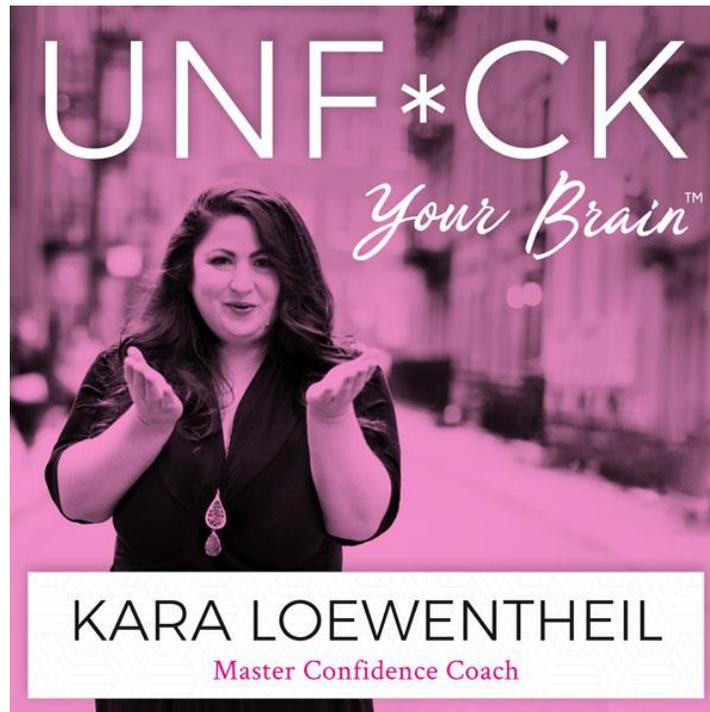


UFYB 141: Closure



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. How are you? I am settled into the place that I will be staying for the summer, and I am looking out at a burbling creek and a pine tree because that's the only tree that has leaves on it here. And I'm pretending that it is warmer than 50 degrees outside because it just really should be by now warmer. That's my firm belief, but nature is not following my manual, which is so rude.

People don't follow our manuals and then nature, viruses, and the government, no one will just do what we know they really should do. And things just won't be how they should be, which would make everything so much easier if the world would follow or manual for it.

This is not an episode about the manual itself because I've already talked about that at length on the podcast and if you're in The Clutch, you know I'm coaching y'all all the time on your manuals for other people and the world.

But I was thinking about that because I do think today's topic is kind of related to our manuals because it's about how we react to and make sense of when something or someone doesn't work out the way we think it should. We don't like what has happened. And that is closure.

So closure is one of those, I think kind of pop psychology concepts that we throw around a lot in ways that are kind of counterproductive without fully understanding what closure is or how it actually works. So today I'm going to teach you what closure actually is and how you can get it.

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So you know I often like to start with the definitions to kind of talk about how we use a word, what we seem to mean when we use it. That's the lawyer in me. Let's define our terms. So I think that we use the word closure a lot, but I don't know that we actually know what we're talking about.

So one thing I notice is that when people talk about closure, they are almost always framing it as something kind of interactive. So it's not like I was in a car accident involving just me and a tree and I need to get closure about it. People don't say things like that that much.

It's usually like, I need to talk to my ex-boyfriend or girlfriend to get closure about our relationship. I need to talk to my ex-boss to get closure about why I was fired. I want to talk to my parents to get closure about something that happened in my childhood that I'm upset about.

It has this kind of interactive flavor where we think that we need closure when we have some negative emotion surrounding some kind of interaction that involved other people. And we think that we need that other person, or at least some kind of interaction with that other person to give us closure.

So I think that this makes sense if you are operating under the premise that other people cause our feelings, which is what most of the world believes. So if you think that other people cause your negative feelings, then of course you think that other people can solve your negative feelings and give you closure, which you believe will be some kind of positive feeling.

And I think from watching my own brain and coaching all of my clients and coaching all of you in The Clutch that there are kind of two different things we think we could get from another person that will provide closure. And it's just useful to kind of understand this so that we can look at our minds and

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see where we're falling into these different categories or where we're making these kinds of mistakes in our thinking.

So I think there's two. One is understanding. So sometimes we think that we just don't understand what happened, which usually means we don't understand why someone acted the way they did. And then if we could understand it, we would feel resolved.

So this one is wrong because when we say, "I just don't understand," usually what we mean is I don't like that person's reasons. So either we mean I don't know the reasons, and if I did, I would feel differently about it, or we mean I know the reasons but they're not the reasons I would have, or they don't follow the logic that I like and so I just need to learn more.

Somehow if I could talk to this person and hear more of their thoughts or more of their reasoning, then I would be able to be satisfied about what they did. But of course, that's just a total lie your brain is telling you. You don't need to understand the reasons that someone did something. You're not really upset about the reasons. You're really upset about the thing.

And often, you already know everything you need to know anyway. You just don't like the person's reasons, or you think if you could just hear enough of it, you could somehow convince them to think in a different way.

So sometimes we believe the lie that we just need more information in order to understand things in a way that will give us closure. And then the second one is that sometimes I think we think we need apology or acknowledgement from the other person.

