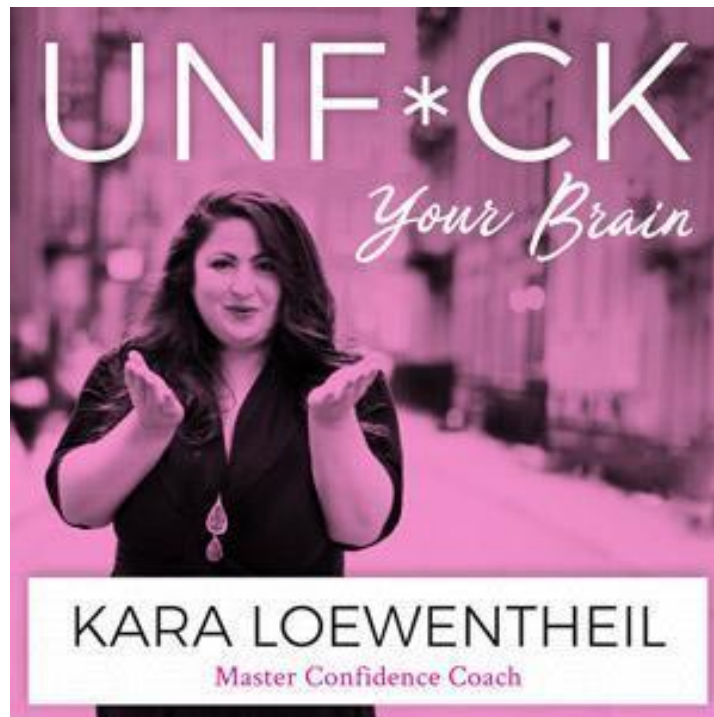# UFYB 292: How to Stop Criticizing Everything and Everyone Part 2

Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

UFYB 292: How to Stop Criticizing Everything and Everyone Part 2

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. Welcome, welcome back for the second installment of how to stop criticizing everyone and everything. So if you didn't listen to the last episode, go listen to that. That is where I break down really what I'm talking about with criticism, how we define that. And I go over a couple of, well, four major factors in our brains' been trained to criticize. And then I also talk about some of the different motivations we have for expressing that criticism. And so in this episode I really want to talk about what we can do to change it.

And I want to preface this by saying I've been working on this for a while and it's still a working progress for me. And it might be working progress for my whole life and that's okay. And this is a little bit of a side note but it kind of feels important especially because so many people listen to this podcast and the vast majority of you are not coaches or teachers or therapists or people who do some of this work for a living but some of you are.

And especially in the coaching world I feel like there's this thing that it goes in and out of fashion to take this bold stance about how you should never try to teach or coach on something that you haven't fully resolved and moved on from. As if it's unethical to do that if you are still figuring it out. And I just call bullshit on that for so many reasons. Number one, first of all, I don't give a shit. Do what you want, you're an adult. I just feel like there's in any profession, there is a group of people who spend all of their time critiquing how other people do the profession.

And there's a place for critique, critical thinking is a useful skill but I think the people who make the most change are the people who are out there

UFYB 292: How to Stop Criticizing Everything and Everyone Part 2

thinking about how they're going to help and serve their students and their clients. And I'm thinking about how I can teach on this podcast and help all of you and not writing think piece Facebook posts about what other coaches are doing wrong.

But anyway, more importantly than that, I actually think it's a little bit of a perfectionist fantasy, that any kind of deep psychological pattern is ever going to be fully resolved such that you are no longer influenced by it and are fully beyond it and can regard it objectively. Even if you change how something is in your brain or your life, you don't always know what it will look like three, five, ten years down the line anyway. Sometimes I look back at something I've taught that at the time I was like, "Okay, I think I've sorted this. I get it. I've changed this in my brain, I'm done with it."

And sometimes I feel like, yeah, that I still stand by that, I feel right about that, I feel like that was right. It hasn't come back up. I feel good about it. Sometimes I look back and I'm like, "Oh, my thinking has evolved and now I see where I thought was done as being one step in my journey." That doesn't mean that what I was teaching wasn't valuable or useful just because I have now even more perspective. And you never know when you might get more perspective. So you'll never be sure until you die.

