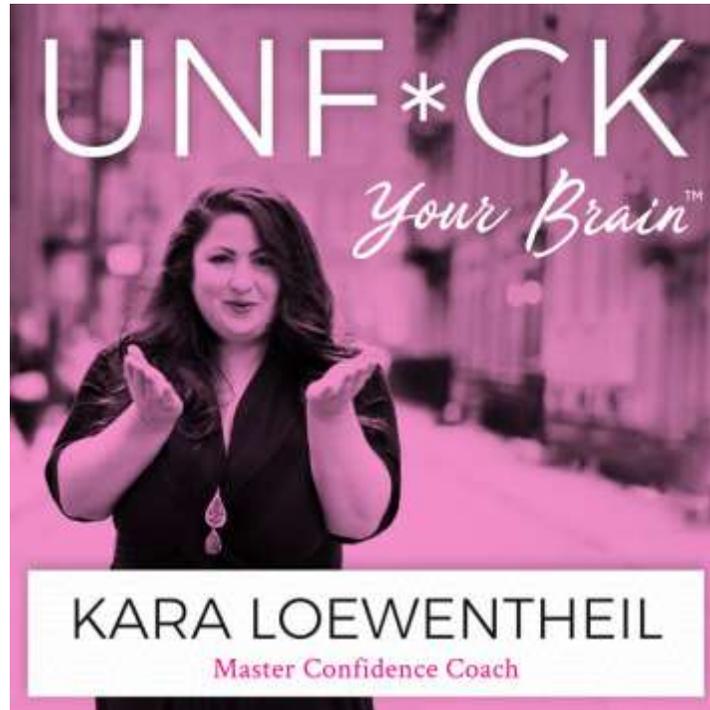


# UFYB 119: Five Years of Thought Work Part 1: Body, Work & Money



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Kara Loewentheil**

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# UFYB 119: Five Years of Thought Work

## Part 1: Body, Work & Money

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 am going to do something a little bit different today and in the next two weeks. I hope you all find it useful. It was super interesting for me to go over and do. And here's where it came from. We just opened up registration for the next Clutch College and it sold out in 48 hours, which was amazing. Obviously, we'll need to do another one this year because I know some of you didn't even get to read your emails about it before that happened.

But as I was answering questions and talking to my students about the event, one thing that kept coming up was that they wanted to kind of know what is the difference you can expect from doing this work over a longer period of time or in a more intense way. And it just kind of made me think about how I want all of you to know what you can expect from learning how to manage your mind.

Because when I think about what makes people give up on themselves and stop trying to manage their minds, I think the number one thing is self-judgment. And that self-judgment really comes from having unrealistic expectations of what managing your mind should look like, and then judging yourself for not being there yet.

And so I am coming up on five years since I discovered this kind of thought work that my work is based on, and so I want to share with you what is different in my life and what is the same. And my hope is that these episodes will give you an idea of both what kind of unbelievable changes

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truly are possible with thought work, and of how having unrealistic expectations can kind of stymie or block your progress.

If there's one overall takeaway, I think it's a concept I've talked about before, which is as humans, we vastly overestimate how much we can get done in a day or a week, and we vastly underestimate what can happen in six months or a year. Radical change is possible but it's not usually radically quick, overnight.

And so the other thing I want you to keep in mind when you listen to what I've experienced and what has changed or not changed for me is that I have not done thought work every single day of the last five years. I have not had a perfect attendance record. I have not done every single possible worksheet I could do. I do not have a perfect morning routine. It is not about perfection. It's about coming back to the practice of managing your mind over and over again.

You don't go to one yoga class and then think like, okay well now I know how to do all yoga. Or you wouldn't go to yoga consistently, build up your practice, stop going, and then be shocked that you couldn't do the same things you used to be able to do. Managing your mind is a practice. It's a lifetime relationship with yourself and your own experience.

It's not like learning algebra where once you learn it then you know it and then you just use it only occasionally when you need to. It's a practice. So bear that in mind that my results do not come from perfect practice or from just learning it once and being done.

So what I'm going to do is talk briefly about kind of each major area of my life and how it's changed since I started using thought work, and so what is different and then some things that aren't different. And in this episode, I'm going to cover money mindset, work and professional life, and kind of body image, food, movement stuff.

