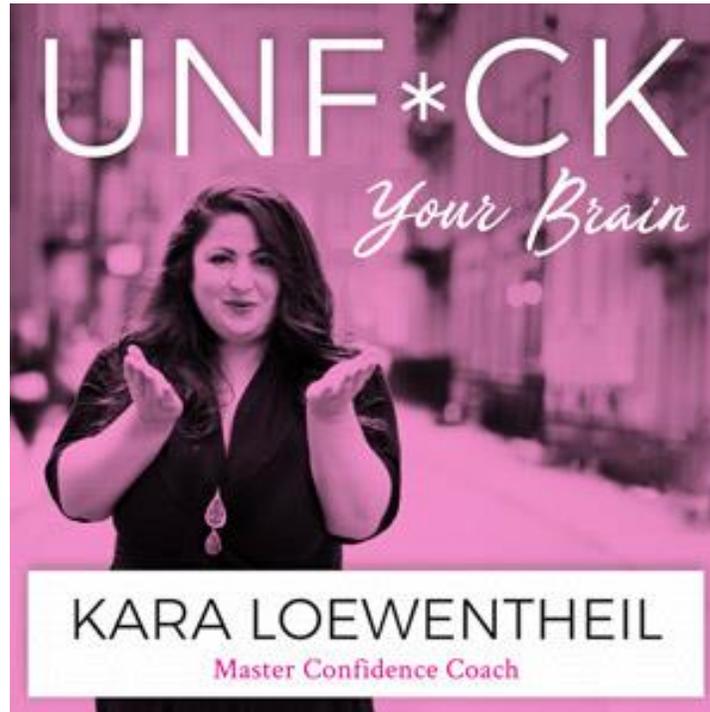


# UFYB 197: Goal Setting Challenges + Solutions: Listener QA



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Kara Loewentheil**

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

## **UFYB 197: Goal Setting Challenges + Solutions: Listener QA**

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.

Alright my chickens, so if you are in The Clutch, you know that we are about to open up registration for our next Clutch College Live, which is all about goal setting. How to set goals, how to make sure you achieve your goals, how to deal with the kind of normal challenges and obstacles that come up.

Because what happens with most of us is we make a goal, we just sort of hope we'll be the person who does the goal, we feel great about the goal when it's all abstract, and then once we start trying to actually achieve the goal, doubt and fear and confusion come up and we just give up.

And so we are devoting an entire three-day Clutch College to setting big goals and learning how to actually achieve them and take action on them. And that is what we're talking about on the podcast today too because obviously if you are in The Clutch, I absolutely encourage you to come to Clutch College.

It is a totally transformative, life-changing event. But not everybody can come. It is very seat-limited because we want everyone to get lots of personal attention. So I want everyone to learn about how to set goals, how to achieve their goals, even if you can't make it to be with us in person. And so that is what this Q&A podcast focuses on.

So if you want to make sure that you get a spot at Clutch College and you're not in The Clutch for some reason, which would be confusing because everybody should be in The Clutch because it's awesome, you

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can text your email address to +13479348861 and you will get a link to join The Clutch.

So if you've been waiting for a good reason and you have a goal in your life that you want to set that you haven't achieved yet or you've set before and never achieved, let this be your reason. You should join The Clutch anyway because it will help you achieve the goal, but if you really want to go all in on that goal and really double down and really commit to making it happen, this is your chance to try to get a spot at a three-day immersive live - although we will also have a virtual option, but same event but there will be virtual spots for people who really can't travel.

If you can, I definitely encourage you to come in person. This is your chance to get access to this three-day goal setting immersion event. It is the most concentrated time you can spend with me learning how to set and achieve big goals, and this is from someone who is running a 11, 12-employee, five-million-dollar-a-year business, which didn't exist five years ago.

And from someone who not only doesn't have an MBA but had literally no entrepreneurial experience before she started. So it was an experience. It wasn't an MBA. It was fucking thought work. And that's what I'm going to teach you at this event.

So if you are in The Clutch, make sure you are watching your email, checking your calendars. We're opening up registration on August 19th. And if you're not in The Clutch and you've been looking for a reason, let this be your sign. Text your email address to +13479348861, join The Clutch now, and then you will have a chance to try to grab a spot at this Clutch College, which I am sure is going to sell out lickity split. Alright, let's get into some goal setting conversation.

