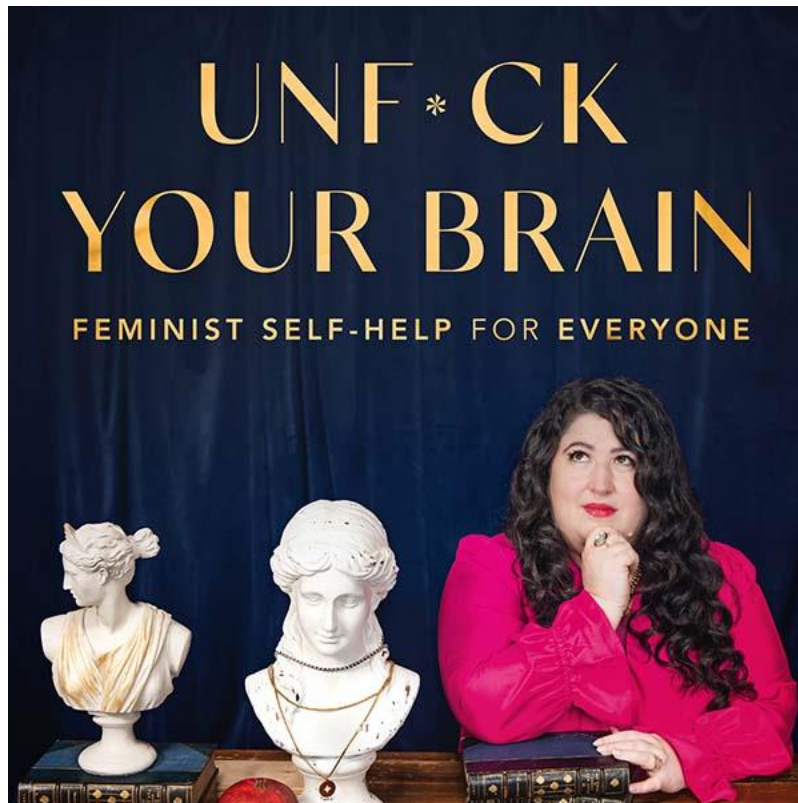# UFYB 364: The Efficiency Trap - And What to Aim For Instead

Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

UnF*ck Your Brain with Kara Loewentheil

UFYB 364: The Efficiency Trap
- And What to Aim For Instead

Alright, you all, pop quiz, how often in the last week have you muttered to yourself under your breath, I have got to get my shit together? I have my life pretty together personally, but even I still have this thought sometimes. And that's because the thought actually is not related at all to how together your life is. It's actually an echo of a sexist standard that society teaches women to hold themselves to, a standard of perfect efficiency, capability and control of all areas of their life, including everything and everyone around them.

But here's what most women don't know. Efficiency is not a good goal to set for yourself. It's actually a trap that makes you less productive and sabotages your impact on your own life and the world. So, in this episode, I'm going to explain why efficiency is a trap and why if you want to be more productive and you want to be productive in a way that actually matters, you should not be aiming for efficiency and what to be thinking about instead.

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.

So, when you think of productivity, what's the first phrase that comes to mind? I think for a lot of us it's time management. We know we have a certain amount of time to use and we know we have more we want to accomplish than we're currently accomplishing. So, it stands to reason that we need to use our time better if we want to achieve more. That seems very matter of fact. We need to get more efficient. We need to get more done in the same amount of time. We need to stop wasting time.

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Now, listen, some of you may be wasting time. I'm not saying you're not. But I also waste time, I also scroll social media sometimes. I get distracted by texting my friends. I binge a Netflix show that I really didn't need to and yet I accomplished an enormous amount in the world. So, I'm not saying you may not waste time. But what I am saying is that getting more efficient is not actually going to solve your problem, and it is really important to understand why.

So let me give you a business analogy. When you want to scale your business, it's crucial to make sure that you have clear systems, good staffing and that there isn't hidden dysfunction in your organization. Because when you scale a business, you scale all parts of it. So, if your business is a mess, you're scaling a mess. If your customer service already is behind, it will only be more behind. If you don't understand how your Facebook ad costs work now, you will not understand them any better when they are 10 times their current size and it has a much bigger impact if it goes wrong.

