

# UFYB 150: Compromising: How and When



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Kara Loewentheil**

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## UFYB 150: Compromising: How and When

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, for one, cannot believe that summer is over. It is dark at 8pm. Unacceptable. I don't understand what happened. I feel like I went through a wormhole. Like, May was a thousand years long and now it's almost September. It is September.

Side story but related, so I used to do this kind of tantric-based meditation practice. I studied with this teacher named Sally Kempton for a bit. Not studied with her like she knew me personally, but I went to her workshops and her teachings, I talked to her a few times.

So anyway, I was at a workshop she was doing in California and I had this super intense experience where I basically felt like everything in my body, all the energy rushed together and contracted inwards to this pinpoint and then it exploded. And I felt like, infinite space inside of me. It was really, really fucking wild.

So I went up to talk to her about it afterwards. I'm in the receiving line, everybody is telling her about their meditation and she's just like, moving us along. And I was like, oh my god, this wild thing happened, it blew my mind. I'm describing it to her, and she just casually said, "Oh yeah, you went through the wormhole."

Like this was just a known thing, like no big deal. Like oh yeah, the wormhole. There are so many different ways of experiencing being a human in this world. It really blows my mind. And I think it's always a reminder to me also of how many incredible tools there are for navigating the human experience.

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Obviously, thought work is my favorite, but it's not the only thing in the world. And I don't ever want to be dogmatic about it. I think as humans, we want to be right and we want to be certain and we want to know the answer, but that's what makes us mentally rigid. I talk about this in the mental flexibility episode.

We can get rigid about thought work itself, that it has to be the one answer to the universe or the only thing that works or makes sense, that it has to be right. But it doesn't have to be objectively right. We can't know that 100% for sure. Even science, even scientific consensus gets revised over time. We don't believe a lot of things that the best medieval scientists believed.

And in a thousand years, people are not going to believe a lot of things that our best scientists now believe. So it just has to be right for you. What gets you the results that you want? That's always the question. Is this helpful? If it's helpful then use it, wherever it comes from.

So in the spirit of that kind of flexibility, let's talk about compromise. And this is going to kind of be a short and sweet episode because it's not actually a hugely complicated topic. It's just that we like to be confused about it and it comes up a lot, so I want to address it.

Because this is one of the things that my students tend to love to get confused about. Because when you are socialized as a woman and basically taught that you should constantly compromise on what you want to make other people happy, that becomes this kind of baseline idea in your head.

And so you start to feel guilty if you ever choose to not compromise. And you start to think that you need a really good reason to not compromise. So

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you start to question and doubt yourself, and you start to feel defensive if you don't want to compromise.

And sometimes when that's the kind of mental and emotional state you're in, you learn thought work and you may be tempted to use it to just be okay with whatever someone else wants you to do so that you can go along with it and not have to deal with the discomfort of disagreement.

So this would be a way of using thought work against yourself, like I talk about in one of the recent episodes. If you are just trying to use thought work to be okay with doing things you don't want to do so that you don't have to deal with your own discomfort, that's not the point of thought work.

The point of thought work is to liberate you, which means dealing with your own discomfort. Then the other thing that I see is sometimes people are coming from the opposite point of view. Part of their kind of awakening to gender socialization has been to really double down on just never compromising and doing whatever the fuck they want, which is - I'm not saying that's good or bad.

But sometimes people then object to thought work because they think that believing in thought work means that you should just be okay with anything. It's like a reaction to being taught your whole life that you should compromise, it can start to feel like a positive rebellion or independence to not compromise and then people start to have this adversarial relationship with thought work or with the ideas where they are like, well you're just teaching people that they should compromise about anything because they can always just change their thought about it.

Of course not. Taking pride in not compromising is not really empowering either. Either you are enthralled to your own fear of other people and so you compromise all the time, that is not empowering, that does not feel

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good. But if you're enthralled to your own rebellion or ego, that also does not feel good and is not actually empowering.

So being too far in either direction is not empowering. You're going to notice a theme, chickens, but the question is never properly posed as what should I do. Should I compromise or not? What actions should I take? That is always the wrong question. The question is why are you compromising or thinking about compromising, or why are you not compromising?

What is the thought producing that action? When we don't know about thought work, I think there are a couple of core reasons that we tend to compromise. Some of us have the thought that we're a bad person if we don't compromise. We just feel guilt if we don't want to compromise.

And the slightly more positive version of it is we may have like, an affirmative belief that compromising is always the most fair thing to do. So we've got some kind of belief that compromise is always good, or if you don't compromise, you're bad.

Sometimes we may compromise because we're scared to lose a relationship, if we don't go along with what the other person wants. And that could be professional or personal. Or sometimes we compromise because we don't want to upset the other person, or we fear their negative emotion.

So in my book, none of these are good reasons. When we compromise for any of these reasons, we're doing it to avoid having a negative emotion. Now, I'm not saying that having a belief about fairness or working together is necessarily bad, but just when you have an absolute rule that you follow in any circumstance to avoid feeling a certain way.

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If you are believing that you should always compromise because that's what's fair, but really, the reason that you are sticking with that thought is that you would feel guilty if you didn't do it, it's not really coming from a positive, empowered place.

So any time we're trying to control our own emotions or we're trying to control someone else in order to control our own emotions, we are not going to feel empowered. It's not going to feel good. If you're compromising because you think you should and you'll shame yourself if you don't, then you're going to actually feel rebellious and resentful and dissatisfied.

