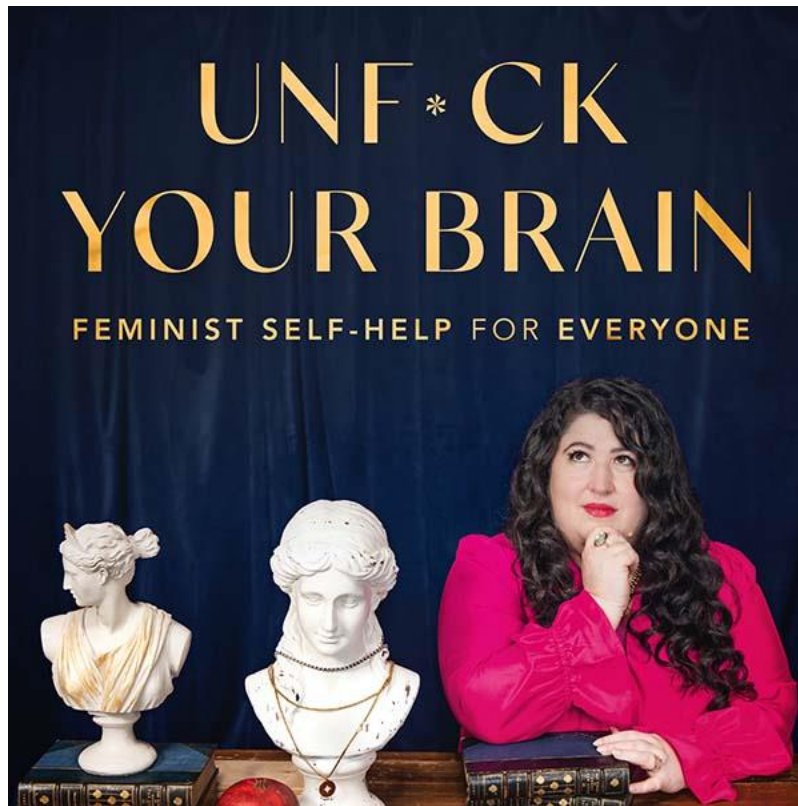


# UFYB 357: Using My Brain to Hit the Bestseller Lists



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Kara Loewentheil**

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## UFYB 357: Using My Brain to Hit the Bestseller Lists

When my book, *Take Back Your Brain*, made the New York Times Bestseller list there was something very different about it from almost all the other books on the list that week. All of the other books had been there for many weeks or were written by people who had literally millions of social media followers, or both, but my book did not. So how did I get it on the bestseller list? How did I compete with authors who had such huge followings?

I'm going to share exactly what I did, mindset and strategy in this episode. And the strategy applies to book bestseller campaigns, but the mindset applies to not only anything you're selling, but any ambitious goal you have. So it is applicable to everyone who wants to accomplish something big. Let's get into it.

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.

Hello, hello my friends. I am excited to share this week's episode and talk about this week's topic because it was essentially the biggest project of the last year of my life, wedding planning nothing compared to this. I spent 2022 to 2023 really focused on writing the book and making it as life changing as possible, creating a true manual for changing your life. And if you have not bought the book yet, I don't know what you're waiting for.

It is the one stop shop guide to changing your brain and changing your life and you can get it at [takebackyourbrainbook.com](http://takebackyourbrainbook.com) or wherever you get your books. But if you publish a book silently in the forest, it doesn't matter how great it is, no one knows about it, and bears don't read as far as we know. So, I spent 2023 to 2024 focused on how to sell the book, but how to sell it in a way that maximized my chances of getting it on a bestseller list, especially the New York Times Bestseller list.

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

## UFYB 357: Using My Brain to Hit the Bestseller Lists

So, the first thing to know, which I didn't know until I started the process because I was apparently naive, is that most bestseller lists are not pure bestseller lists, they are not based only on how many books you sell. Some of them are very numbers based, the Publishers Weekly bestseller list is pretty much just straight numbers, I believe, that's one end of the spectrum.

And on the other end is the New York Times, which is maybe more appropriately called the New York Times recommended reading list. All the books on it have sold enough to be considered bestsellers, they're going to make that Publisher Weekly number list for sure on some level, but that's not the only requirement. So, lots of books that make other lists just based on sales, do not make the New York Times list. And then there are other lists in between. There's Amazon, Barnes & Noble's, C-Suite, there's USA Today, etc.

