

UFYB 116: Forgiveness & Blame



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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

UFYB 116: Forgiveness & Blame

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. I am coming to you from Miami, where I brought my team for a team retreat. I flew my employees in and we spent an entire day masterminding on all of the amazing content, and teaching, and events that we are going to do this year. I am so excited. 2020 is going to be lit. I think that's what the kids say, right? Probably not. That's probably what the 40-year olds say, because I'm almost 40.

One of the things we were really having fun with was planning our next Clutch College, which has been top secret planning, getting ready, we're getting ready to share it. If you don't know what I'm talking about, Clutch College is like the next level of thought work. It's when we get together live and in person to really dive deep into the coaching concepts and learn more advanced tools, make sure we're masters of the ones that we already use.

We did the first one last November. It sold out really quickly and it was so incredible, so we've been working on planning the next one, which is coming up. It's still embargoed and I do not want to get in trouble with my team because I'm scared of them. I don't want to get in trouble by spilling the beans too early. But we are going to be announcing all the details in the next couple of weeks in *The Clutch*. So if you came and you were excited to come to the next one, you keep an eye out. If you couldn't come to the first one, and I know I've been getting messages from you guys ever since the first one about when the next one would be. So that information is coming soon.

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

UFYB 116: Forgiveness & Blame

But listen to me, don't email my team asking about it. Do not DM me on Instagram. Do not send me a carrier pigeon, especially because I think they're extinct. I know that my events sell out really quickly. The Portugal retreat that I'm doing in May, I got 150 applications in 48 hours. Right? Some of y'all are very proactive, which I love, and you want to know how to get first dibs, but it's very simple.

You need to be in The Clutch in order to come to my live events. That's number one. It's called Clutch College for a reason. It's only for Clutch members, because everyone needs to have learned the same basic tools that we all are on the same page. Clutch College, it's not like remedial. We aren't starting from square one, we're there to really up level our coaching tools and our self-coaching skills and learn some advanced concepts. Of course, we answer all kinds of questions and we make sure the foundations are really solid, but everybody needs to at least have been exposed to the basics.

That's really it. You just need to be in The Clutch and you will get the information, I promise. We're going to be announcing it and opening registration towards the end of the month. I think it will sell out within the first couple of days. So you still have time to join The Clutch if you want to get all the details.

You can just go to www.unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch. Or if you want to check it out from your phone. Well, obviously that website ad just will also work on your phone. But we have a nifty little text campaign, so you can also just text if you want. We have a very nifty modern campaign here. You just text your email to (347) 934-8861, that's (347) 934-8861. Just text your email address that number and you will get a link to get to all the information about The Clutch. Okay?

Then once you're in, we're going to tell you all about it. You will get an email about it. We're going to have a webinar about Clutch College so you

UFYB 116: Forgiveness & Blame

can ask questions. You'll get it all. If you're already in The Clutch, you don't do anything to get the information. There's no special list. Just read the emails I send you. Okay? That's all. And if you graduated from UnF*ck Your Brain, we will send you an email as well.

Okay? But listen, if you're in The Clutch and you want to come, you need to read your emails. My events fill up really fast and then people end up upset afterwards that they missed it. I send you emails. I do my part. I tell you what's happening. You have to read the emails, okay? That's our deal. I write the emails, you read the emails. That's how all this works. So keep an eye out and you'll be getting all the details in the next couple of weeks. Okay? It's first come, first serve. Do not try to bribe Elena or Christie, my team. They are corruption proof. Okay? All right. Let's get into it for today.

So it is 2020 now and probably a lot of podcasts are still talking about the New Year and the future that's coming. But you know I like to be contrary, so today I want to talk about the past and specifically, I want to talk about how you think about the past and what other people have done in the past, or what you've done in the past.

Because one of the questions I get asked a lot is how to forgive someone who has wronged you, which is such an interesting question because really, the question is how do I change my thought about something that happened in the past?

But let's break it down because it's a thought that people tend to see as a whole other category of thing somehow. Like forgiveness, we think of forgiveness as being not just thoughts, which it is, but a whole different area. So I want to really kind of break down so you can see how it's made up of thoughts.

So if you're thinking about forgiving someone, that means that you're currently having a negative feeling. That's why you're worried about it, that

UFYB 116: Forgiveness & Blame

you believe they caused. If you didn't have a negative feeling, you wouldn't think there was anything to forgive them for. You're basically trying to forgive them for causing your negative feeling. That's the bottom line.

You're angry or you're sad or you feel rejected and you want to think about forgiving them for causing that feeling you have. That's what you think. Of course, they didn't cause your feelings, which we're going to get into more. But we just want to start with establishing what it even means.

People will tend to say like, "Oh, I'm trying to forgive someone for how they hurt me." But I don't think that hurt me is really specific enough to help you get into your thoughts because what does that mean? So let's get really specific. Don't just call it hurt. What is the emotion you are feeling when you think about the past?

Is it sadness? Is it anger? Is it rejection? Is it guilt? Is it fear? You want to get really specific. Even when we're talking about physical harm in the past, it's still our actual emotional hurt that we become resentful about or have a hard time forgiving.

