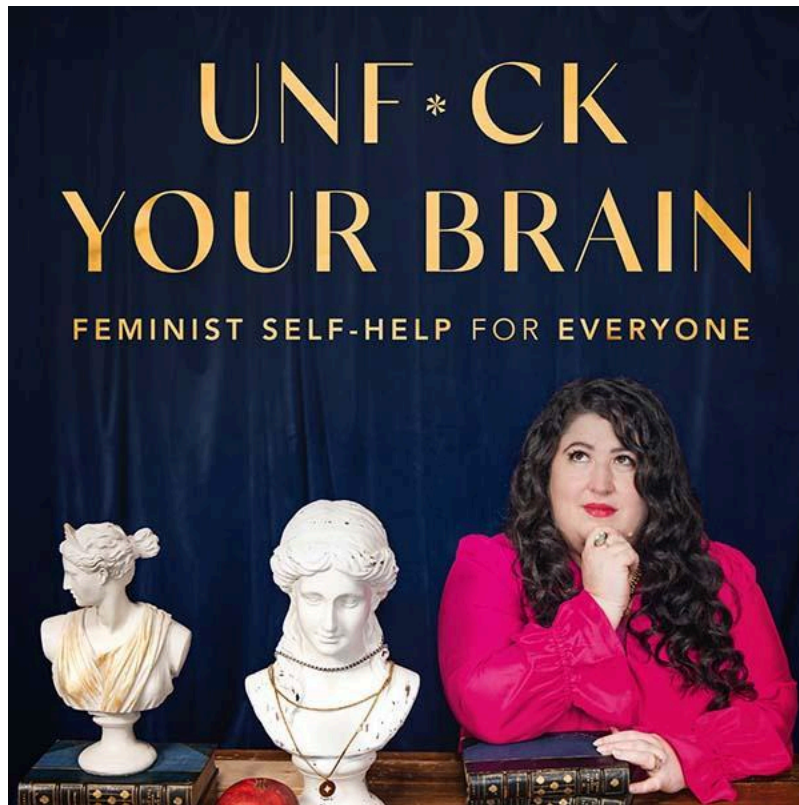


# UFYB 331: Should I Coach Myself or Should I Say/Do Something?



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Kara Loewentheil**

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Imagine your partner says something that really upsets you or maybe it's your boss, your parent, your neighbor, it rankles, you're fuming about it or you're hurt and you're sobbing about it. Either way, your negative emotion is really high but you can't really figure out whether you're supposed to coach yourself or say something so you just keep spinning. In today's episode I'm going to teach you how to know what to do.

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 my wise little owls. I have spent the weekend in a very quiet house because the gentleman consort and the kids were upstate camping, which I refused to do. And I may have gone slightly feral. Every time I'm left alone for a few days I think I revert back to my former self and habits from when I was single and lived alone. And that's because identity shifts aren't absolute in a moment. They take time to cohere and solidify, I think. I actually talked about this in my Friday mini teaching on my Instagram broadcast channel.

If you are not in the broadcast channel, you should be. This is a newish thing that one can do on Instagram. It's a totally free thing. You just join the broadcast channel, the link is in my bio. And then every Monday, Wednesday and Friday you get a DM on Instagram from me. So Mondays I send something about positive thinking and how to create a positive thought. Wednesdays I send a note with something to practice around self-confidence. And Fridays I send something helping you focus on self-compassion. I do some written notes. I do some voice notes.

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It's basically like I'm texting you, but I'm DMing you. So if you go to my Instagram profile, it's just @karaloewentheil, my whole name. You will see the link to join the broadcast there. So in any case, I'm shortly due to return to the land of the living and the cohabitating. But first I need to record this very important episode for you.

So about a month or so ago I was in Miami with my leadership team for our annual meeting. And this question came up that I think is so important and I'm positive that many of you are asking yourselves as well. The context was that we were talking about how one of our company values is that we walk our talk. We're in integrity with what we teach. And that means a lot of different things in terms of how I run the business, how we run the business. But one of the things it means is that everyone in the company takes responsibility for their own emotions.