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And then next week I'm going to talk about family, romantic relationships, social relationships, and anxiety. And then in the third episode I'm going to talk about my relationship with myself, how I relate to the work that I'm doing on my mind now, how that's changed.

So we're going to start with body image, food, and movement, which are obviously three very big areas. And I want to apologize to you guys, I'm a little bit sniffly today so I'm sorry that I sound a bit stuffed up. But progress, not perfection, right?

Okay, so in the kind of area of my thoughts and my actions around food and movement and how I think about my body, so five years ago in 2015, I was still trying to diet and lose weight because I wanted to just finally be good enough. And I thought that if I just lost weight I would finally feel good about myself and everything would work out. Everybody would love me, nobody would judge me, I'd have a perfect partner, I'd run marathons, whatever kind of fantasies I had about that.

But 2015, which is the year that this part of my journey started with this form of thought work was also the year that I first discovered the idea of body positivity and anti-diet culture. So in 2015 I had started to hear about these things but they hadn't really sunk in yet. And so I still really hated my body, I thought about my weight and my body and what I was eating and losing weight and how and when, and making elaborate plans I didn't carry out, and always vowing to start again on Monday. That was just a never-ending refrain in my mind.

And I was constantly mentally living in this fantasy future where I'd have a totally different body and everything was perfect. And meanwhile, in reality, I was still bingeing and purging because I was restricting both mentally and physically, and I was very angry at my body also. Both for how it looked and how it felt, and then what it could or couldn't do because of chronic pain.

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And I did a lot of work on the appearance elements first, and I'm still working on some of the kind of chronic pain and relationship to my body and its limitations, but what I can see now looking back is that I just had so many expectations about what my body should or shouldn't look like and should or shouldn't be able to do, and should or shouldn't feel like.

And really, just like your relationship with anyone else, your relationship with your body is so hamstrung by all of those expectations that you kind of create out of nowhere, or society teaches you or you just decide should be the case, and then you're constantly measuring it against these expectations that it can't live up to, and then you feel betrayed or deprived or angry.

And so that's really the place I was in. I thought about my body all the time and it was almost all negative, and I had a constant running tally in my head of like, what I'd eaten and if it was too much, if I'd been bad, if I'd been good, what life would be like when I lost weight. Ironically, I was the lowest weight of my adult life because I'd been trying to lose weight for years and a little bit successfully over a long period of time.

So now it's 2020. I weigh quite a bit more than I did in 2015. Like a lot of people, I gained weight when I stopped artificially restricting and dieting. I don't weigh myself so I don't know how much more, but I'm several clothing sizes bigger, and yet I feel infinitely better about my body.

I don't criticize my body to myself anymore about its appearance at all and I'm still working on getting a lot better about not having negative thoughts about how it feels, like about pain or about how it works, the things it can or can't do. I really rarely think about what I'm eating or what I weigh or how I look in a negative way.

I think my body is gorgeous and sexy and beautiful and I have a lot more appreciation for the way that it nourishes and carries me through the world.

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I have less pain, I have more mobility, and I accept my body's abilities and limitations more, and I think that's a couple of reasons.

One is that I have so many fewer negative thoughts about it, and I think that the relationship between our negative thinking about our bodies and chronic pain, that there's a relationship there. Also because I've accepted what my body actually is like, I'm able to find movement that I can do in this body, rather than believing my body should be different and it's wrong and then not looking for what I can do.

So now I lift weights twice a week with a trainer, I'm stronger, I'm more able to stick with things like physical therapy, and I understand my pain in a very different way. I now understand it as a neurological pattern and a window into my emotions, rather than a sign that something's wrong with my body and it's broken.

Now, very occasionally still, not all thought patterns go away forever. It's like not all dogs go to heaven. My brain will still light up with like, "Hey, if you just lost weight that would solve all your negative feelings." Circuits like that. Circuits still exist in my brain, but it's rare and I know not to buy into it when it does.

And most of the time I just don't think about what I'm eating or my body, and I have so much more time and energy for other things. But I say that to you because I will hear people kind of talking about it like something has gone really wrong if an old thought comes up, and you just have to think it's like, your brain's old circuits, they're like unused railroad tracks.

They might be overgrown with vegetation or whatever, but sometimes one of them lights up. Sometimes a train tries to go down one. Maybe because you're stressed or you have some other strong emotion you don't know how to deal with, and your brain is just rummaging around back there like,

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what's the solution? What's the solution? How do I get rid of this upset or stress or pain? Oh, I know, here's this old track, let me try playing that.

