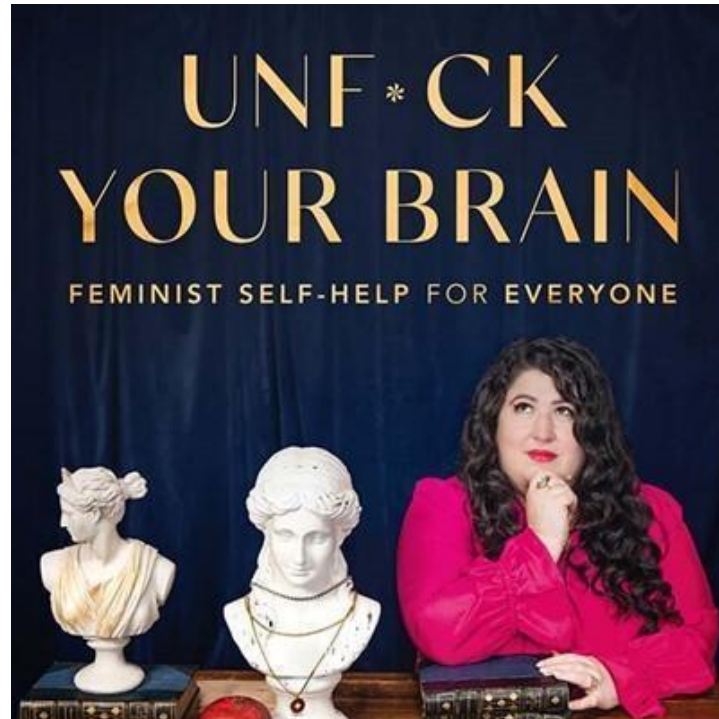


## UFYB 6: How to Get Sh\*t Done



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Kara Loewentheil**

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## UFYB 6: How to Get Sh\*t Done

Welcome to *Unf\*ck Your Brain*. I'm your host, Kara Loewentheil, Master Certified Coach and founder of The School of New Feminist Thought. I'm here to help you turn down your anxiety, turn up your confidence, and create a life on your own terms. One that you're truly excited to live. Let's go.

Hey you all, we made it through Thanksgiving and now we're slaloming. Is that how they say that word? Like a slalom, it's a ski term. I was reading The New Yorker this morning. I read this article about a ski star, Olympic skier and I think now I have skiing on my brain. So who knows if I said that word right? But basically we're heading towards Christmas but the year is not over yet. So now is actually a great time to get really efficient. Most of us are just like, "Oh, it's December. I guess I'm not doing any work till January." Right? We just turn off, but this is actually an amazing time to get efficient so that we make it through the next month with plenty of time to do our work, have some fun and be able to turn the corner into 2018 without an overwhelm hangover or a real hangover for that matter.

So I took a few days upstate for myself over the past week, over Thanksgiving and whenever I'm on my own, I end up getting super creative and productive about what I want to create and teach so that you guys have more tools and more exercises and more strategies to implement, to improve your lives. I always get a rush of inspiration when I have a few days on my own and as you can tell, I'm all about the productivity for the next few weeks.

I'm going to talk about how to get more shit done. So in order to understand how to get more shit done, you have to understand why you aren't getting shit done now. Now you may be getting some stuff done, I guarantee you're not getting everything done that you wish you could, or that you need to. There are two main reasons that you are not getting everything done. Number one, you don't have a system or number two, you're not

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managing your thoughts. And for most of you, it is probably both. When you don't have a system it is very difficult to get organized and stay on top of shit even when you're managing your thoughts.

And conversely even if you have a great system, if you don't manage your thoughts it won't matter, because you'll procrastinate and avoid using your system in doing what you're supposed to do anyway, right? So you need both. If you have a system but you don't know how to manage your thoughts, the system it's irrelevant. It doesn't matter. You won't follow it. On the other hand, if you're good at managing your thoughts but you don't have a system, you are still going to feel disorganized and overwhelmed because the human brain can only hold three pieces of information at a time. If you have a complex job, right? If you are a lawyer or a doctor or an architect or a designer or something, whatever you're doing or an artist, if you have a job that has more than three parts to it, if you have a job that requires doing more than three things in a week, your brain can't hold it all.