And maybe if you'd lived longer you would have gotten a different perspective. And some stuff never gets resolved fully. So saying you shouldn't teach until you've fully resolved something is like saying you shouldn't share what you've learned about symptom management even if you haven't fully cured a disease yet. That's just nonsense. I think it's generally probably not useful to try to teach about something when you are completely in it, have no clarity, haven't coached yourself. I mean but then you wouldn't have anything to teach anyway, that's just called crying on a podcast.

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

UFYB 292: How to Stop Criticizing Everything and Everyone Part 2

Okay, that was like a soapbox that I just needed to get off my chest. But I think it's important for all of you to hear me also saying that there is still stuff that I work on. There is stuff I may always work on. I often use the example of weight loss thoughts like I do not actively think about trying to lose weight or changing my body. My brain still occasionally has some shit to say about that. I don't act on it. I don't really entertain it. But this is how my brain is. I have been socialized this way very deeply.

So I feel like I've done a ton of body image work and I had, that changed my life. And I've taught it to other women and it's changed their lives. And then I started doing some filming stuff and I saw myself on film and some old thoughts came up. That doesn't mean that all that work I did didn't count or didn't matter or wasn't good. It's just like here's a new level. And that's normal and that's part of life.

Okay, anyway, so here's where I am on working on kind of criticizing. And here's how I've been working on this so far. So first of all, you get to decide if this is something you want to change. On a really philosophical thought work level, calling a certain set of words, criticism, is a totally optional thought. And it's optional to think that criticism is bad or a problem, all of that is optional. There are many arrangements of words you can say that some people would call criticism and some people would not. Some people might call it helpful ideas.

Some people might call them compliments. You could tell someone that you think their outfit really clashes and you would mean that as a criticism and they might think, awesome. That's exactly what I was going for. I love to subvert people's expectations for color pairings. They find that aesthetically pleasing or creatively exciting. And you meant it as an insult and they think it's amazing. Or you might tell someone you think they're arrogant and they might completely disagree.

UFYB 292: How to Stop Criticizing Everything and Everyone Part 2

They might actually like that they're proud of themselves about something. So it's all subjective. What counts as criticism is subjective and whether or not this is something you want to change, even if you are offering people your opinions potentially without being invited to and you mean them negatively, you still get to decide if you want to change it. You still don't create other people's feelings for them. So I needed to decide to work on being critical because I thought that I was doing something bad or wrong or I was hurting other people's feelings. That's not my fundamental motivation.

I decided to work on this because I didn't like how I was feeling when doing it. And there are kind of two levels to that. And I want to walk you through this because it's an example of what I always teach, which is that you have to work on your self-criticism and shame about any kind of habit before you can work on the actual habit. So I actually need to say, this was quite challenging for me. I have done so much work on kind of self-acceptance and self-love and I feel I'm really pretty accepting and compassionate with myself about most things.

I had a hard time around this. I was really in my own head about criticizing and criticism and sort of unsolicited feedback that I thought was negative that I was giving. And I was really sure that no matter what anybody said, it was sort of terrible and intolerable to people around me. I talked to my partner a lot about this and he had already expressed to me that he didn't really mind. Sometimes calls it my improving instinct that he mostly finds it helpful and loving and even when not, it's just not a big deal to him. It's not a deal breaker. We each have foibles.

There's things about him that aren't my favorite thing to deal with. And it's fine, it's just part of loving a whole package, but that of course didn't change my thoughts and feelings because other people's words don't change our thoughts and feelings. So I still had a lot of kind of self-criticism and shame about this because I just had the thought that I was basically up

in my own perspective and not really seeing how it could possibly actually be neutral, much less positive.

But then I had a conversation with someone that kind of blew my mind. So I was talking to my friend and my friend told me that their partner, so my friend's partner is somebody with the same improving instinct we could call it, gives a lot of constructive criticism, whatever we want to call it. Has a lot of suggestions for how they can do things better, how they can communicate better in their relationship, what outfits look great on my friend. It's a male friend, so his partner has lots of thoughts about which shirt and jacket combinations look better on him or how he should do his hair or whatever.

And so he's telling this to me and I was like, of course, my thought is, oh my God, how horrible because I'm just really in this sort of criticism is bad. And then my friend said to me, "I actually find it really sweet and it makes me feel connected to my partner." And I was like, "What the fuck are you talking about?" Because my brain could not accept. And my friend was like, "I was actually raised by parents who took care of all of our material needs. There was always food. We always had clothes for school. There was no material neglect or whatever."