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Alright, here is the first question. “Hi Kara, first, thank you for all that you do.” You’re welcome. Thank you for being here. I always feel like I have to read that and answer it.

“So I’m a reforming perfectionist and have done a lot of work breaking down my shoulds. I now have fairly solid intentional thoughts that I don’t need perfecting and the human version of consistency is not 100%. I’m now starting to work on goals that are fun and interesting with the minimum baseline. Once you have a minimum baseline, how do you add to it? I get the idea of starting with one yoga session a week until it becomes normal, but in three months, I could have three sessions a week and that starts to feel again like an impossible perfectionist schedule, shame myself about not meeting.”

So for this one, here’s what I want you to think about. You are thinking about the three sessions a week as the current you. The current you needs to start with one a week. That’s your minimum baseline. Three a week is perfectionist for you right now. But the you in three months is ideally not the you today.

Not because there’s something wrong with you and you should change, but that’s the whole point, right? It’s like you set a minimum baseline - the you right now is someone who doesn’t do yoga consistently at all. But the you of three months is somebody who does it once a week no problem, doesn’t even have to think about it, has no drama about it, or has drama and they don’t respond to the drama. Whatever, you get my point.

The you in three months is not the same as the you now. Otherwise, our goals can never happen. We can never progress. That would be like me saying, “Well, it’s a perfectionist fantasy to think that I can make \$100,000 as a life coach, where I can have 25 clients at a time and so right now my

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minimum baseline is to do five consult calls a week. And then when I think about where I'd be at six months, that seem impossible."

Of course. That's the whole point. You're using the minimum baseline to build up what your baseline is. So you just got to make sure you don't think so far ahead like that where you think that seems impossible.

So I'll give you an example. One of my impossible goals this year was to become someone who exercised for an hour a day every day. And I plotted that out over 12 months with building up in five-minute increments. So January was literally five minutes a day, and then February was 10 minutes a day, and then March was 15 minutes a day.

And so if in January I had said to myself like, well, the December goal is 60 minutes a day and that's impossible from where I am now, that's a perfectionist fantasy, yeah. From here, that's impossible, that's why I'm going to build up to it. Do you see what I'm saying?

So the idea of the minimum baseline is that you can either just keep it consistent, this is the minimum I'll ever do and staying here, but also you can think about it like it changes what your baseline is over time.

So you have to decide, you might be setting a minimum baseline that you aren't going to change, but if you are going to change it, then you just have to think about it as I'm establishing my new baseline and I'll know to add to it once that baseline is just super consistent.

So if you are trying to go to yoga once a week and you've never been able to do that more than two weeks in a row, then you're not ready to add to it. But if you get six weeks in a row, eight weeks in a row, whatever it is, it's like once it starts to feel like there's not so much drama about it I would say. I know that's imprecise but there isn't a scientific variable for this.

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It's like, once it's become a regular part of your routine and you don't have a lot of drama about it. That doesn't mean you don't still sometimes have negative thoughts about it, but you don't engage with them, you don't indulge them, you don't act on them.

There's just not a lot of drama. And you want to. That's when you can add to it. But the biggest thing to remember is don't look all the way down the line and be like, well, that seems impossible from here so it's a perfectionist fantasy.

No, the point is you may get there - there's a big difference between somebody who's let's say not going to yoga at all, the perfectionist fantasy is okay, starting tomorrow I'm going to go three times a week for the rest of my life. That's the perfectionist fantasy because you haven't even been able to go once a week.

But in three or six months or a year, I'm going to be somebody who goes three times a week and here's my plan for how I'm going to build up to that, that's not a perfectionist fantasy. That's having a plan and executing it to grow and evolve your capacity in a certain area. Same for your business, same for anything else.

Okay, second question. "Why is it necessary to set clear and concise goals from a thought work point of view? I always thought they're so restrictive, but perhaps because claiming something requires commitment and dealing with the feelings. Now I think there's more to it as brain doesn't feel happy all the time either way."