So we don't tolerate people flying off the handle, being passive aggressive, being dramatic, personally attacking other people, blaming other people for their emotions. We're all responsible for coaching ourselves. Obviously, we are all human and sometimes people get a little snippy or aren't fully managing their minds, and no one is a perfect mind manager. But overall this is a company value.

It's why employees have coaching stipends as part of their benefits. It's why when someone makes a mistake, our process is to figure out what thought was driving the action to address the problem at the source. It infuses a lot of the ways that we work. So what came up was one of my team members said to me, "Well, when I am upset about something at work, I don't know when to coach myself on it versus when to say something. Because if it's always my thoughts, then that means there's no point ever speaking up about something. Maybe I'm just always supposed to coach myself on it."

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And everybody else who was at the meeting was like, “Yes, we have that question too. We have this thought also that are we just supposed to always coach ourselves and never say anything? When are we supposed to coach ourselves?” And as they were talking to me about this, I realized that I see this come up as a kind of hidden assumption or a subconscious formulation when I’m coaching as well. I think this is a really, really common framing of how self-coaching operates or how it should operate.

And it relates to how we’re socialized as women to doubt ourselves and undermine ourselves because here’s what I think happens in our brains. We learn that our thoughts create our feelings. And then because we’ve been socialized to always doubt ourselves, we decide that means that we are never ‘supposed’ to be upset or assert ourselves or have negative emotions. And we also decide that there’s a ‘right way’ to think or feel about something or a ‘correct answer’ to how we should think or feel about it, even just the use of the word, should.

And then we think there’s a right time and a right way to coach ourselves. And I think we subconsciously decide that there’s some arbitrary line of when something is ‘bad enough’ that we shouldn’t coach ourselves about it and instead we should try to change the circumstance. And that also implies that when we are coaching ourselves, the goal is always to be fine with what’s going on and just put up with it and not say anything and not do anything.

So all of this results in this kind of baked in assumption that there are essentially two different categories of situations in the world. Situations where you ‘should’ coach yourself because thoughts create feelings and your thoughts and feelings are your responsibility. And then situations that are ‘bad enough’ or ‘objectively wrong’ or something, where you should not coach yourself. And where coaching yourself would be gaslighting yourself or harming yourself.

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And so this is the core point I want to make and share in this episode. The whole premise that the world and all experiences are divided into those two types of scenarios is just a mistaken premise. It's like a mistaken starting point. The whole idea embedded in this is that there's an opposition between coaching yourself and communicating how you feel or between coaching yourself and taking action, or between coaching yourself and changing your circumstance.

There's a whole embedded idea that if you are bothered by something, then the two options are to do something about it or coach yourself into not caring. And that is a misunderstanding of the point of self-coaching. So if you have this misunderstanding, you are in good company. I think a lot of people do, but I am going to flip this for you in a way that will change how you see self-coaching for good. So here's the simple but life changing switch I want to suggest to you.

The question is not, should I coach myself or should I say something or do something? The way I suggest you think about it is, I'm going to coach myself and then I'll decide if I want to say something or do something. And if I do, what it is I want to say or do. It's not an or, it's not coach yourself or say or do something, it's an and. To put it another way, I recommend always coaching yourself if you are triggered in a non-clinical sense. I'm not talking about a PTSD trigger.

If you are feeling reactive, feeling out of control emotionally, feeling mentally fixated, feeling very upset, whatever it is. It's always useful to coach yourself in those scenarios. The whole point of coaching is to help you understand your brain and help you detach from the stories your brain tells you that cause your suffering. And to try to see the actual circumstances of your life from a bigger, broader perspective and more than one point of view.

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The point of coaching is not to prevent you from communicating how you feel or to make sure you don't take action or don't change a circumstance. It's to create the integration and wisdom to be able to do those things with a regulated nervous system in alignment with your values and the kind of person you want to be using your prefrontal cortex. And with a broad perspective as opposed to when you are activated and your brain is literally not working as well as it should.

