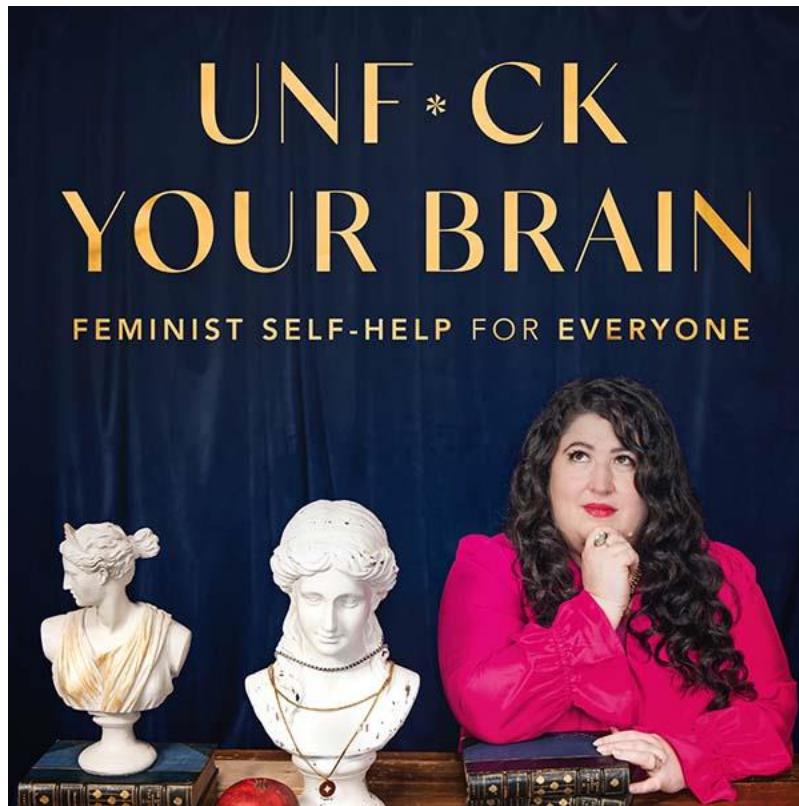


UFYB 375: How to Improve Instead of Give Up



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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There are two big challenges when it comes to habit change, goal setting, or making and keeping resolutions. Really anything where you want to change your actions to get a new outcome. The first is starting. We've talked a lot about that recently on the podcast, how to frame and set a resolution correctly and connect to what's important to you. The second is not stopping when things go wrong. That's where many people lose momentum and fall off. We all understand in theory that we should just try again if we fail, but most of us are totally unable to do that without understanding why.

It has nothing to do with your character or personality traits or the resolution you picked or your life circumstances. It has to do with your brain, which is good news because it means I can teach you how to change it. So let's get into that today.

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.

All right, my friends, welcome to *Unf*ck Your Brain*. I'm your host, Kara Loewentheil, master certified coach and founder of the School of New Feminist Thought. It's all color coded in order that you turn down your anxiety, turn off your confidence, and create a life on your own terms, one that you're truly excited to live. Let's go.

And then life intervenes. Maybe dramatically, you get fired, you go through a breakup. Or maybe in small ways that nevertheless throw you off track. Your kid gets sick or you get sick or you get a new project at work that takes up way more time than usual. Soon you're off track with your goal and you start to feel shame about that. So you vow to yourself to get back on track tomorrow or Monday or next month. And that feels better for a

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minute, but then the deadline comes and you don't start again. And you keep feeling ashamed and bad about it, and eventually you just give up.

There is no shame in having done this once or a thousand times. We all have, myself included. But there is a better way. A few weeks ago on the podcast, I talked about the value of embracing inconsistency when you're doing something new. Part of the way that we build up to consistency is learning from the times that we don't show up and follow through. There is a way to learn from your mistakes so you can actually improve. Most of us don't do this because we don't know how.

We don't know how to learn from our mistakes. We understand conceptually that it is possible to learn from mistakes and it's one of those things that we think sounds great for other people. But because we beat ourselves up and criticize ourselves and shame ourselves for making them, we don't really have any idea how to make the emotional experience of learning from them tolerable. Because as soon as we start looking at an instance where we failed or didn't do something, we start attributing it to our own flawed character.

We tell ourselves that we lack discipline or willpower or we're lazy or we're disorganized or there's something wrong with us that we can't do this new thing naturally and easily and probably everybody else can. We feel guilty, we feel ashamed, we feel anxious, and we end up totally avoiding actually thinking about what happened.

And it's particularly insidious that we are taught that success or failure is a matter of our personality or our characteristics like willpower or discipline. Because it means that we don't get curious about what went wrong. Because we think we already know the answer. We think the answer is either that the resolution or goal was bad or wrong, it was too hard, life was too complicated, it took too much time, or that we're bad and wrong. So

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either way, we think we already know the answer and there's no reason to look deeper.

