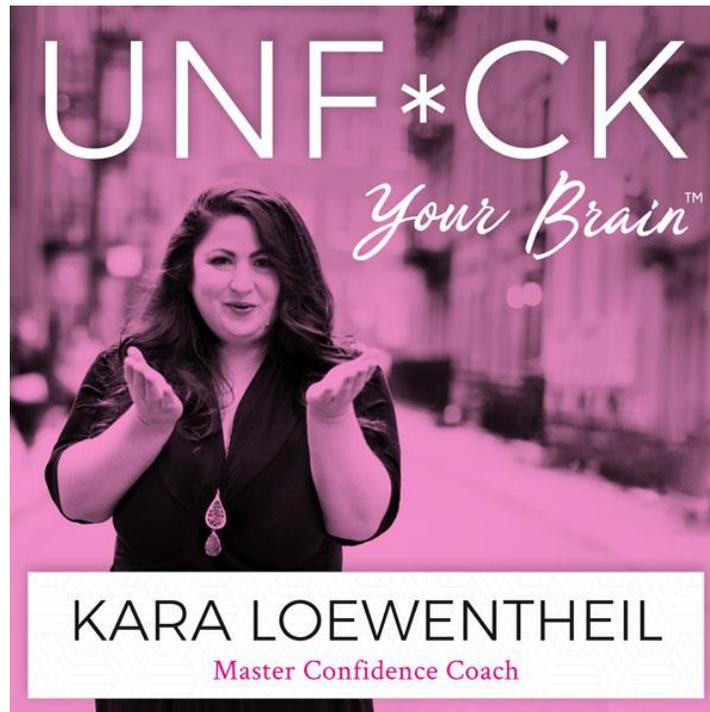


UFYB 135: Embrace the Suck



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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UFYB 135: Embrace the Suck

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 doing today? I am feeling fired up. I have been working on this amazing class that I'm going to be offering only to Clutch members inside the Clutch. It's called the Body Image Breakthrough. It's Clutch College online. So those of you who are in the Clutch know that we have Clutch College, which is an in person amazing event that we hold a couple of times a year and the next one is next January.

But because of the pandemic and everything, you know, the pandemic and everything, we weren't able to do as many live events this year as we want. And so, I decided to take Clutch College online. So I'm going to be offering a Clutch College online Body Image Breakthrough Masterclass, which I am super excited about.

So I've been working on the material for that and just really, at this point in my body image journey, it's almost like I have moved to this next level where I don't really have critical or negative thoughts about my body almost ever really anymore.

And it's been so, I think, powerful to reconnect for me to what it's like when you're so in the thick of it and struggling, and in putting together all the materials for this course and thinking about what did I need when I was thinking about my body all the time and every time I looked in the mirror, I was upset and I didn't want to see myself naked. I didn't want to have sex with the lights on. And I was thinking about like what I'd eaten and what I should eat and what I shouldn't eat and exercising and calories. It was so all consuming.

And I think it's not surprising that for a lot of people, their feminist journey starts with body image stuff. Because when you start to clear that out of

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

UFYB 135: Embrace the Suck

your brain, you realize how much of your time and energy was spent on trying to manage what you eat and what you weigh and what you look like. It's like having a hole in the bottom of a bucket. It just drains all of your energy and focus away from all of the big things you could be doing in the world.

There's no way that I could have built this coaching business and done all of this work on myself and been able to teach and help so many women, if I was still constantly thinking about my weight and what I was eating, and all of that daily self-recrimination about it. And that feeling good some days, then bad some days. I was good. I was bad. It was just so all consuming.

So it's been really interesting to go back to that place mentally to try to, not in my own life, but to try to make sure that I'm putting into the class everything that I think you need to break out of those cycles and to really rewire your brain.

And I think that's going to be an also a nice thing about doing this work for a Clutch College online, is that we have more time together. So I think there's some things that are amazing taught in person in a day, you have a big breakthrough, it's so much fun.

But there's also certain areas of our lives where I think we need daily practice at rewiring and more ongoing support. And, of course, people in the Clutch work on body image all the time, but I'm just excited to create all of this new material for the course and really be doing this deep dive.

So, if you're in the Clutch, keep an eye out. You're going to get an email. A couple of emails. I'm doing a webinar to announce the class and to teach you some body image hacks, whether you're going to join us for Clutch College online or not.

And if you're not in the Clutch, and this is something you struggle with, this would be a good time to join. It's unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch.

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UFYB 135: Embrace the Suck

So, that has been awesome today. But I will say that yesterday, was not having as awesome an experience. I'm having a bit of the human roller coaster ride these days, I will tell you what. Just confronting the unpredictability of life in new ways, getting so many opportunities to watch my mind at work.