So even if you're good at managing your brain so that you don't procrastinate and you don't avoid, you will still be totally disorganized and inefficient if you don't have a good system. So let's start by talking about the system. What do I mean when I say you need a system? A system is any consistent set of practices that you use to manage your workflow, okay? Is a consistent set of practices that you use to manage your workflow. I am astounded on a weekly basis by how many of my high powered clients do not have a system. They have scraps of paper with two dues jotted down on them sometimes, sometimes. Only sometimes do they even have scraps of paper. Sometimes they don't even have that. They just have a running mental list of what they're supposed to be doing. And since I just taught you, the human brain can only remember about three things at a time, that list is always incomplete or some of you just show up to work every day and you figure out what's immediately due and you try to work on that, right?

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If you can even get through you're panicking you don't even really have a mental running list. None of these are good systems. This is none scraps of paper with two dues, is not a good system. A running mental list is not a good system because it can only hold three things at a time. And just showing up and being like, what is being shoved in my face let's do immediately is also not a system. None of these are systems. So here is what happens when you don't have a good system to think about if any of this sounds familiar, you worry constantly about whether you have enough time to get everything done. You feel overwhelmed. You get paralyzed trying to figure out what to do first. So you do nothing. When you work on one thing you're worrying about whether you should be working on something else or when you'll get to it, you have no idea how long your tasks will take you.

You feel out of control about your schedule and you get distracted frequently remembering things you need to do later. Or when you're doing other things, you are distracted thinking about work, right? You're trying to have a romantic dinner with your partner or you're trying to enjoy bedtime with your kids, but your brain is going, "Don't forget to call about the Henderson matter." Because you don't have a system. All of this comes out of not having a clear system to follow. When you have a system, you know exactly what you're going to do when, ahead of time. When you don't have a system, it is just total chaos. So I'm going to teach you the basic principles of the organizational system that I recommend all my clients use and that I teach in detail on UnF\*ck Your Brain. It's a lot to absorb, just listening to a podcast.

So I'm going to give you the basics here and you can implement these basics and see how it works for you. So I want to preface this with something so important. I guarantee that for those of you who are overwhelmed, when you hear what I'm about to teach you, even though it's

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only four pieces of information. When you hear this, your brain is going to say, "That sounds complicated and I don't have time." Your brain is lying. Not having a system is what is costing you so much time. You are wasting at least a third of your time because you don't have a consistent system. I run and manage a multiple six-figure business basically by myself, because I have a system that works. Some of you can't handle a 40 hour week workload because you don't have a system, right? So when your brain tells you, "That's going to take time to figure out, we don't have enough time."

That is a lie. Your brain is confused. This happens with a lot of my clients. Their brain basically says, "We're too busy to make a list." Right? Like, "We have too much to do. We're too busy to make a plan." That's craziness. Right? Think about anything else in your life, if you don't have a plan, you are going to be so much more inefficient and you're going to waste so much more time than if you just start to make a plan. Think about you're eating, right? If you think about meal planning, it takes an hour on the weekends. But if you do it, then you save all that time all week trying to figure out what to eat when. What if you don't do it, that's when you end up ordering in or not knowing what dieter waiting too long and getting too hungry and then eating potato chips for dinner, right?

All that chaos gets created because you don't have a plan. It's the same thing with your thoughts, right? Yeah. It takes some mental emotional energy to decide ahead of time what to think, and to coach yourself before a difficult situation. It is still the best investment of time and energy you can make because it saves you so much time to know what you're going to think going in, when you don't do it, then you're at the mercy of your thoughts and you lose hours or days to whatever your brain does to you during the difficult situation, right? So you need to think about the time that you would spend implementing a system that is an investment, you will make that time back. You will make it back in the first week, not to mention the rest of your life, right? That time is like compound interest.

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You will make it back. So I want to say that on the front end, because I just know that as soon as I start explaining this, half of your brains are going to go, we don't have time or overwhelmed and want to turn it off. Don't do that. This will take a few extra minutes on the front end. It is going to save you literally years of your life once you have it implemented. Okay. So here are the couple of elements you need. Number one, you need a standard procedure for assessing what needs to be done, right? On some level, all that's happening is that work is coming in and when I say work I'm talking about your professional work, but anything, right? When I say work or project during this podcast, I mean it might be writing a brief, it might be getting your tires changed.