So sometimes you work through a thought pattern and it goes away forever, but sometimes it just occasionally and almost randomly will light up and that doesn't mean that anything went wrong. You just are like, whoops, we got to shut off the electricity to that track. Back over here is what we're thinking.

And at the same time, so that occasionally still happens, but I have so much more time and energy for other things because I don't have the constant soundtrack in my brain about what I ate and was it too much or was it too little or how many calories or how many fat grams or how many carbs or whatever, and I'm not spending all this time thinking about how do I look compared to other people or how I used to look or how my clothes fit.

The constant inner monologue. That's what's allowed me to build a business and coach myself in all these other areas that we're going to talk about, and sort of have all the mental energy for that. I started with body image and I kind of think it makes sense because that's something that women are socialized to spend so much time thinking about.

At the same time, like I mentioned, I'm still working through some of these patterns in a more subtle way, like related to how my body feels and can move, related to how different foods feel in my body and making decisions about that. I'm just learning how to relate to my thought patterns around restriction and choice, and what's - switching from good/bad to what feels certain ways in my body.

I'm still navigating that and working on it, and I expect I will continue to because I think that there are multiple layers of all of these thought patterns. And it's like the same way that I always say the way you do one thing is the way you do everything, your thought pattern about scarcity and

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money will often be the same as your thought pattern about scarcity and family love or dating or something else.

If I had been practicing thoughts for years that like, some foods are good or bad, or that my body isn't good at doing certain things, I'm going to work through those on one level, and then I'm not going to be surprised when I see an echo of them at a more subtle level in another way. It's not going to be as intense or extreme. The emotion is not nearly as intense, it doesn't disrupt my life as much, it's a much smaller kind of movement on the scale, but they're still there and that doesn't mean that anything has gone wrong.

So that is food, movement, body image. So now I want to talk about work. In 2015, I was still in legal academia. I was running a think tank at Columbia Law School and my plan had been to go on the market as a law professor, to get a law professor job. I had done a couple fellowships.

But around this time in 2015 is when I decided to attend coach certification, but I still couldn't say I wanted to be a life coach with a straight face. I had a lot of drama about what other people would think. I was still very attached to having this prestigious mainstream career and all the intellectual capital of saying that's what I did.

And my big crazy goal was to replace my salary from the think tank, which was \$150,000, which was actually quite high for academia, my big goal was to replace that in my first three years in business. That was my plan, which we'll talk about in a minute how hilarious that is.

But I was constantly thinking about how I should work better or differently or more or harder. When I wasn't thinking about my body, I was thinking about how I wasn't good enough for my job, I wasn't organized enough, I procrastinated too much, I didn't get enough done, I wasn't productive, I wasn't smart enough, all of that.

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If I could do something in half the time that someone else did it and it was good, I still thought that that didn't count somehow and that I should put in double the time and make it amazing. It was very all or nothing, everything should be an A+, everything should be perfect.

I basically believed that if it wasn't hard, it didn't count. Work had to be hard, and if it wasn't hard, it didn't count. But then I made it really hard for myself and then I didn't want to do it. So I had a little perfect system there. I also didn't think that I had original ideas, either in law or in coaching really. I kind of couldn't imagine how I could ever come up with something new.

I thought all the good ideas had been done already. This is hilarious now when I think about it but I really believed this, that all the good ideas had been done in law or in coaching, and so although I wanted to be a coach, I couldn't imagine that I would ever be kind of prominent or have a big following or come up with something new to teach people.

I took any feedback on my ideas or work extremely personally. I had really intense imposter syndrome and anxiety around it, and I couldn't handle even a few people I knew well critiquing my work. So I was basically just very anxious, procrastinating a lot, and despite having a career that looked like I had accomplished all on the outside, I was constantly discounting it and disclaiming it and sort of excusing away my success and blaming it on - giving the credit for it to people outside of me or other things outside of me and never believing that I was contributing something special.

Now, five years later in 2020, I'm running a multi-million-dollar business and I truly believe that I am a great coach who is changing people's lives by teaching them this work. I am providing two full-time employees with their salaries and their benefits and 401Ks, and when I think back to my goal I had of making a whole \$150,000 in my third year, in reality, what happened is that I made \$200,000 in my second year and then I made a million in my third, and then two million in my fourth.