And if you're compromising to try to control someone else's emotions, you're going to feel anxious or resentful, or both. So compromise as an action will never feel good if it's coming from one of those thought patterns that doesn't feel good.

So the question is really, how do we decide when to compromise if we know that we're allowed to want whatever we want? It's not a moral issue. We can be happy with any outcome. We don't have to get our way in order to be happy. We don't cause other people's feelings. And taking action to teach other people a lesson or try to control their brains doesn't work.

So as always with thought work, we have to back up from that action question. Should I compromise? Should I not? Not the right question. We want to ask what is the thought and feeling that are producing the action of compromising or not compromising. That's what you have to ask yourself.

Why are you thinking about compromising? What is the thought you have? If you're compromising out of scarcity, out of thinking, "Well, if I don't compromise with this client then I'm not going to get more work, if I don't compromise with this partner, then they're going to leave and there aren't

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any other ones,” out of scarcity, you’re going to feel agitated and anxious and you may layer resentment on top of that.

And if you’re refusing to compromise out of ego, out of well, why should I have to compromise? They don’t have to compromise, they think they should get whatever they want but I just want to get whatever I want, or I’m going to show them that they have to take me into account and it’s not fair if they get their way, that’s all ego.

If you’re refusing to compromise out of ego, it’s going to feel defensive. You could hear that in my voice. You’re going to feel kind of agitated and defensive. Neither of those feels good. So you always have to ask yourself, what am I thinking that is producing this feeling and action?

It is very easy to get caught up in the trap, either of thinking that compromise is just always the good person thing to do, or that not compromising is somehow standing up for yourself and having your own back and being independent and feeling kind of righteous and justified.

Neither one of those is true. It’s always about what result are you trying to create. Sometimes the way to have your own back may be to not compromise. That’s totally true. If you are considering doing something that goes against one of your core values, you really have to ask why are you throwing yourself under the bus?

If you have a core value of honesty and someone asks you to lie for them and you consider doing it because you don’t want them to be mad at you or leave you, that’s not going to feel good as a reason and you’re not going to get a good result. That kind of compromise, if you’re considering compromising a core value, that usually comes out of scarcity or fear.

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But sometimes the way to have your own back is to compromise. The question is always, how is it impacting your result? So for instance, you may not like the idea of A- work. But if A- work lets you get your work out the door to help your clients, then compromising on it being A- instead of A+ is worth it. Or you may not like the idea of going to your partner's family for the holidays, but you want your kids to have a relationship with their grandparents, so you compromise to make that happen.

Here's the thing that I think people socialized as women really have to remember. You don't need a good reason to compromise or a good reason to not compromise in the sense of you don't have to justify it. It's not a moral issue. You always get to decide whether to compromise or not with someone else or with yourself.

When I say you want to know your reason, that's just if you want to practice thought work, if you want to be able to create the feelings, thoughts, results you want, you're going to need to know why you're trying to take this action or not take this action. But it's not because you need a good enough reason as if there's some external judge of it.

You don't need a good reason to compromise and you don't need a good reason to not compromise. You don't have to have an approved justification for anything you do. Men are not taught that. Women are taught that. Making a broad generalization. Obviously, there are people of any gender identification who maybe were and weren't taught that in specific instances.

But in general, women are taught to believe that they just need a good reason just for existing, much less for doing things that they want to do. Or not doing things they don't want to do. You don't need a fucking reason on a moral existential level. You don't need a reason.



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On a personal what kind of life do I want to live, do I want to have any idea what's going on in my own brain and do I want to not feel like a crazy person, I recommend understanding what your reason is and deciding if you like it or not. But that is an inquiry that is completely internal.

When we think we need a good enough reason for something, a justification for something, it's not really an internal inquiry. That's all internalized socialization. We've usually got someone we're thinking about. Like secretly it's like, well, I'm really thinking about what would my mother say or what would my friends say.

It's like we want the them out there, whoever they are, to believe and agree that it was okay that we did this thing. Thought work is about a very internal inquiry without that judgment. Not starting from a place of you better have a good enough reason. Starting from a place of I'm just curious what my reason is so I can decide if I like it or not. That's what it means.

It doesn't mean make sure you know your thoughts and then just believe them without coaching yourself on them, but it also doesn't mean you need a good enough reason. It just means make sure you know your thoughts and see what results they're going to create, and then use your self-coaching brain, use the self-coaching tools to decide, do I like those thoughts? Do I like these results? Do I want to keep them? How do I feel when I think that? How do I act? What result am I going to get? And do I want to change it or not?

There's no amount of times that someone else has to have compromised to earn your compromise. There's no score to keep. There's no impact of compromising or not compromising on your worth as a human. There is no universal fairness that is being portioned out and tracked, and you don't need a good enough or legitimate or valid reason to compromise or not to compromise.

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You just need to ask yourself why would I be compromising or why would I be not compromising, what is the thought I am having, do I like that thought, the feeling it's creating, and the action that that's driving me to take? Don't overcomplicate it, don't be confused. Don't ask yourself, should I compromise or not?

Ask yourself, what am I thinking about this situation and do I want to keep that thought? Keep it simple, chickens. That is the way to handle a lizard brain, a chicken brain, a human brain, any other kind of brain. I will talk to you next week.

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