If you're hiring the wrong way and not training correctly, that's only going to become more apparent at scale. If you have a mess then you're scaling a mess. And the same is true of getting more efficient at what you're doing. This will only solve your problem if you are already doing exactly the things you want and need to be doing and not the things you don't want or don't need to be doing and if you are only actually working efficiently now. And possibly not a single woman alive, at least not one who has learned to coach herself, is actually currently doing only the things she truly wants and needs to do to live the life she wants.

Because most women are doing a million things that they do not want to be doing or do not move them toward their big picture goals. We are agreeing to host or attend social occasions or family occasions we don't want to host or attend. And then we are staying up late to make something for the

potluck from scratch because we'll feel bad about ourselves if we just buy something from the store. We're investing time and energy into friendships we don't really want to be in, making plans with people we don't really want to see because we don't want to hurt someone's feelings by turning down an invitation.

We're dating people we aren't excited about because they are 'nice' or seem good on paper. We're taking on busy work that doesn't move our career objectives forward because we want to be seen as a team player and we don't want anyone to think we're rude or stuck up. We're trying to build a business with six competing strategies because we don't trust ourselves to decide what we really should focus on and so we're trying to do what everyone else says. We are cooking three different meals for everyone in the household.

And then we're just eating the leftover bits on the plates, or we're skipping dinner to work late, or to deal with kid bedtime and then we are eating Oreos mindlessly at the end of the night because we're so exhausted. We're forcing ourselves to eat a certain way or work out a certain way and sucking the joy and nourishment out of movement and food because we believe we have to look a certain way to be acceptable and that we're in charge of making sure we do.

If you get more efficient at doing all of those things, you are just getting more efficient at doing shit you don't want to be doing. And the fact that you are doing so much shit you don't want to be doing is part of what's driving the inefficiency or time wasting that is happening. Because of course, it's hard to stay motivated and focused and productive when a lot of the things you're doing are coming from obligation, guilt, shame, anxiety or fear so that's a mess. And if you get more efficient at just doing things this way, you are scaling a mess. You are scaling, doing more things you don't want to do.

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You are scaling all the inefficiency and time wasting you are engaging in because of doing so many things you don't want to do and being emotionally exhausted. So, this is important, point number one of this episode. If the way that you are currently doing things involves doing a bunch of shit you don't want to do and then dealing with the emotional repercussions of that, which for some people can look like wasting time, inefficiency, avoiding certain things, you're just scaling all of that if you get more efficient.

If you just somehow manage to do that all faster, you're just doing more of it. Now, some of you may be thinking, okay, but if I get more efficient at all the stuff I don't want to be doing, then I'll have more time for what I do want to be doing. And here's where we need the incorrect buzzer noise from the game show because that is a lie, not an intentional lie, but that is an illusion and there's a fundamental flaw in the logic of that premise. So, I'm going to tell you why that isn't what happens and why that doesn't work right after this.

So why won't getting more efficient solve your problem? After all, if you get more efficient then you can get the stuff you don't really want to be doing or don't really, truly deep down care about, done faster. And you'll have more time to rest or focus on the things you really want to do. No, that's not what will happen. That idea rests on the premise that there's a finite number of things you could be doing, which you're currently doing, or which you're currently doing and then a few on your list that you haven't gotten to.

And so, if you get faster then, you can get it all done and have time left over or you can get it all done, including the things currently on the don't have time for list. No, there's literally no end to the things you don't want to be doing that you could be doing. That list will only get longer. There's no end to this because the list of things you're doing isn't being chosen on purpose with any useful criteria. It is a list your brain has made for you based on

how you've been socialized to take over-responsibility for everything and everyone around you. And over-responsibility is infinite. There's always more and more you could take responsibility for.

Okay, so you get everything you currently do, done faster. Great. Now your brain, which has been programmed by society, is going to start telling you that it's not enough for your house to be clean. It also should be more stylish and you should do a purge of your closets and maybe you need to reorganize the pantry. You got everything done faster. Great. Now you have time to bake for the class picnic from scratch. And now you have time to participate in that book club that you didn't really want to join after all.

And now you finally have time to research physical therapy options for your mom who's refusing to go to PT, but maybe if you find the people and schedule the appointments and you take her, maybe she will. Do you see how this can go on and on forever and ever? Over-responsibility is a bottomless pit. If your brain is operating on over-responsibility premises, if your brain is telling you that you are responsible for everything and everyone, that's infinite. It will never end. You cannot outrun that by just getting more efficient.