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In a funny way, I think some of the positive things are the same as they were in my past career. I'm still mission-driven, I still believe in being of service, I still do my work from that place of what can I contribute to the world, what do I have to teach and help people. And I'm still focused on liberating women from all of the kind of oppressive impacts of patriarchy, but now I just do it based on the inside instead of the outside.

I also still am a human and I have to manage my mind sometimes to focus. You know, my brain wants to procrastinate on doing new things or things it thinks are hard. I have the total flexible freedom to set my own schedule, and that is a blessing and a curse. It takes a whole extra level of organization and self-discipline.

I don't procrastinate nearly as much, but my brain still wants to. I still have the echoes of those thoughts. Again, you're hearing a common theme. That neural circuit isn't completely dead. It's just much quieter and I don't listen to it anymore. That's what I've learned to do.

I also find now that I'm actually working less and more efficiently. I used to sort of - especially as an academic, much like being self-employed, your work can extend to take up all your time, and most academics work all the time because they also are kind of self-structured, other than their teaching, but with their writing and their work, and there's an infinite number of things they could be working on.

So as I've gotten better at sticking to my calendar and working less and more efficiently, now I have a whole new area of thought work to do, which is around how to spend my free time and that's actually I think a place a lot of people have trouble. I'm going to do a whole episode on that. I think a lot of the buffering and numbing out we do is because we don't know what to do when we do have free time.

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But all of that is to say sometimes what happens is you solve one problem in your life and it opens up a new problem. And I think that's a beautiful thing. It's like, I've solved one thing, now I have this new way to grow, I have this new area to explore, a new place to evolve.

I've also finally just come to accept that however much I think I do or I don't work, that's just a thought. My thoughts about how much I work are really irrelevant. The results speak for themselves, and that's true whether your results are amazing or your results are lackluster. Always look back at the result in your model. What result are you getting? And that tells you everything you need to know.

And I spend a lot of time having drama around my own opinion of like, whether I was working hard enough or working enough or whatever else, until I just finally realized, who cares? What's my result? Okay, I have this business that I wanted to have, I'm reaching my goals, I'm teaching all these women that I wanted to teach. If I'm getting the result I want, then my opinion about whether I'm working enough or not is really irrelevant.

And that's one of the things that I think I have come to see as I have gotten farther in this journey is like, yes, I could change my thought to say that I work hard, and I've worked on that. But also, sometimes you just learn how to not engage with a thought or decide that it's irrelevant.

Like now, my thought is just like, I know brain, you never think that I've done enough, or I always could work harder, I always could be more organized. Your opinion is just irrelevant. I don't care. I'm getting the result I want so that's all that matters. I really no longer worry about being qualified to do my job, which I had as an academic, but also when I started coaching.

And I really believe now that I've created a unique body of work that no one else could create. That's something that always felt like it was missing

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when I was litigating, and I had a little bit of it as an academic, but then when of course I started coaching, I had all the same thoughts of all the ideas are taken, there's nothing new I can come up with, and I believed that for the first year or two and so I didn't create anything all that new. And then as I started to change that belief, now I really believe I'm creating a unique body of work that no one else can create.

And I think the final thing that has changed in this area for me is that I'm willing to let what's easy be easy, and what's hard be hard. I don't believe everything should be easy, but I don't believe everything has to be hard. I used to make everything hard, and now I am much better at just letting what's easy be easy and dealing with it when it's hard, but not believing that I need to make everything hard just to sort of prove that it's work or that I'm good enough.

Okay, so the last topic that I want to cover on this episode, which kind of relates to the work is money. Because in 2015, I did not in any way, shape or form believe that I could make as much money as I wanted. And I actually - I don't think I believed I really had anything to do with how much money I made. That was something that was decided by someone else.

I believed that money was something I got from a salary that someone else decided, and that given my abilities and interest, the most I could ever make was like, low six figures as an academic. I also believed I was bad at math, I was bad with money, I didn't understand business, that all these things were kind of inherent.

It was very fixed mindset, like, these are things I'm bad at and don't understand and that's how it is. And I didn't really want to identify with being an entrepreneur because I had a lot of thoughts about people who made money or wanted to make money or had businesses. I had a lot of negative judgmental thoughts about that.

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So when I was going through master coach training, I've talked about this before, I was very intense with my teacher about how I didn't identify as a businesswoman or an entrepreneur, and I still don't know how she didn't murder me during those coaching sessions.