It might be planning your parents' anniversary party. It doesn't matter, just something you need to get done. You need to have a standard procedure for assessing what needs to be done. So this part of the system I've adapted from David Allen, who wrote a book called, Getting Things Done. I sort of recommend his book, except I don't because he and I really disagree about how you should use your calendar, which is going to become important later in the podcast. So if you want to read his book, read his book ignore his thing about calendaring and listen to me because he wrote it in a different era and for different people. And what I'm teaching works better for people like you. I know that because you're listening to my podcast. Okay? So, but here's what David Allen teaches that is useful. David Allen teaches that there are multiple inboxes in your life, right?

So your emails and inbox, your text messages and inbox. I think he wrote his book before there were text messages, phone calls, commune inbox, any place that you get an assignment or any information comes in that you have to deal with, or anything gives rise to a task. Any place that that stuff comes into your life is an inbox. Any place you jot something down that you need to do, like you give yourself an assignment basically, that's also an

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inbox. Any place that information or tasks come into your life is an inbox. You need to have designated inboxes. You need to know what your inboxes are. So my inboxes are my email. I have several email accounts. They all come to one email client, that's an inbox. Text messages, I definitely get texts from friends or family or my partner or whatever that have like, here's what needs... we need to do this or are we going to do that?

Or whatever. In stimuli comes in, right? Input comes in and I need to deal with. For me the phone is not really one. I have almost no one in my life who calls me in a way that gives rise to tasks. But for some of you that might be, you might work with a partner who likes to call you on the phone or a boss who likes to call you or your parents or whatever. And then for me, for sure, my to do app where I put in the inbox on my to-do app whenever I think of something I need to do. So my two biggest inboxes are my email and my to do app where I jot down, the app that I use, which is called OmniFocus, which I'll explain in a minute, has an inbox it's built to work with David Allen's method.

So it has an inbox feature, but you could be talking about the notes app on your phone, or if you carry a notebook in your pocket, just wherever you write down all those little things that occur to you during the day. So I say that, some of you are not writing that shit down. Some of you are trying to that stuff all the time. So you absolutely have to have an inbox. Everyone needs an inbox that they carry around with them, whether it's their phone or a pad of paper, where they can write down all that stuff that occurs to you throughout the day, right? You need a designated place to put that stuff when it comes into your brain so that you are not just trying to remember it all the time. So if you are reading your kids a book and you remember, "Oh man, I got to make sure I wrote down or we have to check the filing instructions on that TRR." Whatever it is.

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You need a designated place that you know you go to write that down, on your phone or on a notebook. Okay? So you need to know what your inboxes are. You got your email, you have some place to write down things on the fly. You maybe have your phone, whatever your life looks like, right? Your mail, your physical mail. That's also an inbox. You need to know what your inboxes are. And then you need to have designated times that you go through them, right? So you need to process what's in that list once a day. I'm talking to all of you who have all your emails in your email inbox. The pain that I experienced when I see a client or a friend with 4,500 emails in their inbox is just the worst human suffering, I can not handle it. Your inbox should be going to zero every day.

Your inbox is not a to-do list. Here's what happens when you leave all of your emails in your inbox and you use them as a reminder, every time you look at your email, you waste mental and emotional energy reliving everything that's in there, thinking about each thing and thinking about whether you're supposed to be doing it or when it should be done. It is so fucking inefficient you guys, I feel so strongly about it. I have to swear about it. It's so inefficient. It's as if you were reading a book, you have a novel you're reading and every time you wanted to read it, you went and read the titles and the authors of every other book in your house, every time. Okay? So you have to process what is in your inbox. I'm going to tell you what that means in a minute. Step one, you got to know what your inboxes are.

And step two, you need to have designated times where you're going to go through them and process everything in there. That doesn't mean you're going to do all of that work at that moment. What it means is you're going to process it. So here's what it means, when you process something, you look at it and you assess it, right? Maybe it's an email asking you to write a memo. Maybe it's a text message suggesting dinner plans, whatever it is, you look at it and you assess it. There are three options. Actually. There's

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really two options. If the task will take two minutes or less, you do it right then. So if you are looking at your text message inbox, and there's a text from a friend that says, are we on for dinner at seven? It's going to take you less than two minutes to respond to that.