If you think about it, if you trip over a tree branch and you break your leg, you don't have a hard time forgiving the tree branch. Because your thought about the tree branch is very different than your thought about a person who tripped you so you broke your leg.

So it's always about the emotional suffering, the story that we're telling ourselves, even if we're talking about physical pain because we don't have the same question of forgiveness and resentment and blame and shame around a physical accident that might be caused by an object that we don't usually have trouble trying to forgive.

Our specific feelings are always the window into what we are thinking. When you dial into a specific emotion you are having, that gives us access

UFYB 116: Forgiveness & Blame

to what your thoughts are. Because if you want to forgive someone, or even if you don't want to forgive them, what that means is that you have a thought about something they did in the past and you are continuing to believe and think that thought now.

So the first step is always to figure out what those thoughts are. Sometimes we have a thought about a particular action a person took. Maybe they slept with your sister. Maybe they ran off to Hawaii with your retirement fund. Maybe they told you that you were too ugly to love and it had all been a lie. Whatever it is.

The question to ask yourself is so what? So what they did or said this thing? That question will tell you what you're making it mean that this person took this action. What your thought is now about it.

For instance, if you say, "Well, my wife slept with my sister," and I say so what? And you say, "Well, that means she betrayed me and she caused all the pain I felt in my divorce," now we know what it is that you are blaming this person for. What negative emotions you have or continue to have that you think their action caused.

Or if you tell me that your business partner ran off to Hawaii with your retirement fund and I say so what, and you say, "Well, now I'm stressed about money and I can't afford to retire. That's his fault." Now we see that you are blaming him or her for their actions and believing that those caused your stress about money.

Or if you say so what that your ex told you that you were too ugly to love and it had all been a lie, and you would say, "Well, because now I'm not confident and I can't date." So now we would see what it is the you're telling yourself. You are currently suffering, that you are blaming on their actions.

UFYB 116: Forgiveness & Blame

So sometimes it is something really concrete and specific that they did. Sometimes I think we more just have a story about a way a person was with us. It's really like a story about our emotional relationship in the past. It's really a story about our own thoughts. But we tell it to ourselves as if it's a true story about what the other person was like.

So we think like, my parents didn't support me so now I don't believe in myself. Again, you have to ask, so what? Let's pretend it's true they didn't support you. That's just an optional thought, but let's say it was true. So what? So now I don't believe in myself. Now I'm making my current lack of confidence, which is just my thoughts, I'm making it their fault.

Or my best friend was always jealous of me and she hurt my feelings by not celebrating my successes and wanting me to fail. See, that's a story about how she just sort of generally was. I say so what, and you say, well now I feel guilty about succeeding. I don't believe that my friends really care for me.

Now we can see what is your current thought, your current pain, your current suffering that you're blaming on how this person was in the past. If you say well, my ex gaslit me, and I say so what, and you say well, so now I don't believe in myself. Now we can see what thought pattern you currently have that's causing emotional suffering for you that you're blaming on what they did or what they were like.

It's always a question of what you are making the other person's behavior or your story about their behavior mean. When you are suffering now, because of something you think someone did in the past, you have to remember that you're wrong about why you're suffering. You're not suffering because of what they did or who they were or what they were like.

You are suffering because of your current thought about it. That's it. The past does not exist, except in our minds. I say that a lot and it's the kind of

UFYB 116: Forgiveness & Blame

thing that's easy to just sort of nod at, but really sit with it and let it hurt your brain and blow your mind. If you truly try to imagine who you are without your thoughts of the past, if the past did not exist, if you woke up with amnesia tomorrow, your past would not exist to you.

Think about the most consuming stories you have about yourself based on your past, which really just means your own thoughts about the past. Your own story about the past. What would it be like if you woke up tomorrow and you didn't have any of those thoughts?

Your past would effectively cease to exist for you. So imagine that person who you believe caused you so much pain. You'd have none of your thoughts or story about them. Seeing them would not cause you any pain. Thinking about them wouldn't cause you any pain. You wouldn't even know who they were.

And if you really think about it and you kind of dial in, even now without amnesia, the past comes in and out of existence for you as you think about it. You think about other things sometimes too. No matter how focused you are on the past, you occasionally go to sleep or get distracted eating something or watching a funny video on YouTube or something.

In that moment that you are no longer thinking about it, the past doesn't exist. And then it flickers back into existence when you think about it again. It's like a hologram that's operated with a light switch. The past is only there when you flick the switch and the electricity starts running and it starts the hologram going.

And then if you turn away and the switch turns off, it's not there. So if the past does not exist, except in the moment we are thinking about it, then the way we can change how we feel when we think about something someone did to us or the way someone was is just to change our thought about it now. That's it.

UFYB 116: Forgiveness & Blame

It really is that simple. I'm not saying it's easy, but it is simple. Asking yourself how can I forgive them is not a useful question. Because it's like you're asking your brain to come up with some complicated solution that it doesn't even know how to do when the solution is really I have to change the thought I have about what they did or how they were and why it's a problem.