And I was thinking today, it's interesting because years ago when I started doing thought work, one of the ways I got myself mentally geared up for the kind of experiences that I expected to be unpleasant because I was just learning to manage my mind was I would tell myself that at least I was going to learn something about my brain.

Like, no matter what, if I pay attention to my brain, I will learn something from this. And I found that so helpful because it took my focus off thinking about how terrible it was going to be with no redeeming values, sort of, to focus on what I might learn from it.

And I realized recently that I kind of abandoned that tool or just sort of forgotten about it because having done so much thought work so consistently for the last five or more years, most of the stuff that's happened in my life in the last few years, I sort of can do thought work on almost unconsciously, without a lot of drama because I've had years of practice.

So, I haven't had that same thought and feeling of looking at something upcoming that couldn't be avoided, and you know, just thinking like, "Okay, how am I going to get through this?" But now in the time of COVID-19, I'm finding that perspective is actually so helpful and that I need to go back to applying it.

Rather than try to coach myself out of having any negative thoughts or feelings about this sudden change in circumstances, how can I orient myself to what I might learn? How can I be willing to experience something

UFYB 135: Embrace the Suck

that I don't really understand yet, or where I can't see the lesson or the value or the end result yet?

That is really so powerful I think to just be open to the idea that you can't see the lesson yet. I actually once coached one of my friends who was in the middle of literally childbirth. She was about 24 hours into a really long intense labor, and she texted me and she was just so exhausted and demoralized and feeling like all this hadn't been worth it.

And of course, she was in a lot of extreme physical and emotional suffering. And so that's not a time for really intense hard coaching often. And actually, of all the things that I tried coaching her with, she said the thing that was the most helpful was just oh, I might just not see the lesson here yet.

It was like, because a lot of her thoughts were like, "What was the point of preparing this way or going through this part of the labor if we're just going to have to do this thing. It was all pointless, I suffered for nothing." Those kinds of thoughts.

And so when I offered her the idea that maybe she was going to learn something and she was going to find meaning in it, she just didn't know what that was yet and that was okay, she could just get through the experience and then she would figure that part out and be able to see it later, that was so freeing for her.

And that's something I'm trying to use now, and I want to offer to all of you as well, big or small. It can be the COVID pandemic or it can be a rough patch with your partner inside. It doesn't matter. But even if you can't see the meaning or the lesson yet, can you just try to hold faith that if you are willing to stay with yourself, you will be able to create some meaning out of your experiences?

UFYB 135: Embrace the Suck

And that's what the human brain is amazing at, right? So, we know we can do it. And thinking about all of that really led me to this podcast today because it's totally related. I was coaching one of my Clutch clients the other day, not about COVID related topics at all because life goes on.

Some of us are thinking about COVID a lot, some of us not so much. Just like any other brain and thought work situation that's ever existed because it's not the circumstance. We all have different thoughts.

So, I was coaching her about something in her life that she feared and she'd been working on it for a while and she was still really fixated on the fear of it happening. And so when I was coaching her, I pointed out that she was spending all this time and energy trying to coach herself to believe that it wouldn't happen, and to not be afraid of it happening, or to believe that if it happened it would be okay and it wouldn't suck.

She wanted to feel better and she wanted it to not feel bad now or if it happened. And sometimes that works for people, but with her, that was completely backfiring. This is why having a coach is so important because not every technique works the same for everyone.

So one person might be able to coach themselves to believe it probably won't happen. Even if it does, it'll be fine, and then they can just move on. But for this client, those techniques weren't working because she was stuck in a different way.

This is why we all need someone to, like, check our work. You know when you're doing your group project or something or if you got a high-end protocol for something, you need to have somebody check your work, make sure it all looks good. Like we would have people copyedit our legal briefs, check our work. Same thing.

UFYB 135: Embrace the Suck

You need to have someone to check your thought work because if it's not moving you forward, you're stuck but you don't see where you're stuck, and then you just keep trying to do it over and over again because your brain can't see what the other option is.

This is why having a coach is so crucial. So anyway, with this client, this was backfiring because instead, what was happening was she was feeling terrible now in anticipation, even though nothing was happening, and she just kept trying to coach herself the same way and not getting anywhere.

And so what I said to her was, "Listen, you just need to embrace the suck. Embrace the suck." And then I was like, this has to be a podcast episode because so many of us need this right now. So many of us use thought work to try to feel better, and there's nothing wrong with that of course, and often it's extremely effective. That's why we all love it.

But when it sometimes doesn't work and we're stuck, then we get frustrated and we think, "Well, I know this is just a thought so I shouldn't believe it and I shouldn't be experiencing these negative emotions." That's not true. You have a human brain. You're going to experience a mix of positive and negative emotions for the rest of your life.

