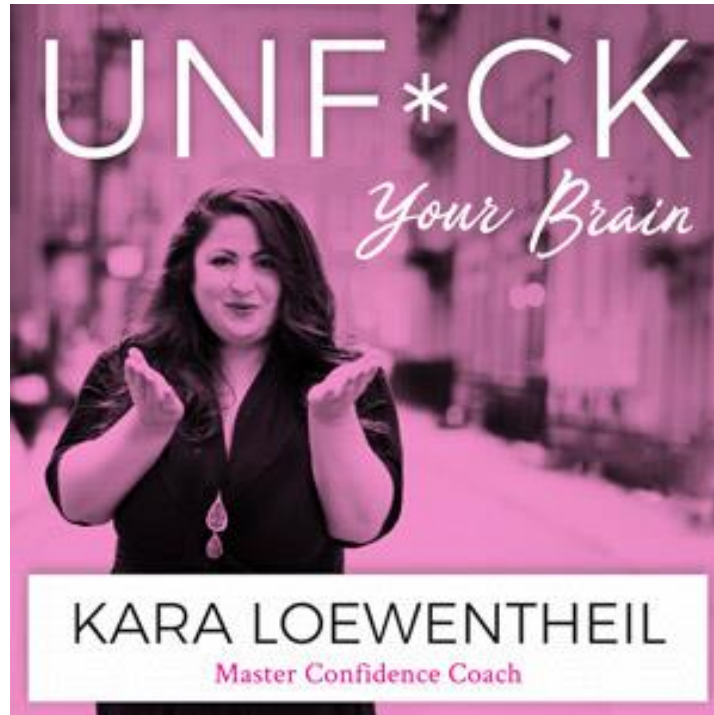


# UFYB 320: Why New Year's Resolutions Matter & Why You Should Make One



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Kara Loewentheil**

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

## **UFYB 320: Why New Year's Resolutions Matter & Why You Should Make One**

Welcome to *Unf\*ck Your Brain*, the only podcast that teaches you how to use psychology, feminism, and coaching, to rewire your brain and get what you want in life. And now here's your host, Harvard Law School grad, feminist rockstar, and master coach, Kara Loewentheil.

Hello my chickens, how are you? I am cold because the gas has been off in our apartment for six weeks due to various landlord shenanigans. And I have never been so grateful that I actually grew up in a bedroom that didn't have working heat. And even though I never really understood why the rest of the house had heat, the heat in my room when I was growing up just broke and it just never got fixed. I had a space heater.

It's actually kind of an amazing metaphor for how long we all can tolerate and just get used to totally solvable problems that don't need to last for years because. We just get used to the problem, we work around it. We have some area of our life that is painful or not working or problematic and we just try to make do. We give up on really solving it and we just tolerate whatever suffering it's creating because we don't even think of it as something we can change.

And I have seen people suffer through years and years of a problem because they had the thought that it couldn't be solved or it couldn't be helped. And this is why I'm so passionate about setting goals and it's why I want to talk in this episode about the importance of goals. And I want to do that in the context of New Year's resolutions because I think that resolutions have kind of started to get a bad rap a little bit. First, I think partly just as you get older, you're more used to setting a bunch of resolutions that you then fail at and you've had a lot of experience in that.

So by the time you're in your 30s or 40s, you may have set the same resolution over and over again for years, this year you're finally going to work out regularly. You're finally going to lose weight. You're finally going to

## **UFYB 320: Why New Year's Resolutions Matter & Why You Should Make One**

go to bed earlier. You're finally going to start dating again, whatever it is. And sometimes you feel inspired maybe, and sometimes you secretly already know that when you set it, that you probably won't do it. So it's easy to get kind of burnt out on resolutions or disillusioned.

And then I think there's also this sort of current pop psychology fad of I'm only living a soft life and doing only things that seem easy and aligned. And I don't want to ever stress and I just want my nervous system to be perfectly regulated all the time. Just kind of a very unrealistic perspective. And then third, I think the kind of goals that often get talked about around new years are often based on kind of shame and unrealistic expectations or they can feel like they're really about deprivation and suffering.

It's all about not drinking and working out and losing weight and all of these kind of things that sound not fun, like a bummer or that are kind of being driven by self-criticism. So those are all reasonable reasons on some level to be skeptical about resolutions. It's absolutely true that goals and resolutions can be perfectionist, can be self-criticism motivated or be part of hustle culture or whatever. But that's not all they are or can be, and I kind of want to rescue their reputation a little bit in this episode.