And one thing that's important to pay attention to is that you may have thoughts not just about the thing you're having a hard time forgiving, but about what you make forgiveness itself mean. If you tell yourself that forgiving someone else means that, "what they did is okay," that meta thought is going to get in the way.

I call this a meta thought because it's like your thought about the thought. You have to resolve that thought first or you'll never make traction on the underlying thought. If you have a thought about why it's not a good idea or why it's not okay to forgive someone, or forgiving them means you're a doormat or what it means to forgive them that you haven't resolved, then you can try rewriting your story about them or what happened as much as you want and thinking new thoughts, but you have unconscious drag on the process.

If the anchor of a boat gets caught in something, then it's pulling on it and slowing it down below the surface. If you have not looked at your thoughts about forgiveness and what it means and whether you really want to do it and why or why not, if you haven't dealt with all of that, then even trying to change your thoughts to forgive someone probably won't work because you haven't resolved this unconscious drag about the whole concept.

And we have a lot of less than useful thoughts about forgiveness is what I find. For instance, we think that it makes what the other person did okay. That's a thought we have. If I forgive them, it means what they did was okay.

UFYB 116: Forgiveness & Blame

But here's the good and bad news. What they did was okay, or it was not okay. It was both and neither. It had no objective essential okay-ness or not okay-ness. A rock is not okay or not okay. It just exists. Whatever actions were taken in the past, it's only our own thoughts that make them okay or not okay.

Your resistance to them, your own thought that they were not okay is only causing you pain. It's not being registered with some universal entity in a big ledger of what was and not okay. It's not changing the past. It's not making the other person involved feel anything. Sometimes the other person is not even alive anymore.

It's only causing you suffering. It's like that saying that hatred is like taking a poison and expecting the other person to die. Resentment is like that, holding a grudge is like that, blame and shame are like that. Holding onto your belief that changing your thought about what happened would make it okay is just making you feel not okay now because you're thinking thoughts that cause you pain and suffering and don't do anything to anyone else.

So that's one reason we struggle with forgiveness sometimes is what we make it mean and we think that forgiving someone else has anything to do with evaluating their behavior or making it okay or not okay. The second reason I think we sometimes struggle with forgiveness is that we think that someone has to be to blame.

So if we forgive the other person, then we're going to blame ourselves. I think any time we are strenuously blaming someone else and very attached to them being wrong, it's usually because we think the alternative is that if they're not wrong, then we did something wrong. And so we will have to blame and shame ourselves if we aren't blaming and resenting them.

So if you're unable to forgive yourself, let's say, for someone cheating on you, is it because you secretly fear that you did something to make it

UFYB 116: Forgiveness & Blame

happen? If you're unable to forgive someone for firing you, is it because you secretly fear you were fired because you were bad at your job? Probably.

You get the idea. It might not be those specifically, but you have to look at why you're so attached to not forgiving someone. And often it's because you're making forgiving itself mean something and then often, it's also because you're making absolving them of blame mean that you must be to blame instead.

But no one has to be to blame because the idea that something went wrong or was bad or shouldn't have happened is totally optional and subjective. It's like we're willing to change our thought about who is to blame for the bad thing, but we don't realize that our belief that the thing was bad is also optional and subjective.

It's a human thought created by a human mind. It's not the law of gravity. There's no physics that tell us the laws of bad and good. These are evaluative, moral concepts made up by human minds and they differ across time and societies.

And I think ultimately, this connects to the most challenging aspect of forgiveness, which is often self-forgiveness. Part of the reason we struggle with forgiving others is that we are unable to forgive ourselves. We're so attached to our own self-judgment that we then have to judge others harshly as well.

When your brain is in the habit of judging you, it's in the habit of judging everyone else too. So the beauty of understanding that thoughts create feelings, which create actions is that you can see that you and everyone else are just always living in some point of that cycle. Not in a bad way.

UFYB 116: Forgiveness & Blame

Whatever anyone else did in the past was just caused by whatever thought, feeling, action cycle was happening for them. And whatever you did in the past was caused by your thought, feeling, action cycle. Your current experience of forgiveness or non-forgiveness is caused by your current thought, feeling, and action cycle. That's it. That's all there is.

Humans with thoughts that cause feelings, that cause actions. All the rest of it is our stories about what that means. We evaluate those cycles and we decide who's good and bad and who's nice and mean and who loved us and who hurt us and who is worthy and who is not. But those thoughts cause so much suffering and they are so optional.

So if you want to liberate yourself, I want you to consider forgiving the people who you think have wronged you, not because you should, not because you have to, not because it makes you a better person, not because they deserve it. It has nothing to do with any of that. Just because it will allow you to free yourself.

And I want you to consider forgiving yourself. All it takes is changing your thoughts about the past and that will change your life. If you want help learning this step-by-step process to changing your thoughts, that's what you can learn in an interactive way in The Clutch, in a way that I can't teach on a one-way podcast.

So just text your email address if you want to learn more to 347-934-8861. It's 347-934-8861. Just text us your email. We will text you right back with a link to all the info you could want about The Clutch and what you will learn and how it will change your life. And if you can't or don't want to text, you just go to unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch. I'll see you there.

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

UFYB 116: Forgiveness & Blame

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