But he was like, "But my parents were kind of emotionally absent. They didn't really pay that much attention to us. Nobody was really taking an interest." I talked on the last episode about how in my family, if you came home with a 98, somebody would be like, "Where are the other two points?" And my friend was like, "If you come home with a test result, nobody even asked about it. Just they weren't engaged in that way."

And so he was like, "When I met my partner and I sort of got to know this part of them, I actually, it made me feel really loved because it felt like someone was paying such close attention to me. Somebody cared about

UFYB 292: How to Stop Criticizing Everything and Everyone Part 2

how my hair looked or whether my outfit worked or how we were communicating or some other thing they noticed. They were paying really close attention to me. And they were noticing me and they wanted to help me and that felt really loving to me. I was being seen and I was being cared about."

So that completely blew my mind. Now, all thoughts are subjective. So I'm not saying this is the right way to think about somebody offering you feedback or criticism or whatever. There's no right or wrong way to think about it. But for me, when I was working through my own self-shame self-blame around having a lot of critical improvement thoughts and offering them to people in my life, particularly my partner. I just really was so in it and had those blinders of shame on that I couldn't imagine that.

This was sort of to me, something that at best someone could tolerate about you in order to get the other good stuff that comes with you. And the idea that it truly was subjective was mind blowing. So this perspective really, number one. It reminded me that I was assuming that I knew how other people felt and that my actions caused their feelings, but they don't. My actions, sharing an idea or suggestion or critique don't cause anyone else's feelings, their thoughts do.

And I don't know what those thoughts are unless they tell me and if they tell me their thoughts, I just need to choose to believe them. So to help me remember that any words I say to someone are just words, they decide what to think about them. And then it also reminded me how subjective this is, how much any trait can come across differently or any action can be interpreted differently depending on the person interpreting it. I also did some self-coaching and got some coaching on the positive side of this trait, again this is all subjective.

UFYB 292: How to Stop Criticizing Everything and Everyone Part 2

But from my perspective all I was seeing was the negative that I'm always looking for what's wrong, that means something bad about me, that it was going to make other people feel bad about themselves. Obviously as a coach I know that I don't cause other people's feelings. But when we're in it and we're coaching ourselves it's because we've lost sight of these truths. So I got some coaching and did some of my own self-coaching on looking for what's the positive side of this trait. And this is something that all of you can do whether it's about self-criticism or about something else.

So noticing what's missing and wanting to improve things and seeing room for improvement is something that has also created my entire body of coaching work, my coaching business, my professional success, it makes me a good coach. And it's helped thousands and thousands of people who have listened to this podcast. So no trait is one sided. And often even in my personal life, when I share those things, people are glad to have heard them.

I have gotten my partner into coaching by sharing places I saw patterns that I thought someone could help him with or things that if he wanted to grow in a certain way he could work on. And he'll tell anyone and everyone that coaching has made his life so much better. And so doing some self-coaching on okay, even if this is something that I decide I want to change about myself, what are the positives of it? So that I'm seeing myself as that whole human ecosystem. I have that whole podcast on the human ecosystem for other people but it's true about yourself too.

Okay, yes, I have a lot of opinions about what people in my life could or should do differently. And sometimes I share them when I haven't been invited to and that's something I can work on. But also what is the positive side of this trait? And for me, my work in this world has come from noticing what's missing in the coaching world and wanting to help make it better and help change people's lives. I'm going to come back to that in a minute.

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

UFYB 292: How to Stop Criticizing Everything and Everyone Part 2

So I also then did some self-coaching on being really clear about what the trait is because I think that when we are in shame and self-criticism we are assuming the worst about ourselves. But when I really dug into a lot of what I talked about in the last episode, what is criticism? What does that even mean? What are the different versions and varieties of it? Where does it come from? What's the motivation for sharing it?

And I was able to see then more clearly that even when I see room for improvement in myself or someone else or in the work that someone's created or whatever, it's never about believing or telling someone that they are not good enough or worthy. And it's not about telling someone that their work or their idea is bad or stupid. There's no cruelty in it and it's not essentializing. It's not that the way someone's acting or how their hair looks or their work product or whatever, being something bad about them as a person.

So for me it's never coming from wanting to tear someone down or wanting someone to feel bad about themselves or wanting to show someone that I don't think they're worthy. It's never about that. It is just a sort of outgrowth of this relentless drive for improvement that I have in my own life and in the world. But there's better and worse ways to deploy that and more or less consensual ways of deploying it. And so that's where I'm choosing to work on. So I did a lot of this work and I'm still working on it but I have made a lot of progress on it.

