

UFYB 189: Creativity, Positive Thinking, and Self-Love: Takeaways from Clutch College Live Online



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 all? I am across the country. I'm in California when I'm recording this. It's the first time I have traveled since the pandemic started, for obvious reasons. And it has been so amazing and also so much for my nervous system.

So as all of us are getting back to some semblance of normal, those of us who are, just remember to cut yourself a little bit of slack. You are not necessarily going to be kind of functioning exactly the way you used to. But there is nothing like seeing good friends and old friends and being in person and being in community with people who I haven't seen for a long time.

I actually have really found that if you choose to think obviously positive thoughts about electronic communication, that my relationships have really done so well over Zoom. I feel closer than ever to my friends. But it is also nice to get to huge people in person.

So that's what I've been doing. Just seeing all of my loved ones. And a couple weeks ago, I saw many of you who are my loved ones at Clutch College. And so today, what I wanted to do is share some of our best takeaways from Clutch College.

And I do this I think after ever Clutch College because I want to share some of the wisdom that comes out of that weekend with all of you. And every time, I just say this one was most amazing than the last one, but it's just really true, and I think the fact that so many people continue to come back

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to Clutch College again and again I think is just proof of that. It just shows you what an incredibly and special experience it is.

So there are kind of four big takeaways from Clutch College that I want to share with you. And the first one is kind of about creativity and owning our own success. So you'll hear I have a podcast coming out later this year where I actually talk about creativity with some of my advanced certification students who work with artists or work with style or work with people on creative pursuits.

And one of the things that's so interesting is a lot of people will say that they're not creative. But when you start looking at your thoughts, what you see is that we have each created all of our own weird crazy rules for the universe in our brains.

We have all created this complex architecture of rules about how we're supposed to be, how other people are supposed to act, what the rules are, we're this way but not that way, we're good at this, we're bad at that, someone should text us when they get home and if they don't, once is okay, but if they don't three times, it means they don't love us.

We just create all of these complicated sets of rules and we're really like little gods and goddesses making up rules for our own universe, and then enforcing them against ourselves. We should be good at our jobs but we shouldn't want to make money, or we shouldn't think that we're too good at our jobs, or we should be this kind of parent, but if we're too much that kind of parent, then that's bad.

We have all these incredibly complicated sets of rules in our brains, and then we tell ourselves that we're not creative, even though we basically have all made up this incredible mental architecture of how we understand

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the world and all the different rules we've created for ourselves and other people.

So number one, if you tell yourself you're not creative, that's bullshit because you've created an entire world in your brain. Like novelists get good reviews for creating a world and a story, we are all doing that in our brains all the time. Your brain basically is a creative story-making machine.

But the second part of that is we blame ourselves for the negative results in our lives, especially once we learn thought work, but we don't stop and take credit for the positive results in our lives. So you can't have it both ways. You can't believe that your brain is so powerful that it creates all these negative results that you judge and shame yourself for, but that has nothing to do with the positive results.

It's like what I always say about imposter syndrome, which is like, okay, maybe you're stupid and bad at your job, but then you must be a brilliant con person if you've actually successfully tricked all these people for so long, right? How could you be stupid and do that?

So it's kind of the same thing. If you are going to take responsibility for the results in your life you don't like, which of course I 100% recommend, you also have to take responsibility for all the positive results in your life. If your brain can create all these negative results, it can create all these positive results, and it has.

So don't go around thinking that you create the negative results in your life, but the positive results are just accidental. They just happen to you. No, you created both of them, and you're creating all of it. We have so much more creative power than we think.

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And so rather than assume that all these kind of weird universal rules that we came up with are just how things have to be, really see yourself as the person creating all of that, and try to break your brain with how different, how antithetical to your current rules your new rules could be. How differently you could think about the world and your life and what a different mental universe you could create because we are all incredibly powerful in our minds.