I was so committed to that because of all the judgmental negative thoughts I had about people who make money or have businesses, even though we all live under conditions of advanced capitalism. We all have to make money one way or another. But it was somehow in my brain like, okay to get it as a salary but if you try to make it, then that was sort of saying that you wanted to make money and you wanted more money and that was terrible.

So I wanted to be a coach but not a business owner basically, but at the same time, I didn't actually really want to work for anyone else. I actually wanted to have my own business. I just was having trouble admitting that to myself.

And then I think I still also believed that making money meant that I was - that if someone paid me for coaching, I was taking their money. That was their money and I was taking it and there was something negative in that, like they had less than when they started and I had more, and that was a problem.

So five years later in 2020, I fully identify as a business owner and entrepreneur. I believe that I can create money easily and that money flows to and from me easily. And since starting my business, I've created several million dollars in revenue already, which is an amount that I never ever would have imagined I could earn or create.

I really believe now that making money is easy and that all I need is my mind. And I believe that making money as a coach means that I'm showing people how to invest in the one solution in the world that actually solves

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any problem, and that when they invest in coaching, it's actually preventing them from wasting their money on things that don't help and won't change their lives.

I've now also had access to so many other people's brains and heard their money thoughts that it's impossible for me to not see the truth, which is whether you feel rich or feel poor, or feel scarce or feel abundant has nothing to do with what's in your bank account. It has everything to do with your thoughts about that number.

Some things are still the same. I always spent fairly freely, but I used to beat myself up about that and think that I should be thriftier and more budget-y and more finicky about every cent. And now I see that I'm just someone who both earns and spends freely and abundantly, and seeing money as a renewal resource and flow for me is what has allowed me to scale my business and help so many people so quickly, and create jobs and hire people. It's both.

It's like, money flows in, money flows out. It's just a flow. And rather than thinking I don't have enough and I have to hold on to what I have, because even if you - I don't believe you can do just one sort. If you decide you can create money but you're still feeling scarcity about it like you have to hold onto it, then you can't grow your business, you don't create jobs for other people.

It's a flow. It has to go both ways. But I also see that I'm not all the way there with my money mindset. I don't yet believe that I can make any amount of money I want. I still have ideas of what is plausible or not. So I can stretch my brain to see it's possible I might be able to have a business that creates, let's say, 20 million in revenue and provides amazing jobs for like, 50 people.

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That, I don't fully believe it or I would have it now, but I can see that I could believe it. It's like, within my kind of forward vision of possible things to believe, but I don't believe yet that I can have a business that creates 100 million in revenue or 500 million in revenue or employs hundreds of people. There's still a cap on my belief.

I still don't believe it can truly be any number, and that's why there's still a cap on my results, and that's totally okay. It's just the next level of the work. And then one of the most important things has stayed the same, which is it's been very interesting in my kind of educational life, until coaching, I went to private schools, I went to Ivy League colleges.

There were obviously people of all backgrounds there, but some of my coaching colleagues came from backgrounds where they didn't know any business owners or didn't know anyone who had any money. And that's been an interesting transition for them.

For me, I think because I grew around people from a variety of income levels, I never thought that having money made someone happy, and I still don't. I just had all this evidence all around me in my daily life that people were happy or unhappy at every conceivable income level, all the way from people making not that much over the federal poverty line all the way up until billionaires.

I had sort of access to experiencing people at all of those levels, and so money is convenient, and if you're below a subsistence level, like if you can't take care of your physical needs, getting to a subsistence level makes a big difference. But beyond that, the studies show it doesn't change your happiness.

And I just think I never believed it did, so that has not been a big shift for me. I always saw that people were happy or unhappy, either separate from their money or even about their money at all different level than it really had

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to do with how they thought about it, and that's all the same. That's only proved to be more true to me now that I have access to hundreds of thousands of people's thoughts about money.

So that is how things have changed and some of how they haven't changed for me since I started doing this work in those three areas. Next week I'm going to tackle my family, social and romantic relationships, how things have changed in terms of my thinking about my relationships with others, and how I experience those.

So I will share that with you next week, my chickens. And until then, I want you to think about what your life would be like if you had a practice of thought work, not a perfect one, but just a practice that you always came back to for the next five years in your own life. What could you change and how could you blow your own mind?

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