It's going to be 50/50 no matter what circumstances are happening. And that doesn't mean that every moment is 50/50. It means some moments will be amazing and some will suck. And the thing about being a human is we're all in for the amazing ones, but we don't want the sucky ones.

So especially when we're trying to coach ourselves out of fear about the future, or out of our resistance to the present, we're trying to get to a place where it doesn't suck. It's like we want to control when that 50/50 happens, and we secretly want it to 100/0.

UFYB 135: Embrace the Suck

We're theoretically willing to have negative emotions that are supposedly a part of life, like, we'll accept that premise, but we just don't want them right now, thank you very much, or at any identifiable point in the future. It's like a child being like, I understand that I need to eat vegetables, but I don't want to eat them today and I don't want to ever. I can't identify a time that I will be willing to eat them in the future, but sure, I understand theoretically I need to eat them.

We will say we understand that negative emotion is a part of life, but whatever shows up, we're constantly trying to get rid of it. Or convince ourselves now that we can do thought work, so we don't have to feel it in the future. Either way, when you are resisting your current negative emotion, you feel suffering.

When you are worried about future negative emotion, you feel suffering. It's all the same. It's all just your thought right now causing suffering. And we will say we understand negative emotion as part of life, but any time it shows up, we're like, no thank you, some other time.

And so much agitation comes from that, from not wanting to experience the suck, not being willing to experience it. But what if you were just willing to embrace the suck? Yes, it's caused by your thoughts, but almost no human I don't think can ever change 100% of their thoughts every second exactly when they want to.

We have to be willing to have negative emotion before we can ever change it anyway. We can never change it when we're resisting it. So, what if we're just willing to embrace that sometimes it's going to suck? What if it was okay for things to suck sometimes? Yes, it's just a thought, but still, what if that was okay?

UFYB 135: Embrace the Suck

Then you wouldn't have to be so agitated about getting away from any current sucking or about anticipating that the future might suck a little bit sometimes. It's like we run around in circles trying so hard to prevent any future feelings of things sucking, which just makes our current moment suck and the future suck is inevitable.

The future suck is inevitable. You have a human brain. Half the time, it's going to make your experience suck. That's just the deal. That's what we're signed up for. It has nothing to do with the circumstances, and that's what's so fascinating, right?

As a coach, you get to see that our belief that the magnitude or impact of emotional suckage - technical term - has to do with external conditions is just totally wrong. The circumstances have nothing to do with it. I coach people in such different circumstances and who would each call the other person's circumstance not a big deal or so much worse than theirs. Either way, it's all the same.

The emotional experience of suffering, of sucking, it's caused by your own thoughts. And it's not more intense when it's a more serious issue, whether everybody would agree with you or not. If you're single and you want a partner, your brain makes it suck 50% of the time by telling you how much better life would be if you had a partner.

And then you get a partner and then your brain makes it suck 50% of the time by telling you how you need a different partner, or this one should change, or maybe you're the problem and you're not good enough. You can change partners every time to one who matches what your brain said would eliminate the suck, and surprise, your brain comes up with new things to complain about 50% of the time.

UFYB 135: Embrace the Suck

See what I'm saying? Your brain creates 50% sucking no matter what the circumstances are. So when you are trying to imagine this future and convince yourself it will never suck in the future or you need to take a lot of action or do a lot of thought work to prevent the future ever sucking, no. Useless. Useless.

If you just accept it's going to suck sometimes, you can move through the world, the joy, and the suck so much more freely. Because it means nothing has gone wrong. Sometimes it sucks to be a human. Nothing has gone wrong. Part of the deal. It was in the job description.

And then there's no reason not to break up with that person or quit that job or whatever because you're willing to embrace the suck. You're not trying to stay really still to avoid any future suck happening. So rather than coach yourself frantically trying to believe that if x, y, z things happens in the future it won't suck and you won't have any negative emotion about it, you can just accept that of course, it probably will suck some of the time.

And it won't suck the other some of the time. If you get dumped, if you get sick, if you get fired, all of that is going to suck some of the time and also not suck some of the time because you'll still be a human, living a human life with a mix of emotions. It's all going to be the same. Same mix, same feelings, same 50/50 no matter how the external circumstances change.

Sometimes it's like we're both terrified that it will suck at all, but then we also assume that if it does suck at all, it will be unrelenting suck forever. No, neither. It's going to suck some of the time just because you're a human, but it's also going to be awesome some of the time regardless of what job you're in or what partner you have or anything else.

You are going to have moments of sucking and moments of joy and gratitude and connection and happiness. That's what life is. It's almost like

UFYB 135: Embrace the Suck

think about the circumstance as - now that everybody's on Zoom, people are using all these different Zoom backgrounds.

It's just like a Zoom background. We can change the background, flash, flash, flash, change the background, flash, flash, flash, doesn't matter. You, the person in front of the background, you're experiencing positive and negative emotion, amazing and sucky moments in the same proportion no matter what, no matter what or how often we change the Zoom background.