At the same time, and kind of always the counterbalance with thought work is that we talked a lot about the idea that we have to accept reality. Now, that doesn't mean we don't want to change reality. I just was talking about creating positive results, changing the rules that we have in our brain.

But the kind of duality of thought work is that we have to accept reality before we can change it. When we resist reality, we actually can't make plans or figure out what to do. Because we're not being honest with ourselves about where we're starting from.

Let's say you're in Toledo, that's the city you're in, you're in Toledo, Ohio. But you just refuse to confront the fact that you're there because you thought you were supposed to be in Akron. I don't know why we're talking about Ohio. This is what's on my mind.

So you're in Toledo, but you refuse to admit and accept that because you think you should be in Akron. You were supposed to be in Akron. Akron would be happier, or that's where you'd planned to be or whatever. And you're trying to get to New York City.

You can't actually make a plan, you can't Google Maps it, you can't get the directions from where you actually are if you insist on resisting where you are, believing you shouldn't be there, not paying attention to it, resisting it, and trying to pretend that you're somewhere else. You can't get anywhere

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because you don't know where you are, so you can't figure out how to get where you're going.

So when we resist reality, that's what we're doing. We're trying to get somewhere to get away from our current reality. But we can't even do that because we're in so much resistance to our current reality that we can't take real stock of where we are and see what's causing it.

If the whole reason you're in Toledo instead of Akron is you wouldn't take off these blinders you were wearing that led you to the wrong place and you kept running around Toledo in your blinders, trying to get somewhere else, you wouldn't be able to see where you were going.

When we don't accept reality and we're in a hurry to get away from it, we can't actually understand where we are or how we got there, and then we can't actually understand how to change it. You have to be where you are in order to actually see how to get somewhere else.

And resisting reality is the most painful thing you can do. We talked about this a lot at Clutch College and did a lot of coaching on this. I think that it makes you feel like a caged animal in a trap, just totally crazed and panicked. Because what you're doing is telling your brain, "This current reality is not okay, I'm not safe here, I can't be happy here, this is bad."

But you can't escape it. Your brain can't get out of your body. Your body can't get out of the present timeline. And so it really doesn't matter what the circumstance is or what actions you take. When you are thinking that way, when you're resisting reality, when you're telling yourself that you don't want to be there or you shouldn't be there or it'd be better somewhere else, you make yourself feel crazy.

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Because your brain thinks now it's in danger, there's a problem, but literally, it's inside your skull and it can't figure out how to get anywhere else. And that is what created that panicked, desperate feeling when we are resisting reality.

So we have to accept wherever we are, whatever's going on. This is our reality. This is what's happening. You'll hear a lot of life coaches teach like, everything is perfect, or this is what should be happening. That's not what I believe, and I don't think you need to believe that.

If you do believe that and it works for you, great. But for me, I've always found that a kind of sort of subtly almost Christian belief system, which is sort of like that we're trying to kind of achieve perfection in life. Like there was sin and we fell and now we're trying to get back to perfect.

That's not how I think about it and I don't think you have to believe this is perfect because it's happening the way it should, even if I don't understand it. Again, that's sort of like God understand it even though I don't. If that works for you, that's great.

But you can accept reality just by agreeing to be with what is. You don't have to believe it's perfect, you don't have to believe it was supposed to be this way, you don't have to believe it should be this way. But you have to believe it is this way.

And you don't have to believe it should be this way, but you also have to not believe it shouldn't be this way. So it's like you have to live in a space that's free of should or shouldn't. Just in order to accept it. And then you can think about changing it.

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But while you are refusing to be present with what is, you will never be able to figure out how to get somewhere else. And the truth is the whole reason we get so crazed is that our brain is always telling us that if things were different, we would feel amazing. If this thing happened, or that thing happened, or back in the past before this thing happened, everything was fine.

That's what your brain says. But your brain's always lying. You've always been a human, you always will be a human. You will always feel positive and negative emotion no matter what is happening. In your times of darkest grief, you will still eat something that tastes good, see a friend smile, laugh at a joke and forget your grief for a moment. There will still be those moments of happiness.

