

UFYB 322: The Must-Do Secret to Planning Resolutions



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 goal oriented chickens or ducks or owls or just fine feathered friends of all kinds. Welcome to part three of this series, the final part in this series of how and why to make and keep resolutions. I mean, I'm actually going to come back to this topic in January because I want to support you if you do stumble with your resolutions down the line. But we're concluding this part of this year is the planning part. So if you didn't listen to the last two episodes, please go back and do that.

But the brief summary is that so far we've learned the following. We've learned that resolutions are important because they are how we align our lives with our values instead of just living based on our primitive brain's desire for comfort and stability. We've also learned that when we choose a resolution based on shame or inadequacy, we want to use that resolution to prove our value and worth by succeeding at it. Then we are destined to fail at it. It puts way too much pressure on us and our brain automatically loses motivation.

If the point of the resolution is in your brain unconsciously, if the point of the resolution is to feel better about yourself. As soon as you feel bad about yourself on the way, which is going to happen because you've got all the same thoughts and feelings you ever did. You'll lose your motivation. If your brain says well I have to quit smoking to feel okay about myself. And as you try to do that you lapse and have a cigarette or you are thinking a lot about smoking, your brain is saying, "What's wrong with you? You're not doing this right. You're not good enough." You're basically producing shame as you go along.

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And so your brain is going to give up and become unmotivated. The only reason you were doing it was to stop feeling bad about yourself and you still feel bad about yourself. So your brain will say it's not worth doing. I feel bad about myself either way. So we can't use a resolution to feel better about ourselves. That's setting ourselves up for failure. It actually just deprives your brain of a real motivation.

So I taught in the episodes that the way to choose a resolution is to align with our chosen values, not to prove our value as a human, to align our human life with the values that we've chosen for ourselves. And I walked you through an exercise on how to do that. And I told you that if you really want to dig into this I have a whole exercise on this on creating resolutions that align with your values inside a bonus module we have in *The Clutch* only right now. All about how to set and keep your resolutions.

So when you join *The Clutch* right now, which is my feminist coaching program and community, you get access to this mini course all about setting and keeping New Year's resolutions. And so you learn how to figure out what your values are, how to pick a resolution that lines up with your values, how to plan the resolution and how to execute it and stay on track.

So if you want to do that with me in that process, if you want to work through that process inside *The Clutch* with other women who are doing it and get the coaching and support you need, then you should just join *The Clutch* now and make sure you get access to that because it's only available through the end of the year. It's only available till January 1st. So you can join by texting your email to +1347 934 8861, it's +1347 934 8861. You don't need a code word or anything. If you join before or on January 1st, you will automatically get access to this bonus of that mini course on resolutions.

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Or you can just go to unfuckyourbrain.com/clutch, same deal, as long as you join on or before January 1st, the date is now through then, you will get access. So today what we're going to talk about is a kind of piece of what I teach in that course, which is the actual planning of the resolution, because here's how most of us plan a resolution. We pick the resolution, then we create this perfect plan for how great it will be when it all works out. And this gives us a hit of dopamine right now. Imagining how wonderful everything will be in this perfect future feels really good in the moment.

So it can be a really addictive process and this could look like deciding that, well, you're going to be working out more and going to the gym every day. So you order a bunch of cute exercise clothes and you color code all the gym classes in your calendar. Or maybe you tell yourself, in January, I'm going to actually start reading all those parenting books I ordered. And you start just feeling good about how soon you are going to be a perfect parent just as soon as you read those books.

Just as soon as I start meditating in January, I'm sure I'll feel chill all the time and I'll never yell at my kid anymore. Or it can look like creating the perfect writing schedule. I'm going to finally finish my book. I'm going to do this perfect writing schedule. I'm going to write that all on my physical planner and just look at these beautiful, clean pages with my writing scheduled on it. And imagine yourself just writing away productively every morning.

What all of these examples share is that they are fucking fantasies. They're fantasies. They're not real. They are imaginations of a world where you effortlessly and easily carry out your resolution. Please listen to me when I say, if it was so effortless and easy to do this with your current brain and set of thoughts, you would already be doing it. I'm going to just say that again. If you did not need anything different in your brain to create the

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result that you want in your resolution, you would already fucking have it. You would already be doing it. This is not a criticism of you at all.

