have coaching businesses are trying to start them in The Clutch and I coached one of them live today on our Clutch call. And she was saying that she had never coached anyone before so she didn't think she could get clients or be a coach.

But she wanted to be one, she's trying to have a coaching business, but she kept thinking she never coached anyone before so I made her coach me live on the call, which I think she was terrified, but she did such a good job. It was actually super helpful for me, which is the amazing thing about coaching.

When you're in your own thoughts, it doesn't matter how experienced you are. You're totally blind. So my answer to that is I think you need to coach yourself. You have to kind of learn some tools and I recommend of course,

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if you want to get certified that you go to The Life Coach School, which is where I went. I think you need to practice.

But there's no moment to feeling ready. There's no knowing that you're ready. You're never going to feel ready. We're never going to feel ready to do new and scary things. And what you have to remember is that the people you're coaching, when they're in it, they're in it.

When I'm in it, I'm in it. When I'm in my thoughts, I'm in my thoughts. I don't realize that they are thoughts. So that's the bottom line. You're never going to feel ready, but that's okay. We do it anyway. And all you have to remember is can you see something in someone that they don't see themselves?

And with these tools, the answer is always yes. Even if that person is a master coach and your coach. So don't wait until you feel ready. Make sure you learn some tool somewhere and that you coach yourself and then you just got to go for it.

Okay, next question. "What do you think is the most helpful question to ask ourselves?" So I love that question. I think - I have to say, so what, or what are you making that mean are always my go-to favorites. Because I think we just present our thought that we have like it's obviously a problem.

We think it's a circumstance and we're like, this is obviously a problem. And so asking so what is so fascinating. Even something that seems like we would all agree is a problem like, people are dying, so what? I stole a million dollars. So what? It doesn't mean so what like - it's not the person being like, who cares?

So what is a question that helps illicit from us what we're making it mean. Whatever the circumstance is, whether it's having a zit or embezzling a million dollars, whatever the circumstance is, or that there are people dying in the world, whatever the circumstance is, the question so what allows us

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to illicit what we are making it mean and why it's a problem. That's what helps us get access to the interpretive work our brain is doing.

Because what happens is the interpretive work is subconscious. So we're just like, look, I embezzled a million dollars, I have a zit, people are dying, whatever it is, obviously it's bad, right? That's how we're thinking. We have suppressed - we are not conscious of the thoughts that are creating the meaning around those things and why they're a problem.

And so asking so what really helps you discover why something is a problem for you. It's always your thoughts is the answer, but what those thoughts are.

Okay, someone asked another great question. These are so good. "Do you think thought work proves that voluntary gay conversion therapy could work?" No. I don't think so. I think that there's a whole category of experiences that I think I would just call physical sensations that may interact with thoughts and feelings but are not completely the same as them.

So hunger. Hunger is a physical sensation. Now, yes, sometimes you experience emotional hunger or you can start to feel hungry just when you think about something, even if you weren't hungry a minute before. But there's also a category of physical hunger that is a literal physical sensation response to a lack of food or nutrients that has nothing to do with your thoughts.

Similar with being cold or hot. So I do think there's a set of physical sensations that aren't created by thoughts, and I think that our sexual orientation and attraction, that there's a part of it that's that. Now, I do think that there are elements of our attraction to people that are more susceptible to thoughts than we think.

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For instance, people often are really hot and heavy, they get married, they're really attracted to each other, they've having a lot of sex, and they stop having sex, or they've just been together a long time. They don't have to be married. But a lot of people have experienced a drop off in sexual attraction during a relationship.

Or being attracted to someone and then finding out something you think is really objectionable about them, and then all of a sudden you're not attracted to them anymore. Or not being attracted to someone getting to know them and attraction growing.

So it's not like either or in terms of attraction and thoughts. I don't think that no part of our attraction to people, like it's all just pheromones and none of it's affected by our thoughts, but I also don't think that we can manufacture an entire experience of attraction and physical arousal to somebody only using our thoughts.

I think there's a little bit of both. So I don't personally think that our basic sexual orientation is something we can change with our thoughts. So no, I don't think that thought work proves that voluntary gay conversion therapy could work.