And in your happiest stages of life, marrying the love of your life, going on your honeymoon, winning the lottery, making a million dollars in your business, the best part of raising your children, whatever it is, there will still be days that you wake up on the wrong side of the bed, or you snap at somebody, or you yell at someone, or you're bored, or you're restless, or you hate what you see in the mirror one day, you just feel bad.

That's just being a human. And so whenever our brain is furiously resisting reality, it's because it's telling us that somewhere else is better. If this condition was changed, if this circumstance was different, everything would be okay, I would always feel good.

And that's not true. And so for me, the best way to accept reality is to remind myself that no matter what's happening, I'm going to experience positive and negative emotion in these circumstances, and no matter what my circumstances in the future, I will also experience positive and negative emotion then. There is no exit ramp off the human experience.

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And releasing the fantasy that there is an exit ramp is what allows you to be present with whatever your current reality is. And then if you decide you want to change it, you can.

So the third kind of thing I want to share with you that we talked a lot about is self-love, which is obviously something we talk about all the time on the podcast. And this is really related, so just like I just talked about how you can't change anything if you won't be present with your current reality, the same thing happens when we want to love ourselves.

So what happens is we don't love ourselves, we have a lot of negative thoughts about ourselves, and we want to magically love ourselves. But we don't really want to get to know ourselves to do that. Because we have all these negative thoughts about ourselves, right?

So it's like we think that we're terrible and then we're like, I want to love myself but I don't want to get to know me or try to like me, or I don't want to spend time with myself because I'm terrible, that's why I need to love myself. That cycle doesn't work.

And so one of the things I suggested to my Clutch College students was that rather than try to magically love themselves, they just try to get to know themselves better. When you don't like yourself, you don't want to get to know yourself. But you can't love someone that you don't know.

You don't love a stranger on the street. You love someone you know. You love someone where you know their idiosyncrasies and the cute things they do and their deep thoughtful opinions or how much fun you have golfing together, I don't know, whatever. Obviously not golfing for me, but for some of us.

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When you don't like yourself, you don't want to know yourself, and then you want to jump to self-love. Well, you don't even know yourself yet and you don't even like yourself yet. And self-love can become this whole pressure. I have to love myself. So what if you just think about it as if you're trying to get to know yourself better?

We think of self-love as this destination like we're going to get there, I'm going to get to self-love and then it's the exit ramp off the human experience, I'll always feel amazing. Self-love is just having a better relationship with yourself. It's not a destination that you arrive at and then everything is perfect.

It's a relationship you have with yourself. So just like if you imagine you're improving a relationship with a friend or a partner or a child or a parent, the goal is not I never have a negative thought about this person again. That's not reality. You're going to be irritated sometimes, you're still going to be bored sometimes, you're still going to get angry occasionally. You're just improving the relationship, you're shifting the proportion of negative and positive interactions, or negative and positive thoughts.

And that's what you're doing with yourself. That's what self-love is. It's just having a better relationship with yourself. Being nice to yourself more often. Giving yourself the benefit of the doubt more often. It's not like rainbows and unicorns all the time.

And one of the things to remember when you're sort of working on that is that part of the reason we're so critical and negative to ourselves is that same perfectionistic thinking where we think that in order to think something positive about ourselves, we have to be that thing all the time.

So it's like in order to think I'm a good mom, we have to be a perfect mom and always be good at it, whatever that means. It's all made up. But that's

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not true. You don't have to be 100% of a positive thing to be allowed to think the positive thing about you.

It's not a 1% or a one-drop rule. If you are a good mom some of the time, you get to believe I'm a good mom. If I'm a good coach sometimes, I get to believe I'm a good coach. I don't have to be a good coach literally 100% of the time to be allowed to believe that I'm a good coach.