So, my book made all of those lists, including the New York Times. The New York Times list is the hardest to hit by far. And the hardest category is the one my book was in, which is called advice, how to, and miscellaneous because it's a very varied subject category and content wise. So, you're competing with things like celebrity cookbooks that sell 100,000 copies their first week, that's in the same category as my book. So that list is very hard to get to hit.

And it's not just book sales, you need your book sales to come from real people all over the country. Obviously, you can't just buy your own books and make the list. But you also need to be doing media and podcasts and TV. You need to seem to be someone who's being taken seriously and who has a platform and a reach that sort of justifies your book sales. So, I'm going to talk about the strategy in a bit, for any of you who are curious.

But I want to talk about the more important thing first, which is mindset. And specifically, how I dealt with what felt like a big disappointment and failure when I first started opening pre-orders for the book and how I solved my mindset block to go on and make the bestseller lists anyway.

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

## **UFYB 357: Using My Brain to Hit the Bestseller Lists**

Now, before I get into this, you may be wondering, doesn't your publishing house market and sell your book for you? And the answer to that is no, not really. Especially not if you've got a big advance because you have a platform and a following. They really expect you to sell your book to your listeners and your fans. That's part of why they're giving you a book deal. So, getting a book on the bestseller list is something that the author has to really be working towards.

And I have talked to many, many bestselling authors in my space, kind of self-development, financial education, selfcare, wellness, all of that advice, how to and miscellaneous and that has been consistent for all of us. So, when I first started planning for this, I hired a book launch support team because of course my own employees are running our existing business. They had their existing jobs to do and they were a huge support in this process, but we needed outside support as well.

And my book launch lead told me that my goal should be to sell 20,000 books by the end of my first week on sale. So, all the pre-orders and the first week sales, that would be the goal. And she said ideally she wanted to see 8,000 orders by the end of 2023. So, to be at about 40% of the total goal when my book comes out in May. So, at the time, that sounded just fine because I had never sold a book before and I had no idea how it was going to go, but I'm used to achieving goals when I want to achieve them.

So, I created a plan to share the book, to incentivize pre-orders, we put the plan into action. And at the end of December, at the end of the year we had, drumroll, about 3,000 pre-orders. Now I'm going to pause and say that 3,000 pre-orders in the grand scheme of things is a lot. That is more than many books sell the whole time they're in print. So, I was and am, and even at the time was so honored and grateful for that support and really proud of myself for selling 3,000 books.

But it was less than half of what had been communicated to me was the goal to be comfortably on the way to achieving my big goal of the bestseller list, so, I had not hit that goal. I had not even come within eyesight of that

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

## **UFYB 357: Using My Brain to Hit the Bestseller Lists**

goal. And so of course my brain freaked out. It went into turtle on its back mode. It told me that this is impossible. I'll never be able to make it. I can't do this. It was a lot of, this is something that's outside of my control. This isn't like something in my business where I can just keep trying until I get it right. We only have a certain amount of time, and you're already behind, all of these kinds of thoughts.

And for selfcare, I did a bunch of looking at social media profiles for people in my category who had made bestseller lists, who mostly have a million followers, literally and then having negative thoughts about my social media following. So, this is all the nonsense. I'm sharing this so that you understand my brain is full of nonsense too. My brain reacts to failure this way also. The obvious thought I was having, it was a problem, was, I can't do this. And that's a thought a lot of you have.

The only difference between us is that I have been doing this work long enough that I just don't stop there. I know that that's just a thought. I know that when I think that, I need to coach myself. But I didn't yet believe the thought, I can do this, so that was not the answer. I couldn't just answer, I can't do this or I can do this because I really didn't believe that I could at the time. I did not believe that I was going to be able to get to 20,000 books by the end of my first week when we were at 3,000 in December.

So, here's the self-coaching I did and I used my future feminist self-process that I talked a little bit about in my last episode. So first, I thought about how my socialization was impacting the way I was thinking about this. So, I just tried to remind myself about all of the kinds of patriarchal thought patterns that were coming up. I was discounting my own potential and my own capacity. I was doing what society has taught me to do, which was, assume that something isn't possible for me.