When you think of it as an or, coach myself or say or do something, you're assuming that the point of coaching yourself would be to get rid of your emotion, to change your thoughts even if you don't want to. To just be fine with anything in the world. But it's not any of that. The point of self-coaching is not ever preordained. You don't want to go into self-coaching, telling yourself that the goal is to not think or feel a certain way. Nor do you want to go into self-coaching telling yourself that the goal is to prove to yourself that your thoughts and feelings are correct and perfect.

You just don't want to have an agenda. The goal is simply to be curious and create awareness. Think of it as being like a mediator or a judge. You don't want to go into a case assuming ahead of time what the result should be. You want to be curious about what's going on and ideally, conduct a neutral evaluation. That's obviously not what happens in our justice system a lot of the time, unfortunately, but that's what we would hope would happen.

Assuming the point of coaching yourself is to 'get over' whatever you're thinking or feeling or experiencing is actually counterproductive, and it backfires. Because when you are having distressing thoughts and feelings, and then you assume that if you coach yourself, the goal is to stop having those feelings and change your thoughts and not care about the thing. Your brain experiences that as you rejecting its perception of reality. And that creates all this cognitive dissonance. And then part of your brain doubles down on the original thoughts and feelings.

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So then you feel resistant about coaching yourself and part of your brain is fighting to convince you that all your thoughts and feelings are true and objectively correct, and you should just act out of them. And then part of your brain is trying to coach yourself to think and feel totally differently. And everybody's got an agenda and nobody, including you, is being compassionate or curious. So we really need to reframe this. The question is not, should I coach myself, or should I say or do something.

In fact, there isn't a question at all, because it's not an either or, it's an and. If I'm having an intense emotional reaction to something, anything. I don't want to just act from that place. I want to help myself calm down. I want to get curious. I want to understand what was going on in my brain. And then I'll decide how I want to think, what I want to feel, and how I want to act. I'm not going to decide ahead of time that I should think or feel differently or that I shouldn't say or do something.

I'm not going to put a thumb on the scale because if I've already decided the outcome, I can't really be curious, I have an agenda. And the whole point of self-coaching is learning about ourselves, learning about why and when we get angry or sad or hopeless or lonely or rejected or ashamed or whatever other emotion is happening. We're just trying to learn about what's happening in our brains. And all of that learning is just to make us more skillful at navigating our human experience.

Sometimes that might mean saying or doing something, and sometimes it won't, but we can't know ahead of time. Our thoughts and feelings are always our responsibility. Other people do not cause them. We do always get to choose how to think and feel about something or someone. But that doesn't mean that there's a right or a wrong way to think or feel, or that we're morally required, or that the goal is to always be chill.

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And that doesn't mean that the point of self-coaching is to never express our opinion or perspective, or to always coach ourselves into making peace with any circumstance. So I don't recommend asking yourself, should I coach myself, or should I say or do something? It's not or and it's not a should. The question to, should I coach myself, is always only if you want to. But for me the answer to would it be useful to coach myself before I decide if I want to say or do something about whatever's upsetting me is always, always, always, yes.

Sometimes it turns out that it's true. I don't need to say or do anything because my reactivity was coming from my own thinking in a way that just dissolves once I understand the wound or the trigger or the thought error. And sometimes even once I understand it and see what's going on in my brain, I decide that I want to keep that thought pattern or I'm going to work on it. But I want to communicate how I need or how I want accommodation and support or maybe I just want to change a circumstance.

Or maybe I think it would be useful if there's another person involved for the person I'm interacting with to understand my perspective. And I want to show them what my thoughts and feelings are about, what I'm responding to. But all of that is very different when I've already coached myself. And so I'm doing that from a reflective and regulated place. And I don't do that all the time perfectly at all but that's my goal. And that is the point of all of this work for me.

So you get to decide what the point is for you, my friends, because I'm not in charge of you, you are. But if you ask me, the answer to, should I coach myself or should I say or do something, is that's not a useful question. And the answer is always both and. Coach yourself first and then decide what you want to think, feel, say or do from there.



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