I want to talk about why goals and resolutions are so important. And this applies to any time of year, of course, but I want to talk about new year's resolutions specifically because I actually think there's a good reason to set resolutions at this time of year. So you can apply anything I'm talking about in this episode to goals at any time of year mostly, I am going to use the word resolutions. And I am going to talk about why I think this is a good time of year to do them.

So here's why resolutions matter in general. One of the biggest problems of being a human, once your basics, material and safety needs are met is your brain's tendency toward comfort and stability. Comfort and stability are

## **UFYB 320: Why New Year's Resolutions Matter & Why You Should Make One**

lovely, but they're also the opposite of change and growth. Your brain evolved to want to save energy and remains stable. So anything that feels familiar and consistent to your brain, signals to your brain that it's safe and you're not going to die.

And the real catch 22/mind fuck of it is that essentially, anything can become familiar and consistent to your brain, even when it's emotionally volatile or unpleasant or damaging to you. So, for instance, hating your body can be a familiar and consistent state to your brain. Fighting with your spouse can be a familiar and consistent state for your brain. Having a series of dead end situations who ghost you and don't treat you well, can be familiar and consistent to your brain.

Biting your nails or pulling your hair or overdrinking or overeating or restricting your food or bingeing and purging or over-exercising or any other physically harmful coping mechanism that we use, can be familiar and consistent to our brains. Staying in a job you hate, familiar and consistent. Negative emotion that's stagnation and stuck-ness or even misery can all be, stay with me now, familiar and consistent. The suckiness of them does not motivate our brain to change them a lot of the time.

The mental and emotional suffering, even if we're aware of it, does not outweigh the safety, stability, comfort and consistency that our brain wants. So we have that on one side and then at the same time, most of us don't want our lives to be this way. With our higher thinking brain, our prefrontal cortex, this is not what we want for our lives. We did not choose to live in this manner on purpose because it was the ideal life we wanted to live.

We didn't set out and say, "What I really want is to feel overwhelmed by negative emotion about my job and my marriage." And then to take pills every night to drown that out and then feel hungover and ashamed the next morning, and then do it all again. We didn't choose that on purpose

## **UFYB 320: Why New Year's Resolutions Matter & Why You Should Make One**

because we thought it was great. In fact, we generally have certain values for how we wish our lives would be or we want our lives to be.

And we want to have loving, healthy, growth oriented relationships, many of us. We want to take care of our bodies and feel physically well and able to the extent that we can. Everybody's body is different and that's available to them in different ways. But most of us would like to feel as physically well as we can in our given body. We want to do work we care about, many of us, that challenges our minds and contributes to the world. We want to feel like we're doing something good for our community and our world. We want to have long lasting, supportive and fun friendships.

We want to have great sex, many of us. We want to feel stylish and put together or we want to live in homes that are attractive and pleasing to us. We want to feel good in our lives and about ourselves. We might not share all of those same goals but we share a lot of them or we share some of them. And the reason we don't have the life that matches those isn't because there's something wrong with us or we don't deserve it or we just have to be better.

It's because our brains are working as they evolve to work. They are prioritizing safety and stability because our brains think those protect us from danger. So resolutions or goals are absolutely critical because they are how you bridge the gap between your brain's default operating system, what it finds familiar and consistent, even if that sucks for you and the life that you want to live. Let's say that again, it's so important.

The purpose of a resolution or a goal is to bridge the gap between what your brain will do if left to its own devices and the life that you actually want to live and need your brain to help you create. Setting resolutions and executing on them is how we bring our lives into alignment with our values. It's how we counteract the tendency to stagnate and tread water and suffer

## **UFYB 320: Why New Year's Resolutions Matter & Why You Should Make One**

for years on end because that stagnation and suffering are familiar and consistent and safe. Your brain on its own will always default to what's easiest, which is expending the least energy which is keeping things the same.

So if you want a life that aligns with your values, if you want a life that expresses the vision you have for your life, you have to expend effort to make that happen. Setting a resolution is the signpost that tells you where you're trying to head. This is why the sort of, I only do things that feel easy and aligned to me is so stupid. Obviously there's something to alignment. I'm going to be talking in this whole little series about resolutions about how to align with your values but it is not what feels easy.

It's whatever your brain already does, that's just what you're doing right now is what your brain thinks is easy, and that's what feels easy to your brain. Setting a resolution tells you where you're trying to go a different direction, where you're trying to head. It's how you operationalize your values in your life, and that's how you work on bridging the gap between the places where your life is not matching your values, the things you want out of it.