And doing that, just like I always teach, working through the shame and the story I have about the behavior was really helpful because it both showed me how this is one part of a bigger trait in me. It showed me how it can be helpful. It showed me that I don't control other people's feelings and I don't cause them. But it also showed me that the downside of the behavior for me, actually doesn't really have anything to do with anybody else because I don't cause other people's feelings.

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

I could offer someone some unsolicited suggestions and then they could feel really loved and happy. Sometimes I'll ask an old client of mine, I'll see something especially my coach clients, people who I've coached in the past who are now coaches. I'll see something on social media and if I'm like, "Hey, can I offer you a suggestion about this?" Or, "I see something going on in your sales copy here? Would you like to hear about it?" I mean I'm asking consent, which is important but everybody has routinely been like, "Yes, please, I would love that."

So what other people think of my suggestions is up to them. But what I saw when I removed the shame and the self-blame is that I did actually still have the motivation for wanting to change this that I like, which is that I don't want to feel constantly dissatisfied with everything around me. I think a little bit of dissatisfaction can be an amazing thing that keeps us innovating and striving and growing and improving. On some level we have indoor plumbing because somebody was dissatisfied with the social solution of just throwing feces in the street. So that's a plus.

But being constantly dissatisfied, not being able to just enjoy my surroundings or my loved ones or myself is not something I want to foster in myself. And ironically my self-criticism and shame about the behavior, which was the most painful part of course, is a result of the same behavior. I train my brain to find fault in everything so it also finds fault in me. So if I keep doing that, if I keep strengthening the fault finding, I'm going to keep strengthening the self-fault finding as well.

So here are a few of the techniques that I've been using to change this behavior both in terms of my thoughts and in terms of sharing my thoughts. And I think there's kind of two categories of techniques. The first category is techniques that are about redirecting your thoughts about a particular person or thing. So if you know that you tend to criticize your kid and get on

UFYB 292: How to Stop Criticizing Everything and Everyone Part 2

their case a lot, that you're constantly, "You didn't clean up your room and you never listen."

Or you have one employee where you're always looking for something wrong or you only see the worst in your boss or in your own parent, whatever, someone in your life. You're going to have a technique that's specific to that person or situation. So first, you can practice a thought that you are going to think on purpose whenever your brain wants to criticize. So my favorite one right now is, this may not have frosting but it's still cake. I love this thought.

This came out of coaching I was getting from Maggie Reyes. She's a marriage coach but I have done some relationship coaching with her, which is of course just self-coaching about my thoughts. And this came out of a conversation about that saying of, well, having the cake and eating it too or the frosting on the cake. And so I use this all the time now. This may not have frosting but it's still cake. And that is a thought that kind of redirects my brain with my business, with my relationship, with my bonus kids, with anything in my life where the bulk of it is really good if I choose to look at it and see it.

But I'm fixated on the 10% that could be changed or improved. This may not have frosting but it's still cake rather than just fixating on how it doesn't have frosting or the frosting isn't the flavor I wanted or the frosting's smutched or whatever. So you can have a kind of general thought like that. I invite you to use that one or some similar version. You can also do the practice of making a list of things you do like or admire or value about the person or a list of things that are good about the work or the project, whatever it is.

You can practice focusing on purpose on things you do like or admire or value about the thing or person that you tend to criticize. The second

UFYB 292: How to Stop Criticizing Everything and Everyone Part 2

bucket or kind of techniques that are more broadly applicable by which I mean they don't have to vary by particular a situation or person. So one thing I've been practicing is noticing when the urge to say something comes up and allowing the urge to be there without acting on it.

This is very similar to what I teach in *The Clutch* in the modules we have, the courses we have around behavior change and numbing out for things that are urge driven like drinking or eating or shopping or whatever. Those are behaviors that are driven by dopamine urges. We get this urge to do a thing to get a little reward chemical in our brain. And I have that urge sometimes around voicing my opinion, especially a critical opinion. Some of you must too because anything that happens in my brain I've found happens in a lot of your brains.