This is just me pointing out that your current set of thoughts is creating your current set of outcomes and returns in your life. If all it took to work out consistently was having cute exercise outfits and color coding your calendar, you probably have already bought those and done that before. If all it took to stop yelling at your kids was reading a parenting book, you'd have read it by now. If it was so easy to meditate every day with your current thoughts, you'd already be meditating.

All that perfect planning literally gives you a chemical hit in your brain that feels good, but it's not reflective of the reality you're going to be in on January 1st. This is especially true if you normally beat yourself up about this area of your life, which again, if you are not following what I teach and you're just setting resolutions the way people normally do, it's a perfect storm because you're picking something where you feel bad about yourself. You're trying to motivate yourself with shame. And then your plan is just this perfectionistic, perfect plan. And it feels so good because normally you beat yourself up.

So if you normally beat yourself up about always hitting snooze and waking up late and being late to work, it's going to feel really good to tell yourself that you're going to be a different person who's always on time starting January 1st. The fantasy is relief from the self-criticism. And if that resonates for you, I have a whole episode called Perfectionist Fantasies and Tomorrow Thinking that you can listen to, that's episode 90. But that's what you need to know for this purpose, you get the idea.

What all this means is that the biggest mistake in planning a resolution is only planning for it to work perfectly and not planning for the very foreseeable obstacles. Those obstacles are all the reasons that you are

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currently not doing the thing you want to resolve to do. And it's not because you don't have enough willpower or discipline, thank goodness. Because if that was the issue, there's no reason to expect that on January 1st, you would suddenly have more willpower or discipline. So it's good news that that's not the issue.

The reason that you aren't currently doing it is because there are normal obstacles that come up to accomplishing goals, normal problems in our thinking, our feelings, our actions, or the world around us that get in our way. But we don't plan for them, so we leave ourselves completely vulnerable to them throwing us off course.

So for example, if you currently smoke and you want to quit smoking and your plan is just quit or chew Nicorette or use a patch to quit. That's not a full plan. That is a perfectionistic fantasy. A plan would be going through all the various influences on your smoking and all the times and the reasons the urge comes up and all the obstacles and planning how to handle them. So the addictive properties of nicotine, definitely an obstacle and a nicotine replacement product may answer that obstacle. So you may have planned for just that one obvious obstacle.

But urges to smoke aren't just physical, they're emotional. What about the way you've conditioned yourself to smoke when you're anxious, how are you going to deal with that anxiety? Your anxiety is not going away overnight. If smoking is how you've dealt with it for 10 years, what's your plan for dealing with it if you're trying not to smoke? What about the FOMO you might feel when your friends go out to smoke at work or at the bar or a party, how are you going to deal with that FOMO?

What if your eating or drinking habits change when you stop smoking? Nicotine is an appetite suppressant. Sometimes people gain weight when they stop smoking. If you haven't dealt with any of your thoughts about your

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weight and your body, what's that going to do to your brain? How are you going to handle it? What if you do smoke? What happens if you relapse? Do you just start again? Do you say, "Fuck it", and finish the pack? What plan do you have in place to learn from the moments that you do fail and get back on the wagon and keep going?

As you can see from just this one example, there are a lot of potential challenges you need to think about and plan for. And most of us don't want to do that. That doesn't feel fun. Having a perfectionist fantasy feels fun. Planning in real life feels hard. That's why you haven't done the thing yet. But you can actually plan a resolution so it will succeed. Most of us just skip that and that's why our resolutions fail. We don't anticipate what might go wrong and we don't plan for it. We don't plan to fail but planning to fail is the only way to truly succeed. That's not being fatalistic, it's being smart.

It's magical thinking to believe that just considering obstacles will somehow ruin your chance of success or to believe that ignoring obstacles will somehow just work out. The more you're prepared to overcome obstacles in a realistic way, the greater you will have a real and solid belief that you can change. The fantasy you already sort of know is not going to happen. If you want real belief in your ability to actually change things in your life, you have to plan in a way where you plan to fail and overcome obstacles and keep going.

So that is the most important step you can take, planning to fail. And this requires a lot of inner work and self-honesty to really look at the reasons you currently don't do something. So you can plan how to change that. It's your thoughts that have motivated your actions right now. So it's your thoughts that have to change if you want different actions. You might want to quit smoking. You may have that thought but you have to really dig into all the thoughts that come up that could take you off track and plan for how to handle them.