You just respond to it, then it's done. You don't ever think about it again. If it will take more than two minutes, you add it to an ongoing list of projects that you have. So that could be right brief or refinish the roof on the house. Anything you need to get done in life is a project. So that means anything that's in your inbox is either a two minute task or it's a new project, or it's a task that goes on the list of a project that already exists. Okay, I'm going to say that again. When you're processing your inbox, anything, an email, a phone call, a voicemail, a text message, and know you jotted down. Anything you were processing can only be one of three things. It is either a task that will take less than two minutes that you can do right then, or it is a new project.

And you have to create a new list. You got to write it down and we're talking a minute about where you could write it down, but you need to write down this new project, write this memo or draft this brief or design this house or whatever it is, however big or small, it becomes a new project. So it's two minute task or it's a new project, or it is an additional task on a project that already exists that you already have written down on a list. Can only be those three things, and so what's implied in that. The last thing you need here, you have your inboxes, you have your set times to process your inboxes. And then you also have to have a list of projects. And that list you can create it in the beginning when you try to implement this, but then it just evolves over time.

Right? All projects get finished, new ones come on. You always have lists of projects where you are always putting tasks so that you can see, oh, okay, this came in. I need to do this research assignment that's part of this

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case. Okay. That task goes on this project list, right? So you have multiple lists, one per project and you are putting tasks wherever they go, whichever project they go with. You can see how this is much more organized than trying to hold it on your brain or even just on a to-do list. When you have a to-do list, you've got all your projects mixed up all in like a weird row, right? And they're not organized in any useful way. When you organize, you're basically creating to do lists that are organized by project so that you can have that 30,000 foot view of what are the overall projects in my life, both professional and personal and what needs to be done on each of them?

So those are the basics. And in terms of where to keep your list of projects, you can really do it as old tech or as new tech as you want. You can just do it on pads of paper if you want, you can just have a notebook or a pad of paper where you've got each page is a different project. You can do it that way. You can also use software, any kind of to-do lists that lets you organize it that way. I use OmniFocus, which was created for David Allen's methods. So it has more features than you need and I tell clients this all the time, it's like you can buy it and just ignore like 80% of the features, but it is set up for projects. So that can be helpful. But anything will do, it does not have to be fancy.

All you need is a place you can write down a list of the projects in your life, right? And then you have your inboxes where new tasks come in or are written down. And then you just regularly process those inboxes and assign everything in them to a project. Or you do it if it only takes two minutes, right? That's really not actually that complicated. You just know where your inboxes are. You regularly process them and when you process it, you're just looking at what comes in and either doing it in two minutes if you can, or adding it as a task to a project. When you do that, you don't have to have 5,000 emails in your inbox because you don't need them there to remind you that you have something to do. You have taken that stimuli, you've taken that information and you've turned it into a task on a project.

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Then you can move it out of your inbox. So you are not constantly reassessing in your brain. "Oh, what does that email? What is it about? Oh, have I done it yet? Oh, what does that have to do with?" You don't have to keep going over and over that ground, you've processed it. You've turned it into a task. You've assigned it to a project. You know that you have everything written down. You guys cannot overestimate how much mental energy you will save and how much anxiety you will save in doing this.

Because when you do this practice, when you have a consistent system, you never have to worry if you're missing anything, because you can rely on your system. If you don't have a system, you will constantly worry that you are missing things because you are, because your brain can only hold three pieces of information at one time.

So you will always be worried about it. When you have a consistent system, you never have to worry. Even if you can't remember what you're supposed to do, it doesn't matter because it's in the system. So you know, anything you need to do, it's either in an inbox and you haven't processed it yet, or it's written as a task on a project. Those are the only two places that a piece of information can be in your world and there is so much security in knowing that, okay? So that's the David Allen part. Here's the part I like to do add to it. David Allen teaches you, never put it on your calendar and look at your projects on any given day to assess their priorities, and when to do them. Don't do any of that shit because you are all like me, like I used to be. Type A perfectionist mostly, and that will paralyze you within decisions and stress.

And so don't do that. You are not ready to work by priority yet. So here's what you do. You have now your projects with your list of tasks. So you know everything you've got to do is written down on paper. Once a week

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you look at... so I like to do it on Sundays. You look at your projects, you figure out what needs to get done in the next week. And then you assign time on your calendar to those tasks and I suggest do you break it down.