And so I also have been practicing just allowing the urge to comment without making the comment. The loop in your brain to push the button to get the dopamine is intense and you cannot resist or willpower it. You have to breathe through the urge and allow it to be there without acting on it. One of the things I've been reminding myself is if this is a true thing I really need to offer someone then it can wait. So if there's something going on, if I'm having a communication problem with a friend and I really want to address it and I think they left me on red or ghosted me or passive aggressive.

Those are all my subjective opinions. If I decide I want to say that, I want to offer what could be seen as criticism in that context. If it's really valuable and valid and necessary it'll seem compelling in 48 hours also. If I feel this intense urge to say it right away, that's usually more coming from that urge, that kind of wanting to get some emotional release or get the dopamine from saying the thing and that I want to breathe through.

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

UFYB 292: How to Stop Criticizing Everything and Everyone Part 2

I have also been practicing a thought that kind of speaks to this desire overall which is kind of variations of, I don't have to control this thing or person or behavior in order to feel good. Or I also use, my feelings are created by my thoughts not by x where x is whatever I'm wanting to be different. My feelings are created by my thoughts, not by whether my kid cleans their room or my feelings are created by my thoughts, not by whether my colleague doesn't answer my Slack messages or whatever. Whatever it is I want to say something or criticize someone about, in order to make them change.

And then third, if I still want to offer an idea or a suggestion or an observation. I check in with my energy behind it. So I said I was going to come back to my coaching business and here's how it applies. When I came into coaching and I noticed that something was missing, I noticed that the coaching industry didn't talk about socialization. In some way that is a criticism and a critique and I was offering a correction. But because my motivation was service and growth and helping people I really was just focused on that.

I haven't made my whole business be about criticizing other coaches and other coaching modalities. Some people do that. I have seen people starting what they call feminist coaching businesses where most of what they're doing is critiquing how everything else works and how everybody else operates and railing people publicly for various things. And not following the orthodoxy that this person has created for themselves. That is not how I did things.

For me, I just offer this additional lens that I wanted to share, that people could take or leave. And that felt amazing. That's why it's fueled this whole business and it's kind of a good emotional comparison. When I want to share an offer or an observation or an idea or a suggestion with someone

else, my energy is that I have an idea they might like to hear and I'm okay if they don't agree or don't want. That is so important.

When I am offering coaching and my coaching ideas I don't feel attached to whether other people will accept them. I don't feel angry if somebody else doesn't agree with me. Even when I'm coaching someone directly, I just was coaching somebody in *The Clutch* today who was talking about how they feel like they have to convince people of something. And I was telling about how I don't feel I have to convince anybody. I don't have to convince my clients. I don't have to convince my students. I don't have to convince my listeners. That's just not the energy I'm coming from.

So when I offer my thoughts on this podcast I really am freely offering, this is what I see, this is what I notice. If this is useful to you, please take it and use it and if it's not, that is okay. When I'm criticizing someone I am very attached to whether they agree with me and/or change the thing I want them to change or apologize or do something. I am not just sharing an observation freely that I think could help them. I am wanting them to change my feelings and I do not feel that it's cool if they don't.

So if my energy is around feeling like I need to control the person, they need to agree with me about my critique, they need to change or apologize or admit they were wrong. If they have to do something and agree for me to feel okay, that's criticism energy for me. If it's that, if it feels like I'm trying to control them in that way then I've got to go back to technique one or two. Then I've got to go back to practicing thoughts about them or practicing my thoughts about trying to control things in general.

If there's any urgency about it or if there's any control about it, I've got to go back. But if it truly feels like hey, I just want to offer something. Here's the thing I notice. And I've also been practicing just literally asking for consent

UFYB 292: How to Stop Criticizing Everything and Everyone Part 2

before I offer that suggestion or that point. That's how I know it's more something that I would want to offer.

Alright, so there you have it, chicken. Now you understand hopefully more about your desire to criticize, why it's so important to deal with the shame and self-blame that you might have about that habit and how you can start to change it if you want to. I will see you all next week.

If you're loving what you're learning in the podcast, you have got to come check out *The Clutch*. *The Clutch* is the podcast community for all things *Unf*ck Your Brain*. It's where you can get individual help applying the concepts to your own life.

It's where you can learn new coaching tools not shared on the podcast that will blow your mind even more. And it's where you can hang out and connect over all things thought work with other podcast chickens just like you and me. It's my favorite place on earth and it will change your life, I guarantee it. Come join us at www.unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch. That's unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch. I can't wait to see you there.