You can see why this will go on forever and ever. If you do not learn how to choose your responsibilities on purpose based on your goals, priorities and values, then getting more efficient just means you're doing more and more things that don't align with those goals, priorities and values. Women are socialized to think and feel over-responsible. And by definition, there is no natural or logical end to being over-responsible. It has no limits. By definition, the concept is infinite and it can infinitely expand.

There's no clear distinction between one set of things you shouldn't be responsible for and another set of things you shouldn't be responsible for. It's an endless set, over-responsibility is like a virus that will just replicate

forever in your brain and in your life. So, if you just focus on efficiency, you just get more efficient at being over-responsible so, you can be over-responsible more and more. You can over-function for other people more and more.

You can cram in even more things that aren't your responsibility. So, what is the alternative? You need to think less about getting more efficient at what you're currently doing. You need to not just accept the list you have and try to get more efficient at it. And you need to think more about what you actually want and need to do. Not based on what society told you and what other people think and your own guilt, based on your own goals, priorities and values, using that prefrontal cortex.

Not responding to that survival brain that tells you that you must be over-responsible or else you're a bad person who deserves to be left alone in the jungle to die. We have to access that prefrontal cortex that can determine what are your goals, your priorities, your values, and make decisions in accordance with that part of your brain. The antidote to over-responsibility as I've been talking about recently on the podcast is self-responsibility.

You have to take self-responsibility for deciding what matters enough to go on your calendar, go on your to-do list, go on your plate of chosen responsibilities. And I totally understand that this can feel really challenging because you may not even know how to tell the difference right now, and that's normal. You've literally been socialized to not even think there was a difference. You've been socialized to believe that your purpose is to be over-responsible and over-function for other people. You've been taught and socialized to believe that that's where your value comes from, is that the more you can do that the better you are.

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So, it's really hard when you're first starting to try to think differently, but it is absolutely imperative if you want to be more 'productive' in a way that actually produces something that matters to you in the world. And that could be actual production like you are trying to write an opera or that could be producing a certain kind of relationship with your family or producing a certain kind of fitness routine. Whatever it is, if you are operating from over-responsibility, you will always be able to scale that over-responsibility.

And getting more efficient while still fully in the cult of over-responsibility just makes you more efficient at being over-responsible and you will never ever get ahead. You can't outrun the tide of over-responsibility. You have to shift your thinking towards self-responsibility. Deciding for yourself what are your values, what are your priorities, what are your goals and choosing what to do or not do based on that. That is the only way to actually get more efficient, more productive. That's a big project, you're probably not going to do it all from one podcast episode right this minute.

But even understanding that efficiency is not the goal is a huge win. That will save you so much time and money spent on pursuing yet another solution to make your time management better. Buying another planner, that's not going to make a difference. Buying more color-coded pens, it's not going to make a difference. Buying a fancy software, it's not going to make a difference. And understanding that there isn't something wrong with you because your list of responsibilities feels endless and always growing is a second huge win and really important awareness.

Patriarchy depends on you being over-responsible and over-functioning for everyone else, keeping you feeling behind, feeling bad at time management and believing that you just need to improve yourself more, have more willpower, have more discipline and be more efficient, be more productive, and then you'll be able to do it all. But you can never do it all when all is what society has chosen for you, when all is an endless list of

things, because you have been taught you could be responsible for anything and anyone.

So, before you rush to try to take self-responsibility and understand how to do it perfectly right away, I want to encourage you to just sit with this new awareness and let it permeate your brain. Sit with this idea that if you learn how to be more efficient without interrogating why you're doing what you're doing, all you will do is scale your ability to keep doing a bunch of stuff you don't want to be doing and haven't chosen on purpose. And it's a lie that getting more efficient will somehow get you out of that trap. The efficiency is a trap.

We have to change the value that we're trying to reach here, not efficiency. What is true productivity? What do you actually want to produce in the world or in your life? That has to be what guides your decisions. And see if your self-compassion feels a little easier to access with this new awareness and understanding.

If you're loving what you're learning on the podcast, you have got to come check out the Feminist Self Help Society. It's our newly revamped community and classroom where you get individual help to better apply these concepts to your life, along with a library of next level blow your mind, coaching tools and concepts that I just can't fit in a podcast episode.

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. I can't wait to see you there.