Here you are having sucky and amazing moments in front of the Swiss Alps. Here you are having sucky and amazing moments in a desert. Here you are having sucky and amazing moments underwater. Doesn't matter what the background is. You're going to have sucky and amazing moments in front of any of those backgrounds, in any job, with any partner, at any weight, whatever it is.

So one big reason to embrace that is that it actually will make the suck less painful because you're not freaking out and resisting it and thinking it means something has gone wrong, and you're able to remember that life is 50% positive. So, if you're in the sucky part now, sometimes when I'm in a sucky part now and having negative emotion, I'm like, oh, this is awesome because it means positive emotion is coming.

When you're in positive emotion, it means negative emotion is coming. It's going to be back and forth. When you resist the suck, you drown out the joy too. Because you only see what you focus on, which is the suck. And your brain is so busy resisting the suck it can't even create the joy. So, think about it like you have 100% brain capacity. If 50% of your brain capacity is being spent on negative emotion but you just allow that, you have this other 50% to create and experience and focus on moments of joy.

UFYB 135: Embrace the Suck

But if you resist the 50% that's sucking, now you're using that other 50% you have just to resist and freak out. So now you have no brain capacity left for any of the good stuff. You don't have any brain space available for thinking the thoughts that cause joy and happiness and meaning and fulfillment.

You're too busy thinking negative thoughts about your negative thoughts, so now you've used all your brain's capacity on just the negative. But here's the other reason. And this is really I think what I've been thinking about a lot lately. How we show up for and face and move through the suck is where we find our purpose and our meaning and our resilience.

It is easy to show up for endless brownies and orgasms and joy. Everyone can show up for that. But not everyone can show up for the suck. Not everyone is willing to go through the suck or tolerate the suck with consciousness, much less to welcome the suck or invite it in.

How you show up for the parts that suck, again, they just suck because of your thoughts, but still, is what will move you forward in life. It's how you will grow and find meaning. Just think about it now.

If you think about what were the formative experiences of your life, the times you were proud of yourself, the times you learned something valuable, the times you rose to the occasion, the times you saw what you were capable of doing and being, were they the easy, blissfully happy times? Of course not.

It's like a runner's high. You don't get the high without the run. You don't get the benefit without the struggle. You don't get the meaning without the suck. Now, I'm not saying that suffering is virtuous. It's not good or bad. It's just part of the human condition. It's just one of the things that we have like faces and sucking. That's just what life is.

UFYB 135: Embrace the Suck

Even when we can use thought work or meditation or whatever else to reduce our unnecessary suffering, which we can, pain and some negative emotion are always part of the deal. So, it's going to be part of our lives no matter what, and we get to decide how to think about that, how to show up for that.

And let's be real. In times of crisis, not everyone makes it through. But none of us make it through life forever either. Inherent to any human life is the truth that one day it will end and if you're conscious of it, that might suck, and you get to decide how to show up for that truth. So, embrace the suck. Sometimes life will suck. Yes, that is a thought and it's optional, but you don't have to change it. I find it useful.

And when you're resisting the negative emotion, you can't change them. And when you stop resisting them, you'll find they often either change on their own or just don't need to change. Because you will see that the sword is forged in the fire. Whoever you're called to be, whoever you're capable of being, that person comes to light in how you show up for the suck.

There's no right or perfect way to do it. It isn't a test you can fail. It's not a moral issue. It's just a process of being willing bit by bit to stay present and conscious in your life. None of us do it perfectly. It is a skill we have to learn. To embrace joy and happiness and connection, which a lot of us find easier, and to embrace the opposite of all of that, because that's part of the human condition too.

So embrace the suck, my chickens. There is nothing to fear. Emotions can't kill you, and as for the things that can, none of us get out of this thing called life alive no matter what in the end. So how do we want to show up in the meantime? That's the question. I want to embrace it all. The parts that feel amazing and the parts that suck, and I hope you do too. I'll talk to you soon.

UFYB 135: Embrace the Suck

If this episode spoke to you, then you need to check out The Clutch because it comes with a five-week self-coaching course that will walk you through exactly how to apply this life-changing work to anything you experience. Literally anything. If you've ever thought, "Well, I don't know how to get started with thought work or I don't know exactly how to do thought work or if I'm doing it right, or what order I should do it in or how I should do it," the self-coaching course teaches you all of that.

And even if you're familiar with thought work concepts, The Clutch will help you take the work deeper, and it comes with access to expert coaches who can answer any thought work question you have. Plus, me, of course, to coach you live. No question is off limits. You can change your life by going to unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch, or you can actually just text your email address to 347-934-8861 and we will send a link to all the information you need straight to your cellphone. I'll see you there.