And as I talk about on so many episodes, of course, believing a positive thing about yourself shifts your identity to that, and you become more and more of it. So I believe I'm a good coach, I practice coaching with more confidence, I focus on my clients, I get better and better as a coach.

You don't have to be 100% of something to be allowed to think this positive thing. That includes self-love. You don't have to love yourself 100% of the time to identify as someone who loves themselves, who is working on having a better relationship with themselves.

It's not this destination of perfection you get to. Being a good mom, loving yourself, being good at your job, being a good partner, whatever it is, it's not a destination that we get to when we're that way 100% of the time. It's a relationship with ourselves where we practice being a little nicer to ourselves, giving ourselves the benefit of the doubt more, allowing ourselves to think positive things about ourselves, even if it's not 100% of the time, we're not 100% perfect at it.

I think people think that coaching is to help them not be a mess, but everyone's a mess. Everyone's going to stay a mess. I talk all the time about how I have a half-managed mind. If we just accept the mess, we can see that coaching is about being nicer to yourself about the mess.

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It's okay to be a mess, it's okay to be human. You are like three evolutions of brains in a skull attached to a meat sack of electricity. Things are going to be a mess sometimes. That's okay. The point of coaching isn't to make you never a mess so you can love yourself.

The point of coaching is teaching you how to accept the reality that we are sometimes a mess, accept your present reality and become more skillful at being kind to yourself, at giving yourself the benefit of the doubt, at not criticizing yourself constantly, allowing yourself to think positive thoughts about yourself, and improving that relationship. Not getting to a destination of self-love.

So here's the last thing I want to talk about, which kind of connects to the objection some people have to that idea. So the objection that people have often to being nice to themselves is that they think that they have to be mean to themselves to drive themselves.

They think that if they were nice to themselves, they would just sit on the couch all day and do nothing. Now, first of all, there's no prize for not sitting on the couch. You don't get to the end of life and they calculate how much time you spend on the couch. My cat spends all of his time on the couch. I think he's totally worthy.

But I do believe that humans naturally want to create and contribute and be in community with each other. We see that in little kids. Little kids don't just sit on the couch before they've developed self-criticism. They are very active and out there and curious and they want to learn and they want to meet people and make friends and they want to run all around, they want to talk to you.

Humans naturally want to create and contribute and be in community together. And so when you're working on your relationship with yourself, I

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just want you to think about how much of your premise about yourself is that you are inherently lazy and indulgent and sinful.

Again, this is a very Christian concept. Even if you don't identify as Christian, it's infiltrated our culture, this idea that humans are sort of naturally sinful. And we have to correct that by berating them all the time.

You don't have to choose to believe that underlying premise. So how would your life look different if you believed that you naturally want to create, to contribute, to be in community with other people? And that if you were nicer to yourself, you would actually be allowing all of that to flourish and get even bigger and better.

If you believed that believing you're good enough, like worthy enough as a person, if you believed that improving your relationship with yourself would only boost your desire to create, to contribute, to be in community with other people, then what would your life look like?

That, my chickens, is a life-changing question. So I really want you to sit with that. If you change the basis of your relationship with yourself from, "I have to control and regulate and moderate and berate myself to make sure that I do things, the premise of that relationship being left to my own devices, I am a sinful, lazy sloth and I have to use all this negative reinforcement to make myself be better," if you shifted that premise to believing, "Like a small child, I naturally am curious and want to create and make things and want to be in conversation and contribute and help other people and want to be in the world and in society and with other people and be creating and be contributing, that's my natural state of being, and the nice I am to myself, the more I can access that natural state," how would your life change?

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For me, that change has been phenomenal and it's still ongoing. So I want to invite all of you to contemplate that question too because that I think is the biggest thing that we learned in this Clutch College.

So if you were there, I hope you enjoyed this recap. I loved being with you in that intimate container for three days. I cannot wait until we do our next one. And if you were not there, I hope that this was helpful and I hope you will join us next time. Talk to you soon, chickens.

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