It is interesting you said voluntary because of course, I for sure I don't think anything like that could ever work against someone's will, but even if someone wanted to, maybe you can make a little difference in the margins but if you already had fluid sexual attraction, maybe, but I think if you're really biologically attraction-oriented towards a certain gender presentation or sex or whatever, I don't think that thought work changes that or proves that it's all a choice. So no, I don't think so.

Okay, so someone asked, "For one-on-one coaching, is it a set time frame? I.e. six months, and do you have set topics or modules to lead the coaching or is it client-directed?" So I don't do one-on-one coaching. Well, that's not exactly right. All the coaching I do is one-on-one in the sense that when I

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am coaching you, you and I are having a conversation. Nobody else is participating.

But you can only get direct coaching from me like that in a group setting, which means that other people are watching and learning from your coaching and you get to watch and learn from their coaching. I like to always clarify that because some people think group coaching means we're all going to have a conversation and all give our ideas and perspectives, and it's not that at all.

It's much more like, if we were in a physical group, still, we're not, but it would be like, I'm talking to you, you're talking to me, we have a conversation back and forth. There are other people in the room learning from it but they're not weighing in with their opinions or perspectives. And same when you're watching someone else get coached.

So that's the only way to get coaching from me is in a group setting like that and that's because you actually get so much more out of group coaching. Because when you are getting coached one-on-one, you're like a little bit a deer in headlights. You're a little scared of me, there's other people watching, your brain is defensive, it doesn't want to think it's wrong. Things are moving fast.

It can be so, so powerful to get coached live but usually, that takes a while to sink in. But when you're watching other people get coached, you can access the learning immediately, right then and there because it's not your brain. And so you are not getting coached.

And a lot of people just like to learn from other people getting coached. They never want to get coached live directly. They prefer to submit a question and get an answer in the Ask The Coaches part of The Clutch we have in the membership site where it's written coaching, or they want to submit a question and have me answer it in a Listener Q&A because I've

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done - this is unusual in the public podcast but I do one of these every week inside The Clutch, just for Clutch members.

So all different ways to get coaching. So that's the answer to that. And then in terms of do I have set topics and modules to lead the coaching, yes, when you join The Clutch, you do a five-week intro course where I teach you the self-coaching model that is the basis of everything.

So you get that and then we have a couple of different bonus modules on different topics people struggle with like work stress and dating stress and family stuff and kind of all the topics that you would - body image and all the different areas that people struggle with. We have little bonus materials on each of those. So at that point, it's sort of client-directed in that you can choose what you want to work on.

And then of course, when you come for coaching, you get to bring me or bring to the website or whatever, bring to the Facebook group whatever you want to get coached on. So it's kind of a combination of both. It's very - I teach and coach at a very high level. It's very important to me that everybody have the same basis of the self-coaching course. But I could coach you on anything, anytime, anywhere.

Okay, someone asked, "What are your thoughts on what emotional intelligence means and how to improve it? Thank you." So this is such a fascinating question because I think that it's often used in the rest of the world to mean how can we kind of predict and understand other people's emotions and act in ways to manipulate them, kind of.

It's not meant as manipulative, but it sort of assumes we cause other people's feelings and so people with low EQ are said to like, not understand other people's emotions, be socially awkward or not be managing well because they're too aggressive or whatever. And that having high EQ would mean being able to act in such a way as to best control other people's thoughts and feelings and make them positive.

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And so obviously I don't believe that. I think emotional intelligence has to start with emotional intelligence about yourself. Like, getting to know your own emotions, understanding what's happening in your own thought and feeling life, and developing your own emotional intelligence, which is the skillfulness of knowing what feeling you're having, being able to process and allow an emotion, which is something we talk about and work on a lot in The Clutch or anywhere you work with me.

Being able to have that emotion, understanding what causes it, being able to work skillfully with your thoughts, all of that is true emotional intelligence. And I think the better you get at that, the better you are at understanding what's going on with other people and you do show up differently in the world in a way that I think is probably easier for other people to deal with. But it's not like, you then use that to control how other people think and feel, which I kind of think it's somehow sometimes how it's meant.

Okay, I love this question. "What about lawyers makes them easier or more difficult to coach?" Such a great question. So what makes them more difficult to coach is that they want to argue about everything and take everything to the extreme black and white example. And they never want to ask like, well this idea, even if I can't 100% prove it's true everywhere, might it be useful to me today?