So we set clear and concise goals so that we know if we've reached them. That's really it. If your goal is just make some money, you have no idea if you've made some money, you don't know how far you are from that, if you've accomplished it, and it's much too easy to be vague and not take the action required.

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You could make a dollar and be like, okay, well, I did make some money technically. Your brain hates confusion. Just think about when you sit down to do a project. Is it easier to do a project if you have broken out every step and know exactly what to do? Or is it easier to do a project when you sit down and you just see the to-do list is just write report.

Your brain is like, what? What report? What's supposed to go in the report? What's the report supposed to look like? Do I have to do research? How long does it need to be? Your brain has so many questions and it's exhausted, it wants to take a nap, and it doesn't want to do anything.

So we set concrete and specific goals so number one, we know if we've reached them and we can bring up all of our own negative thinking around the goal and all of our own insecurity and imposter syndrome. We want to bring that stuff up by setting a concrete goal. And we set a concrete goal so that you can then figure out what to do.

If I say make some money, you don't know what to do. If I say five \$5000 this month, now you got to think about how you're going to make \$5000 this month. It's much more concrete. So those are both reasons. It doesn't really have anything to do with feeling - you're not going to feel happy all the time either way.

I think maybe the part where you got a little stuck is you're like, those goals are so restrictive. No, that's a feeling you're having and a thought you're having. The goal is not restrictive. The goal is a neutral circumstance.

What's interesting for you to dig into is if you set a specific goal, why do you then feel restricted? Or why do you have the thought this is so restrictive? Do you want to keep that thought? That reaction to having a specific goal tells you a lot about what's going on in your brain about the goal.

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“How do we know when we are fighting a reality that cannot be changed, as opposed to moving the dial forward on something that can be changed but just takes time?”

So this was in response to the Q&A I did about Theranos and Elizabeth Holmes, which for those of you who weren't in The Clutch yet is the woman who basically perpetrated a massive fraud by defrauding investors of all this money and claiming that her company could perform blood tests on a single drop of blood and was going to change the testing industry and it turned out it was all a lie.

So I'm telling you that because in the question, this question asker says, “You mentioned that Theranos could have listened to her teacher.” Theranos is the company actually, so she means the owner, that Elizabeth Holmes could have listened to her teacher who said it was physically impossible to create that type of blood test but she did not.

“Alas, isn't part of taking leaps and moving forward sometimes about pushing past what other people say is the reality? Senator Barack Obama was not supposed to be able to become president based on centuries of racism in the US, he was too young, he was a politician, and yet he did. He clearly had the thought he could but lots of other people did not believe he could. He envisioned a different reality.

For social movements, the world exists as it does but people must believe they can make change. At some level, don't we have to believe we can change reality? Or is it more that the laws of biology tested repeatedly indicate a task is not possible? E.g. Elizabeth Holmes and Theranos.

For those of us working on calendaring, if we keep trying to sleep four hours a night and operate at full capacity the next day and it does not work, or finish a task in one hour that repeatedly takes three hours, do we need to face reality or just keep trying new ways?”

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Okay, so I think this is a great question and the answer to it I think is that it's conflating a lot of different dynamics and scenarios into just calling them all things that seem impossible, which is a really broad term in this sense.

So I don't think that Theranos being a fraud and Obama becoming president and you trying to fit too much on your calendar are all the same thing. Some of those are results and some of those are circumstances, like they're all different.

So I do think that of course, all of thought work, any time you put something new in the result line, you're trying to create basically a new circumstance. If your circumstance is I can't run and the result you want is I run a marathon, then as you live through that model, when you finally have that result that you've run a marathon, that becomes a new circumstance. I ran a marathon, that didn't exist before.

So any time we put a result that we want in the R line that we don't have, we are trying to create a new circumstance. Resistance to current reality is about emotion. So this question listener should listen to the What About Sexism podcast again with this frame in mind.

What I teach about resisting reality is that emotional resistance to reality actually makes it harder to achieve our goals, not easier. And what's fascinating is biology is not even a clean line. Since I started working on my running, I've been obsessed with that story that I told on one of the podcasts about how until the 1970s, it was understood that biologically, the human body could not run a mile faster than four minutes.