I was doing what perfectionism tells me to do, which is, if I can't do something perfectly right away, then I assume I can never do it and there's something wrong with me and I just don't have what it takes. I was telling myself that I'm not compelling enough or entertaining enough, I'm not

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

## UFYB 357: Using My Brain to Hit the Bestseller Lists

attractive enough. My brain was even pulling out things I don't even think about any more like, well, this is because of your size and if you were thin, then people would take you more seriously.

My brain gave me all these reasons that some people had more followers than I did, and therefore, my warped thinking, more books sales than I did. I was comparing myself to other women and finding myself wanting. That's another thing society tells us to do. I was having a version of, who am I to think I can do this, which is a message that society gets all the time. Women are told to be responsible, be realistic, be humble, not messages we give to men in the same way.

So, I got a good picture of how my socialization was impacting me. It was making me feel hopeless. It was making me want to give up just because I've encountered a challenge, where things weren't going perfectly right off the bat. And I will say, my book strategist never said to me, "You only made 3,000, now you're not going to be able to do it." She was totally supportive. But of course, my brain was trying to make that number she had given me, the authority and that if I couldn't meet it immediately and perfectly, then it was never going to work.

So, I was also seeing how that socialization plays out, where women are taught to not believe in their own authority and their own empowerment, but instead to give all the power to something else, like this number that she had just told me was the goal. I wanted to give that number all the power, and if I didn't make it then that was that. So, I could see how all the socialization was impacting me. It was obviously not giving me helpful thoughts, but I knew that just trying to thought swap to, I can do this, wasn't going to work because I didn't believe that yet.

So, I tapped into my future feminist self, who was a bestselling author. And I asked myself, what was that version of me thinking? And what had that version of me been thinking when she was selling the book that was a bestseller? This is a complicated tense. It's the conditional future tense. It's the version of me who doesn't exist yet, but I'm kind of believing exists or



## UFYB 357: Using My Brain to Hit the Bestseller Lists

believing exists in the multiverse somewhere who is a bestselling author. What would she have been thinking now where I was? And what thought can I use now to get there?

When we're connecting to our future feminist self, we're connecting to the part of us that knows how to get where we want to go. So, my future feminist self wasn't thinking, well, I always knew I could do it. That clearly wasn't true, even if I became that future bestselling author, which I did, it wouldn't be accurate to be thinking, I always knew I could do it because the me of right then did not know I could do it. That wasn't true.

Often when we try to figure out the thought we need to accomplish something, we kind of erroneously or just unhelpfully focus on the thing, but what needs to shift is our identity. That's why we're imagining and accessing our future feminist self, not our future check mark list of accomplishments. It wasn't about focusing on the book itself and what happened to the book. It's not, what do I need to do to make this specific circumstance. It's, who do I need to be?

And so, the thought that I accessed using this future feminist self process was. I am going to show up for my book like a bestselling author does or like a bestselling author would. Rather than wanting the book to do something for me, for my ego, for my self-worth, rather than wanting my book sales to convince me that I was going to make the bestseller list, I focused on what I could do for the book. And I focused on who I needed to be and how I needed to show up, the identity I needed to be in. I needed to be in the identity of a bestselling author.

Again, the emphasis was on, who do I need to be, not, how do I make X thing happen. So, my question to myself was, how does a bestselling author show up for their book? I will tell you the answer to that right after this.

So, my thought became, I'm going to show up for my book the way a bestselling author would. And sometimes I used a variation of it, which was, I'm going to show up for my book as if my book is already a bestseller. So, I

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

## **UFYB 357: Using My Brain to Hit the Bestseller Lists**

used the conditional tense to not trip my brain up. My brain didn't yet believe my book would for sure be a bestseller. And I was like, "That's fine. I don't have to believe that." I don't have to try to believe that this factual thing is going to happen, that I can't absolutely convince my brain is true.

What I need to focus on is, who am I trying to be in this process? So, both of the thoughts I was using focused on how I would show up and that gave rise to a cascade of thoughts about my book. How does a bestselling author think about their book? I thought about the power of the book, the importance of the book. The contribution it was making to social discourse. The people whose lives are going to be changed. And it also helped me focus on how I could show up to support the book.

Again, this was so important, not how this book should prove something to me by how well it does, but how I could show up to support the book. If you're struggling in a relationship, whether someone or something and you want it to behave or be a certain way to validate you. It is so powerful to ask yourself, how you need to show up differently to support that person or the thing to do its best. Want your book to be a bestseller, to validate that you are good enough? Ask how you can show up to support your book in becoming a bestseller instead.