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That is exactly what you learn to do when you work with me inside *The Clutch*. Resolutions are how we bridge the gap between our values and our current lives. I talked about that in episodes one and two of the series. And coaching is how we bridge the gap between our aspirations and our current ability to meet them. So resolutions are how we bridge the gap between our values, how we want to live our lives and how we actually are. The resolution points out to us where we're not living our values and what we're trying to move towards.

And then we have to take the brains we have and turn them into the brain that can create success of that resolution, the brain that can create a life where we are aligned with our values. Coaching is how we bridge that gap between our aspirations and our current ability to meet them. A resolution expresses a value that you want to move towards. But if you already knew how to do that, you'd be doing it, so you're missing something.

You're missing the bridge between who you are now and the person who can live into that value and that aspiration. It's not a character flaw or a character defect or willpower, anything like that. It's just your thoughts. Specifically, it's not knowing how to change the thoughts and make up your current traits and abilities into thoughts that create new traits and abilities. This is a skill. This is a skill you can learn, how to look at where you are, look at where you want to go, figure out who you need to become to get there, and then change your thinking to become that person.

That is a replicable, repeatable skill that you can use in every area of your life, but without it you have very little hope of bridging that gap. That's the bridge that coaching and self-coaching provides. That's the bridge that thought work enables you to build. Changing your thoughts on purpose enables you to scaffold piece by piece. You can build the bridge as you walk over it. Thought work is the bridge that took me from being a constant procrastinator and deadline extender to someone who gets done what I say

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I'll get done, when I told myself I would do it without drama, the vast majority of the time.

Thought work is the bridge that took me from someone who was either in way too long dead end relationships or going on dozens of pointless first dates and not getting traction. To someone who's engaged to a man who is a true partner in every way and who adores me more than I'm sure I deserve. And who also makes me laugh until I cry on a regular basis, which are really my main three criteria in a partner. Thought work is the bridge that took me from someone who never exercised and hated exercise to someone who's lifted weights twice a week with a trainer for the last six years.

Thought work is the bridge that took me from feeling trapped in a career that I didn't really want to be in, but had a lot of sunk cost of time and education and financial investment and social prestige and family desires and all the rest invested in. To leaving that to create a business that I love and financial freedom for myself. So if you want to change anything in your life, you need to take different actions. And if you want different actions, you have to create different thoughts and feelings to drive them.

So I want to invite you to make 2024 the year that you really bring your life in line with your values and your goals. Let's not just aspire to change, let's actually make it. That's what you learn to do inside *The Clutch*. So right now when you join *The Clutch*, we will give you access to that mini course all about how to set and keep resolutions using this model that I have described over the last few episodes, which is really unique to the work we do in *The Clutch*.

You'll learn how choice overload can sabotage your goals, how to practice constraint to prevent that from happening, how to avoid decision fatigue when choosing and executing a resolution. How to set a resolution using

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your values in a more in depth way, how perfectionist fantasies can interfere with your goal settings, so how to make sure that that's not fucking you up and making you pick a resolution that you're not going to be able to do. And then you'll learn how to actually implement it.

So you're going to learn how to plan it, how to plan to fail, how to consider obstacles and make a plan for overcoming them. And then how to take massive action to actually accomplish it. So you'll get a workbook that walks you step by step through the process of all of this. And a tracker for tracking the first four weeks of your resolution to make sure that you are learning from any challenges that come up.

Plus in January we are having special coaching calls in *The Clutch* that are all about this, dedicated to helping you stick to your resolution. So whether you need some help picking the resolution, you need some help staying accountable, you need some coaching on obstacles that are coming up. We've got your back. We're going to be having special coaching calls, study halls dedicated to this topic in *The Clutch* in January.

So all of that is totally free and part of your membership, but you have to join by January 1st. So text your email to +1347 934 8861, that's +1347 934 8861. We'll just send you the link. You don't need a code word. Or go to unfuckyourbrain.com/clutch. You really can become the person that you are trying to be if you know how to bridge that gap. That's what you can learn inside *The Clutch* and that's what 2024 can be like for you. But you have to come and join us on or before January 1st to make that happen. I'll see you there.