Don't assign three days to write brief. Your brain doesn't even know what that means really, and it'll procrastinate for two of those days. You want to really break that down like, these three hours, I'm going to review the pleadings, these three hours, I'm going to do kind of case research, these three hours on research this issue, even you could break it down into even less than three hours.

But break it down to small chunks, as small as you can and assigned time on your calendar to those tasks, okay? You also need to assign the time on your calendar to socializing, to sleeping, to family time, to exercise, to commuting, to sex, whatever else you do. You need to get so intimate with your calendar. Your calendar is your new best friend, okay? It's really important to put the non-work stuff on there because a lot of what you struggle with is not having a good sense of what you're giving up for your work, right? So always just thinking like, "Oh, okay, well I could do this Thursday night if I needed to." And not really seeing, "Okay, that means I'm not going to be able to spend that time with my family."

Right? You've got fuzziness in your calendar and so things spill over into other time that you really want to be spending on something else. When you put that on the calendar, as that family time, as that self time, whatever it is, you will get better about respecting your own time boundaries because you'll be making a really clear trade off and doing it concretely on paper or on the screen. So here's the big important thing about doing your counter. There's two. One is what I just said. You need to put everything on there and not just work. Secondly, you need to include buffer time. So a lot of you probably have tried to calendar your tasks before, and it all went haywire the minute something unexpected happened, because this is human life

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and unexpected shit happens. So you have to build in time for that on the calendar.

I recommend anywhere from two hours a week to two hours a day for some clients even more, depending on how unpredictable your workflow is, right? You know that better than I do. Is it only once a week that someone gives you something you didn't expect? Or is it every day? You're on the bottom of the totem pole and every day for four hours you're doing urgent stuff that a partner didn't tell you about before, right? You know your schedule better, whatever it is, you need to have time set aside so that anything unexpected that comes up, you have time built in to do it. Or you have the space to transfer other tasks to the buffer time to make time to do the new thing. I want you to physically move it around on your calendar. The more you put everything on your calendar and practice, physically moving tasks and commitments around as your workload changes, the more responsible and reliable you will get with your time.

And the more realistic you will get with your task management and your scheduling. And most importantly, remember your calendar is supposed to be flexible. A lot of us perfectionist create this great calendar and then the one time that anything goes wrong or something doesn't fit, or we don't get something finished or something comes up, then we're like, "Oh, the whole thing's ruined." It's not ruined. The beauty of an electronic calendar is that you can move things around all the time. I use a paper one and I use erasable pens, right? It's supposed to move. It's supposed to be flexible. That's fine. Nothing has gone wrong. Moving things around on your calendar as you need to is part of the practice. It's not a problem. Okay, that was a lot of information. You may want to listen to this one again, that's the system I recommend you use at a high level.

Now, like I said earlier, a system won't help you if you aren't actively managing your mind about the projects because even with a system, if you

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are not managing your mind, you will create a beautiful calendar of work tasks and then you will sit down and you will get on Facebook instead, because your brain is scared of your work. So you still have to be actively managing your mind and working on changing your thoughts. If you're avoiding a particular assignment, just putting it on the calendar won't magically make you do it. You still have to conduct that like socratic self dialogue that talk about it. What am I avoiding? Why am I avoiding it? What am I afraid will happen? What could I practice thinking instead? The thoughts that make you avoid your work, make you procrastinate and throw your schedule off are usually going to be some variation of it.

I don't know how to do this or this won't be good enough, or I don't have enough time. So you have to stay on top of managing your mind and changing those thoughts. You always have to be paying attention to what you were thinking when you're procrastinating? Sometimes it's about your own abilities. Sometimes it's just a thought like, "I don't have enough time." Right? When you think that you feel overwhelmed and you don't work, and then you have even less time, right? That one is a really classic productivity killer. So coming up with thoughts that you can practice on purpose when brain goes into anxiety and overwhelm is key. That's the other part of the process that we work through in detail in UnF\*ck Your Brain. If you want to stop procrastinating and avoiding, you have to learn how to manage your mind. So those are the two things that matter.

Having a system and managing your mind, don't go by another organizational self-help book or another \$90 planner. All you need is a pad of paper, honestly. You can use an app but you don't need something fancy. The true keys to getting done are a system that you consistently follow and consistently managing your mind. Okay? So give it a try and let me know how it goes.

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All right, my loved ones, my lovely chickens. I will talk to you guys next week.

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