So this is even more wanting to control them. We think that we can't feel better unless the other person agrees with our interpretation of reality and our kind of negative emotion about what happened. So we want them to

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agree with us, usually that they were wrong and we were right, or they did something bad, or we at least want them to somehow acknowledge it.

We think that if they just took responsibility for our feelings and agreed with our thoughts about how things should have happened differently, then we would feel better. So those are kind of the two big things I see is that we want people to admit that they did something wrong to us and that they caused our negative emotion, and then we think that would make us feel better. Or we think we just don't understand why they did this thing, or acted the way they did or said what they said or whatever it is, we just need more information, and if we could somehow understand it, then we would feel better.

And of course, both of those are not true. They're both lies that our brains tell us because it's never what the other person did or why they did it that's causing our emotion. It's always just our own thoughts about it. So, we don't need to understand it anymore and we don't need them to agree with us to actually feel better.

I'm going to talk more about that in a minute. But I think it's important to kind of put our desire for closure in perspective and in context. Because one element of it is this belief that other people control our feelings, but then I think we also get really fixated on closure because so many of us are consumed with our thoughts about the past.

So, I talk a lot on the podcast about the difference between living in your thoughts about the past, living in the present, and living in your thoughts about the future. This is a complicated balance. I think one of the interesting things about this work, the way I try to teach it is that it's really a balance of living in the present moment and also thinking from the future.

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It's trying to combine this mindfulness tradition of present awareness with the human ability to make plans and think ahead. But living in our thoughts about the past is almost never useful, and yet that's what a majority of us spend our time doing.

We give the past so much power over us. Our whole cultural narrative is about the past defining us and shaping us and staying with us. The story of Adam and Eve is this original sin that then has to shape all of humanity's future. And then we have a current contemporary cultural narrative that our past is what creates our personalities and that's what determines how we react to things and how we think and feel about them.

This is not a truth of human existence. Some societies have believed in astrology, that the position of the stars and planets when you're born is what shapes your personality, and some societies have believed it's a balance of humors in the body, and some societies have believed it's about the circumstances of conception or that the gods decreed it.

There's so many different theories. But our current theory is that the past is what makes us who we are, and the past limits who we can be. So of course, we are obsessed with the past. And the more we ruminate about the past, the more we feel stuck in the past, and then the more we want to set free.

And because we are blaming other people for our feelings, we think they're the ones who can liberate us from that suffering. So, we have these two ingredients. One is believing that other people cause our emotions, and therefore believing that we need to understand things more or we need people to agree with us or to acknowledge us or to do or say something to make us feel better, and this obsessive fixation and rumination about the past and this attachment to the idea that the past limits who we can be now.

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When you put those things together, it makes sense that you become kind of obsessed with relationships or interactions or events in the past that didn't happen the way you wanted and wanting someone else to be able to give you closure to change your feelings about it so you can move on.

The problem is that it doesn't really work because other people don't cause our feelings. Our thoughts do. So occasionally after we talk to someone else, we change our own thoughts about it and feel better, and then we think that that's closure. But most of the time, even that doesn't happen.

Even if we understand better what happened, we won't feel any better because we're still believing it shouldn't have happened that way, it was negative that it happened that way. It would be better if it hadn't happened that way.

And even if the other person agrees with us and apologizes, which you would think would provide so much closure, we usually still don't feel better long term for the same reason. We're still believing it shouldn't have happened the way it did. Whatever it is that happened in the past that we're upset about, we still think it should be different.

I think that when we talk about closure, what we really mean is that we want emotional resolution from our thoughts about the past. We want to feel resolved. We want to feel at peace with something that happened. And peace is really just the absence of suffering about the thing that happened. It's the absence of resistance. It's the absence of wanting things to have gone a different way. It's the absence of believing that things would just be better if they were different.

I think that's what closure truly is. It's a name that we give the absence of resisting and suffering around a circumstance. Because if we just called it stopping resisting reality, then it would be on us to fix it. So instead, we call

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it closure as if that's a real thing that exists. And that way, we can believe someone else can give it to us.

If you think about it, calling it closure makes it hard to even know what it is or how to do it. If I say you need closure, you don't really know what that means or how to get it. But if I say you need to stop believing the past should have been different and make peace with things happening exactly the way they did, now you know what I'm talking about.

Now, I'm not saying you know how to do it. That's what coaching and self-coaching are for. That's why people need coaches. But you understand the concept. You at least can understand what I'm saying to you. You see what's standing in your way and where you're trying to go.

Closure is mystifying. Stop believing the past should have been different is pretty clear. So when you want closure, here's what you have to understand. It has to come from you. It's something you have to create yourself. No one else can give it to you.

And closure is not going to magically arrive by just constantly thinking about the situation. One of the things I see happen so often with people who don't actually know how to change their thinking is that they think they are processing something or they think they're working on getting closure, even if they know it has to come from them, they think that the way to do that is just to think the same thoughts over and over and over again.

Now, I talk a lot about not rushing away from your thoughts. It is very important to observe your thinking and allow your feelings. We're never trying to run away from our own minds. We always are, but we try not to, right? But that's a big difference between observing your own mind, which cultivates resilience, and just being totally in it and thinking and believing all of your thoughts about something over and over.