You want your kid to behave better, to prove that you're a good parent? Ask how you can better show up to support your kid and set them up for whatever behavior you want them to learn to be able to do. It shifts the focus from the person or the thing existing, to give you an emotion and focuses on how you can show up to create the outcomes that you want by being the person who can create them. So, focusing on the idea of how I could show up like a bestselling author took me out of, I don't know how and got me going with ideas.

It meant then, rather than just asking myself, what's the minimum I could do or what's one good idea? I was asking myself, what is the best idea I could have? What is the most energy I could put behind this? And the result was



## **UFYB 357: Using My Brain to Hit the Bestseller Lists**

a series of actions that helped my book land on the list, on six of the lists, and including that very difficult to land, New York Times Bestselling list.

I created a trillion, just a banana set of bonuses for people who pre-ordered the book or bought it the week it came out. And I rotated these every week to get the attention of people who maybe hadn't resonated with the previous bonuses. This was so much work, but it was really worth it because it helped people see that whatever they were struggling with, the book would address it.

I reached out to colleagues and friends and I asked people to help me. A bestselling author showing up for her bestselling book wouldn't be shy. I offered to speak to groups or teach online in other people's programs, which I normally never do, if they would buy books for those students. And this was well below what my normal speaking fee would be. And I had some brain drama, I had to coach myself on about, well, doesn't it reflect poorly on me if I'm supposed to be this big success, and I'm willing to come speak for this amount? That was my ego.

If the goal was, how can I show up for the book? Yeah, it maybe didn't make sense to come and speak to three people, but it made sense to go speak to 100 people or 150 people if they were going to get the book. I didn't focus on how small a drop in the bucket, 10 or 20 or 50 or even 100 books was compared to the goal. I just focused on the idea that every book order counted and it was my job to show up for the book like a bestselling author would.

I invested in my podcast PR person. I worked with her on getting me on big podcasts and on TV to share about the book and establish some media credibility. And this was probably 80%, maybe 90% a failure, if you look at it in terms of how many pitches we sent out that did not work out. But it was a total success if I think about it, of the impact of booking that 10 or maybe 20% that did work out.

Another great example of whether I'm going to make it about me and my ego and be upset when somebody doesn't respond or doesn't want to book

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

## **UFYB 357: Using My Brain to Hit the Bestseller Lists**

me, or whether I'm just going to keep going in volume because I'm willing to fail 80 or even 90 times to succeed 10 times. And in the end, if you are expecting the answer at the end of this podcast to say and we sold 20,000 books anyway. We did not. We did not sell 20,000 books by the end of the first week, not even close, but nevertheless we made six bestseller lists.

The book was the number one nonfiction bestseller on USA Today. It was number one on the C-Suite list. It was in the top 10 on Publishers Weekly. It was number 10 on the New York Times, the advice, how to and miscellaneous list. And my brain had things to say about the number and I coached myself about that too because brains are brains.

The data seems to be that about 0.5% of books ever make the New York Times Bestseller list and mine is one of them, with about one-tenth or less of the social media following than the other folks on the list. And not even having hit the goal that I was told I needed to hit to make this happen. Now, I don't know why I was able to make it with that much lower of a number than what the goal was. I don't know if the idea was to give me a really big goal so I would get farther than I would otherwise. I'm sure that is true.

I'm sure if I'd been told 4,000, I would have probably sold two. But what I do know is that fixating on the number and making it all about the math wouldn't have gotten me on the list because I would have just given up. But connecting to my future feminist self and understanding how to borrow thoughts from her and how to practice being in the identity of the person who had created the outcome I want, allowed me to create it.

And the best part is, even if I hadn't gotten on the list or on any of the lists I would have been so fucking proud of myself for the way that I showed up. That was what was really powerful and in the end, even that New York Times Bestseller list was just a bonus, was just the cherry on top because I had already become the kind of person who shows up for her book and herself like a bestselling author. And I was already committed to being proud of myself like I was a bestselling author, regardless of the outcome.

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

## **UFYB 357: Using My Brain to Hit the Bestseller Lists**

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It's also where you can hang out, get coached, and nerd out about all things thought work and feminist mindset with other podcast listeners 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/society](http://www.unfuckyourbrain.com/society). I can't wait to see you there.