It was like a physiological, mechanical reality. And then someone did. So obviously, even things that we believe to be biological realities sometimes turn out to not be. So again, any time you're fighting - it's almost the operative word in this question was in that first sentence. How do we know when we're fighting a reality?

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If you're fighting it, if you are resisting it, if you are struggling against it, you're never going to get what you want. That's part of my point is that you are going to burn yourself out with frustration and resistance and you'll accomplish less than you could if you didn't do that. And if that's how you teach your brain to think, even if you get there, you won't feel good enough.

I don't think that Obama became president because he was focused on resisting and struggling against racism and all of his people who thought he was too young. He wasn't like, I'm going to become president to show all those people they're wrong and to struggle and resist them.

I think he was able to become president because he was like, I have this dream, I have my eye on this goal, I know I can do it. So these are all three different things. When you say Obama wasn't supposed to be able to become president, all you're talking about is other people's thoughts that he wouldn't.

So of course we often can do things that other people don't think we can. That's not at all a reality. That's just other people's opinions about whether someone can become president. Another way to think about this might be sometimes we don't know what the reality is.

People might have thought that running the four-minute mile was the reality. They thought that was a circumstance. They turned out to be wrong. But the way that someone figured that out was they set this impossible goal and went for it.

So I think that the biggest conflation confusion on this question is that when I talk about changing our reality, I'm talking about setting big, exciting impossible goals we want to achieve, and you're talking about resisting and fighting reality.

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You may not think question asker that that's what you're doing, but the way that this reads, I think that is where it's coming from at base. And just that framing of the question is getting in the way of you understanding it.

And then the last thing I'll say is with something like calendaring, the question there is why are you trying to do that? That to me is not the same as Obama. It's not the same as the laws of biology to the extent that they operate. I mean, I believe in biology. I meant to the extent that they're true.

We were wrong about the four-minute mile, but we seem to have been right about how you can't do a blood test based on one little drop. That's why Theranos folded.

But who knows? Maybe it can be done but she didn't figure out how to do it. The problem with Theranos is not that she tried to do something impossible. It's that she lied and defrauded everybody along the way. Maybe it was possible and if she had just told the truth about what was going on, she might have been able to do it. I don't know, who knows? But for sure, the lying and the defrauding got in the way.

And in terms of the calendar, my question would just be why are you trying to do that? If you know that you have a lot of evidence that your body physiologically need more than four hours of sleep at night, most people's bodies do, not all, again, some people don't need that much sleep.

But if you're someone who does, if you consistently feel biological symptoms of fatigue when you sleep four hours a night, why are you trying to do that? And you don't need to.

So the answer is that you are not efficient with your calendar, or you're having perfectionist fantasies about how much you need to get done and why. And that's an opportunity for thought work.

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So no, I would not recommend that somebody keeps trying new ways to only sleep four hours a night when their body is pretty clear with them that it needs eight. You always have to ask yourself why, you guys. It's not like any goal you set is automatically good. Why are you trying to do this?

Why are you trying to sleep four hours a night? Why are you trying to stuff your calendar? Why are you focused on everything you can get done? I try to focus on like, what kind of leisure time do I want and then what am I going to get done in the rest of the time?

I think that this last example has a lot more to do with why are you doing this thing. And that is the more important question. So I think that each of these things has been linked up when they don't all really have that much to do with each other. But it was a good question because I know a lot of people have this or similar questions or wonder about different parts of this question, so I wanted to talk through them all.

“Hi Kara, I have a question about thought work and goals. Isn't any goal you set because you want to feel a certain way? Thoughts create your feelings, so if you change your thoughts, you'll feel differently. But if you already feel how you want to feel, what is motivating you to set any goals to further yourself? What creates the desire to do something if it's not for wanting to feel a certain way? It could apply to career, fitness, love, or anything. I'm sure you get this question a lot, sorry if you've already covered this.”

So, nothing to be sorry for. It's a good question and I do answer it a lot because it comes up a lot because it's an obvious question for people to ask when they start engaging with the work, so that's why I wanted to answer it here.

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It's almost like you have to completely swap your paradigm. So right now, the only reason you can imagine doing something is because you want to feel differently. But what if it's possible to do something for another reason?