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I was just trying to explain this to someone recently and teach it to him because he was experiencing so much emotional suffering and he believed that - it was about something in his past. So it was totally a “closure” situation. And he believed that he needed to go deeper and deeper in the suffering to process it.

But what was so clear to me as a coach is that that’s not what was going to help him. He wasn’t allowing emotion and observing and detaching from his thoughts, which is what actually allows you to process pain and move on. He was just rethinking his painful thoughts over and over again and believing them over and over again and thinking that if he just kept doing that more and more, magically, that would turn into closure.

Your thoughts create your feelings. So every time you think a painful thought, you create more pain for yourself. There’s no amount of thinking that same thought that will somehow clear out or process the pain or get you to the other side of it. It’s just like you’re running a line of code that creates a certain function, or like, tapping the knee as a reflex and it kicks and your leg kicks. It just keeps recreating it.

So, when we are kind of fixated on something in the past and we want closure and we just keep thinking about it, we never get it. And this is why even if you talk to the person or people involved, you often won’t feel like you have closure because they’ll say X, Y, Z, but you’re just still thinking your own same thoughts, so nothing’s going to feel any different. That’s why no one else can give it to you.

So if you have something painful in your past that you’re fixated on, the good news is that you can get closer any time you want. And it could be something happening in the present you’re trying to get closure from. Not always - it could be with a very recent past.

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But you have to create it yourself, and that means you have to stop believing all of your thoughts about it. You have to stop resisting the reality of what happened. And you have to stop believing that things would be better if they had been different.

I think we stay so engaged in conflict with our past because we think the past is what's preventing us from being happy now. So we somehow think if I just think a lot about how the past was terrible, somehow, I can magically change it that way. I'm resisting that past because I think it's what's keeping me from being happy now.

But it's only our thoughts that are in the way of us being happy now. To create closure, you don't have to understand more about what happened or the other people's thoughts or feelings about it. You don't have to get an apology or an acknowledgment or forgiveness, if you're the person who thinks you did something wrong and you're trying to get closure about that. Anything else.

You don't ever have to speak to the other people involved again. You don't have to go back in time. And you don't necessarily have to go deeper into your pain. If you've been avoiding your emotions, yes, you need to allow and process them. But if you've been indulging in the pain and just creating more and more pain constantly for yourself, you don't need to keep swimming around in it.

You just have to decide to accept reality. Whatever happened happened. And some of you may be able to believe that it was meant to happen that way. For me, I believe - the version of that that I can believe is it couldn't have happened any other way.

And what I mean by that is whatever happened was the result of every person's model in that exact moment, the thought, feeling, actions that

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everybody was in, and every aspect of the natural world being the way it was in that exact moment. In that microsecond screenshot freeze where everybody's model was the way it was and the world was the way it was, that's all that could have happened.

So, it doesn't mean I can't change my future. It's not deterministic in this future way of like, whatever's meant to happen will happen or that there's some divine intelligence doing it. Again, some of you may believe that and it may work for you. It doesn't for me.

It's not deterministic about the future. But it is deterministic about the past. I believe whatever happened had to happen exactly the way it did. There was never any other option because of everybody's models and the world being the way it was and all the moments that led up to it.

You can see how believing that gives me closure any time I want it about anything because it means nothing has gone wrong. Nothing happened that should not have happened. Not because of some consciousness intention in the universe for me, that's not what I believe, but simply because it is. It is what happened and so that's all that could have happened.

Suffering is resistance to what is. Accepting that what happened in the past had to happen and that it's totally neutral and that we get to decide whatever we want to believe about it doesn't mean anything about how I might want to act or what I might want to create in the future. Doesn't mean I can't try to grow and evolve and create different results that I think I want to change.

All it means is that emotionally resisting something in the past that I cannot change is the most surefire way I know to ruin the present and rob me of

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my future. We are only wanting the past to be different because of the meaning that we give it, because of the story that we are telling about it.

Everything happened exactly the way it had to happen and everything that happened is completely neutral until a human decides to have thoughts about it. So you can change those thoughts about what happened at any time, which means that closure is always available to you. All you have to do is accept reality and accept the neutrality of reality.

I know, it's easier said than done, but that is why coaching is the secret to life. Accepting that there's nothing wrong with what happened and nothing has gone wrong. Whatever happened was neutral. You get to decide what to think and feel about it and you get to decide when to stop resisting it and that is the moment that will set you free.

So if you're The Clutch, I want you to post in the Facebook group if this is something you're struggling with about what you're struggling to get closure about, and then based on the podcast, I want you to post about where you can see you're resisting reality or believing that it should have happened differently, and then you can get some coaching on that.

And if you're not in The Clutch but you're struggling to get closure about something in your past, then come join us so I can help you with this and save you a lot of time. Because not making peace with your past, my chickens, will hold you back until you do. Take it from me.

Alright, I wish you all a wonderful week, as much closure as you want and need and can create for yourself. And I'll talk to you next week.

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

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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 unfuckyourbrainn.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.