And I think there's a reason to do this around new year's, I don't think it's just sort of a cliché. Yes, time is all made up and an illusion and we created the calendar out of thin air. And it's not everybody's new year. I'm Jewish, we have our new year in fall. And if you are on the lunar calendar, maybe celebrate Chinese New Year and that's usually end of January, beginning of February on the Gregorian calendar. There are various new years and I actually am happy, I use both. I use the Jewish new year and the kind of secular new year.

But I do think there's a reason to do it around whatever your new year is and here's why. Humans need structure and ritual. It helps us organize our

## **UFYB 320: Why New Year's Resolutions Matter & Why You Should Make One**

sense of time and it helps us know what to be doing. And it helps us create meaning over time by revisiting the same themes at the same times of the year. It's not a coincidence that every society, especially indigenous societies, have a lot of rituals and kind of holidays from year to year. They help structure our experiences. The turning of one year to another is a useful time point for doing that.

First of all, a lot of other people are doing it at the same time, so there's a cultural momentum behind resolutions and the new year, which I think can be helpful. And I think there's a natural kind of quieting and turning inward when it's colder, when it's darker, right after the holidays are over. I mean, not all of us have colder, darker months right around now, it depends where you live obviously. But I think that there's a sort of both cultural momentum that is helpful. There's a context setting of the ritual of it being the same time every year, that's helpful.

It helps us kind of peg our progress to the time as our lives go on and there's a natural kind of slowing down and germinating, whenever your winter is, that is useful for this practice. So I think resolutions do matter quite a lot. And there's good reason to use the change in year and that shortest daylight of the year to draw inward and look inside and figure out what we really want to work on changing in order to bring our lives into alignment with our values and our aspirations and our dreams.

What is the foundation work we can be doing now so that when spring comes we can really blossom. So in next week's episode, I'm going to talk about how to choose a resolution, how to use your values to help you figure out what is worth working on and why. I don't want you to choose a resolution the way that you normally do, or at least not to think about it in the way that you normally do.



## **UFYB 320: Why New Year's Resolutions Matter & Why You Should Make One**

So in next week's episode, I'm going to teach you two different techniques, one for how to start with your values to figure out what resolution to choose. And one for if you already have resolutions you're really committed to, how to work backwards to connect them to your values so that you have a more positive productive motivation. And it's not coming from self-criticism or perfectionism. But if you want to get a head start on this process and you really want to go through it, obviously in the podcast I'm going to talk you through it at a general level.

But if you want to really dive in and do this for real, I have a way for you to do that too. Right now, when you join *The Clutch*, which is my feminist coaching program and community, we are going to give you access to a bonus teaching pack all about resolutions. So it's an extra course or module that you get as soon as you join. And you will learn everything you need to set and keep resolutions. You're going to learn how choice overload can sabotage your goals and how to practice constraint to prevent that from happening.

How to avoid decision fatigue when choosing and implementing a resolution. The importance of what I call active focus and keeping your resolution. I mean we're all good at making them, it's the keeping them where the rubber hits the road. How perfectionist fantasies can interfere with goal setting, how to make sure you aren't basically falling prey to that when you choose your resolution. How to take massive action to accomplish your resolution. So it's really everything.

It's starting at the beginning, what are your values? Walking you through identifying those. How you are going to choose a resolution and conversation with those values. How you're going to plan it, how you're going to execute it. How are you going to plan for obstacles and deal with them? You'll get a tracker for tracking the first four weeks of your resolution to make sure you're on track.



## **UFYB 320: Why New Year's Resolutions Matter & Why You Should Make One**

And in January inside *The Clutch*, we're having special coaching calls that are dedicated to helping you stick to your resolutions. So whether you need some help framing your resolution and goal or you've set it and you've started and you're having trouble with accountability or obstacles are coming up or your brain is getting in your way. We will have your back. So all of that is available when you join *The Clutch*, but you need to join to get it. So text your email to +1347 934 8861. There's no code word necessary, just text your email to +1347 934 8861. We'll send you the link.

Or you can go on [unfuckyourbrain.com/clutch](http://unfuckyourbrain.com/clutch). And now is the perfect time, because then you're going to have all of the lessons and the workbooks there. So that then next week when I teach you the concept of using values to guide your resolutions, you're going to have the exercise that walks you through exactly how to do that ready so you can really hit the ground running. Alright, my friends, I'll see you there.