Let's imagine if you only ever have gone to move your body because you don't want to feel guilty. And then you decide you don't want to it for that reason anymore, but your brain can't comprehend there could be another reason.

Now, that one's probably easier for you to see like, oh, well maybe you would want to do it because it feels good or because you want to get stronger, whatever it is. Just for the joy of it. You can see some other alternatives.

Or let's say you've only ever kissed someone out of obligation and you're like, I don't want to do that anymore, so how would I know when I want to kiss someone? Maybe I would want to do it just because it seems fun, I would like to. I'm just trying to give you a few different examples.

But it's like you have to completely switch the paradigm from we only go do things to feel better about ourselves usually, to why might we do something otherwise? Why would I want to have a business if I know I can be proud of myself anyway? Because I think it would be fun is really the answer, or because I want to grow, or evolve, or stretch myself.

I think the difference is doing something because you think at the end you'll feel a certain way, or doing something because you want to have the experience and you are interested in the process. So I don't have a business goal because I think when I get to that goal then I'll feel good about myself because I know I got to feel that all the way through.

It's not like when I get there, then I'm just going to feel it. It's going to be work to get there. I'm not going to feel that way in the beginning and I'm

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going to have to figure out how to feel that way and that's going to be the growth and evolution. And I choose that because to me growth is a priority.

I don't think that's true for everyone and I don't think there's anything wrong with discovering thought work and cleaning up your thoughts and not hating yourself anymore and getting to a place where you just feel good about your life and you just want to stay there.

You want to keep doing the same things you do in your life and not be setting big goals and trying to do new things. And that's totally fine. If you think about meditation and what a lot of those traditions teach, it's not necessarily about setting big goals to achieve them. It's about learning to enjoy the present.

I think that's a totally valid approach. For me, I personally found that I actually do want to stretch and grow and learn and evolve. Those are experiences and processes that I enjoy just for the fun of it, just for the joy of existing.

I just feel like we're here, it's a limited amount of time we have here, I want to have a lot of different experiences. Not because I'm going to feel happy at the end or feel good about myself at the end, or feel content when I don't now. It's not about the goal.

It's not about getting to a certain place so I can feel a certain way. It's just because it seems like fun. I want to experience something different. Maybe I had a partner and I did work on that relationship and I learned a lot and I learned to love them and I learned to love the relationship, and now I want to have a different relationship because I want to learn to love some other totally different thing, I want to do some other kind of work.

Maybe when I've learned to love a job, maybe then I do want to leave it because I just want to learn to love something else. I, for me personally, am

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very motivated by always getting better and more skillful at understanding what's happening with my mind and being able to manage my thoughts and feelings and being able to manage my mind and create a deeper and deeper intimacy and mastery of my own experience.

And so I'm always going to choose the things that lead me in that direction. It's not really because of how I want to feel in the sense of I think I'll get a positive emotion if I do that thing.

So it's normal for this to hurt your brain and I had this exact question when I started doing thought work and it really took me a long time. My teacher would always just say like, because it's fun. And it took me a long time for my brain to get it but now I really do.

If I love myself and I love my life and I know that my self-acceptance and my self-regard and my happiness aren't conditional on any particular goal or outcome, I have to come up with a new reason for setting goals if I want to have them.

And in my experience, I do think there's something in a lot of humans that does lead them to want to stretch and grow and evolve. And so I don't find that most people end up just being like, this is actually good, I'm just going to hang out here. But if you do, that's okay too.

Some of what's implicit in this question is like, an assumption that we should have goals. Like well, if we just feel good about things, we won't have goals, then why would we have goals? Well, I don't know, do we need goals? We don't have to have them. I don't think that's necessarily a given.

But I do find for a lot of people, we do still want them. For me, I always want to blow my own mind. That's really the bottom line. I'm like, that is so cool, look what I can do, I had no idea I could do that.

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But my happiness isn't dependent on it and my self-regard and self-assessment and self-love are not dependent on it. I just think it's fun. Like what else am I going to do with myself? I don't want to take up knitting. No offense to knitting. Knitting is great, you can totally blow your own mind with knitting. It's just not my particular thing.

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