It's like no, they have to be able to attack it from all sides and do all the extreme hypothetical cases and really go after the idea. That doesn't make them more difficult to coach. It's just more time consuming, but that was what I was like as a student and my teacher did not murder me.

And one of the reasons I'm so passionate about this work is that I did that when I encountered it. I attacked it from all those angles and continued to for months and years and it stood up, and that's why I believe in it so strongly.

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So the easiest thing I think about coaching lawyers, this was my experience too, is once they get over that hump where they've attacked it all, then they're pretty much onboard. I do think that the way lawyers are taught to think in law school, the kind of ability to argue both sides, be a zealous advocate for different positions makes them a little bit less attached to the idea that certain things have to be objectively true or right or wrong.

So it's almost like there's a beginning version of that subjectivity, and if I just take them all that way there logically and show them how tight and fool-proof it is, then they're onboard. Whereas I find that people with different intellectual training, they may go along easier at first, but they're still very attached to the ideas that certain things are objectively good or bad, or that certain outcomes are objective good or bad. So I think it's sort of two sides to the same coin, which is true for most things.

Alright, I think last question because this is a perfect one to end on. "What is the point of thought work? Do we get to choose the point ourselves? Can there be a wrong outcome?" So to me, the point of thought work is being able to live a conscious and intentional life, which is something that I've always cared about. That's always been a value of mine, which itself is just a thought.

It's a thought I've had for a long time and I like it. I like the results I get from it. I always wanted to have a conscious and intentional life. I wanted to live on purpose. I wanted to feel like I could create what I wanted in my life, that I could be the person that I wanted to be, and just feel like I had control over - not the outside of me, which I can't control, but my own experience.

And thought work is what has allowed me to do that, so for me, the point is living a conscious and intentional life. And then my mission in life is to teach other women how to do that. And other people of all varieties. But that's not the right answer.

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Everybody gets to decide what is the point of doing it. Is it just so that you don't spend as much time on Netflix and drinking booze? Is it so that you don't yell at your kids? Is it so that you can start a business? Is it so that you can run a marathon? Is it so that you can have a better marriage? Is it so that you can get out of debt?

You can pick anything you want as your purpose, and maybe your purpose will change over time about what you think the point is. So when this person asked can there be a wrong outcome, whether something is right or wrong is just a thought. So I don't think there can be.

There can't be a wrong reason to do thought work because who would decide that? You get to decide what your reason is. I get to decide what my reason is. I don't get to decide that your reason is wrong and you don't get to decide my reason is wrong.

I mean, we can decide that and we can have those thoughts, and then we'll just feel terrible, and the other person will do what they want anyway. So I think everybody get to determine the point for themselves but for me, the point is I want to live a conscious and intentional life and I have big things I want to do in the world and thousands, if not millions of people I want to reach and serve, and thought work is what allows me to do that.

So before we wrap up, one of the questions I get asked most often is what books I read or I recommend you read. So I'm not going to list them all on the podcast. But we've set up a way for you to get a free copy of my reading list.

So you can text your email to 347-997-1784. That's 349-997-1784. Text your email address to that number. You will get a response asking you for a prompt, and you just text back the word reading, and then my reading list will end up in your mail box. If you've already opted in for this, the reading list is pretty much the same. I don't think we've changed too much.

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You can always opt in and see if we have added a few things, but if you already have it, you already have most of it. But if you don't, it's a great way to get it. So text your email address to 347-997-1785. And then if you're already on my list, try to use the email where you already get my emails because that is what is going to make sure that you don't start getting everything twice.

And then when it asks you for the prompt, just text back reading. Now listen, if you have problems with this, occasionally your cellphone provider may block our text messages, or if you live internationally and you can't text, that's fine.

Just go to www.unfuckyourbrain.com/106. This is episode 106 so if you go to unfuckyourbrain.com/106, we will have a link to the registration page where you can sign up to get the reading list. That way you don't have to text, you can just do it online.

Alright my dears, so fun to answer your questions. If you like this kind of episode where I just answer questions, you should definitely join The Clutch because I do a bonus Listener Q&A every week in there, just for Clutch members, and I'm only answering Clutch member questions. So you have a much better shot at getting your question answered too. Alright, I'll talk to you soon.

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

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guarantee it. Come join us at www.unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch. It's unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch. I can't wait to see you there.