But the truth is that it's neither of those things. It's definitely never the case that you are just inherently bad and unable to do things and there's something wrong with you. I promise. It might occasionally be that the goal was too ambitious or, you know, your life circumstances really changed drastically. But that's not the issue most of the time.

It's actually extremely normal to fail at something or not follow through when you are trying to do something new. That's why I've been talking about embracing inconsistency. And it's an essential part of the process that is required to learn how to actually do it in your life consistently to make it work long term.

So let me give you an example. Let's say that one of your goals is to eat more different vegetables. I don't know why this is my example this year, but it just seems like a good one. So you set yourself a goal like you're gonna eat two different vegetables with dinner. That's your goal and your plan, right?

You're setting your goal to be, I'm gonna naturally manage to eat two different vegetables every dinner just by thinking about it during the day. That's really kind of unconsciously what you're assuming. And then of course, life happens, there's traffic, your kid has homework they need help with, last minute you end up scarfing cold leftover mac and cheese.

There is so much valuable information in this experience that you can use to inform your next attempt to do it. But most of us miss out on all of that rich information. We just say, oh, today was too hard, I'll try again tomorrow. Or we say, oh my God, I have no willpower, I already failed. But if we were able to diffuse that shame and not assume it's impossible, we could get so much useful info from this occasion.

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For instance, we could see that dinner is likely to be the most hectic meal for you, so it doesn't make sense to try to wing it. So maybe for the second day you try planning it out ahead of time, what you'll make for dinner based on what's in the fridge, you look in the morning, you have a plan for the evening. But then that night the dog throws up everywhere and you have a fight with your partner and you end up just ordering Pad Thai and throwing your hands up.

Again, you can assume it's too hard or there's something wrong with you, or you can review and analyze what went wrong here. Maybe just planning the veggies isn't enough. Maybe you need them prepped before dinner. And maybe when you ordered out, you decided, fuck it, since you're not making your planned meal, you'll just ignore the goal entirely. When you could easily have found Thai food that had two veggies in it and still achieved your goal.

So maybe you try a third time and again you don't do it. And then you realize, okay, I did plan ahead. I even prepped the veggies for myself, but they required being cooked and I ran out of time. So maybe I need to air fry them when I'm making breakfast or I need to have pre-cut veggies I can eat raw with dinner.

You see how if you're able to analyze what happened without shame or guilt or drama about it being impossible, you can actually learn something each time to improve the next attempt.

And you gain invaluable insight into how to customize the way you achieve a goal or resolution for you and your life and your brain. There is a way to do this analysis without all of that shame and guilt drama. And that's what I'm gonna share with you right after this break.

So in order to actually manage to analyze what went wrong and brainstorm solutions, we need to defang the shame, guilt, and anxiety that come up

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when we fail or break a resolution or don't follow through. The first crucial mindset shift is actually what I mentioned in the first half of the episode, but I really recommend that you adopt this as an intentional thought to think on purpose ahead of time, from the beginning when you are setting your goal or resolution.

And that mindset shift, that thought is, it is a normal and essential process to fail and learn from it. It is a normal and essential part of change to fail and learn from it. It is a normal and essential process of achieving a goal to fail and learn from it.

A goal or resolution in the abstract is like buying an item of clothing off the rack. It rarely fits exactly how you want it to. That's why you take it to a tailor, you get the hem shortened or the neckline changed. Or it's like learning to walk or talk or dance. It requires practice and trial and error.

So we want to start from that premise and I really recommend that or something like it as an intentional thought. Then there are three kind of qualities or stages of the process of analyzing and learning from a failure or a missed action you didn't take.

The first step is to validate yourself for trying and to look for anything you can call a success. I know it seems impossible when you aren't doing something, but did you maybe do it the first day, even if you didn't do it the second day? If not, did you at least think about it on the first day, even if you didn't do it? Can you at least validate yourself for having chosen this resolution and trying to make an effort? Looking for anything to see as a tiny success is crucial because that is how your brain will start to shift your identity to being someone who is succeeding.

The second step is to be nice to yourself, and everyone wants to skip this. We think, if I'm nice to myself, I'm just excusing my failure and I won't do better. But being mean to yourself is actually why you are not doing better,

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because it's preventing you from learning from what goes wrong and adjusting your approach to make it easier. So how can you be a little kinder in your self-talk about having failed or not followed through?

Step 3 is where you actually analyze what went wrong, but do not skip steps 1 and 2. In step 3, we want to actually look at what happened and see what conclusions you can draw from it about how to better set yourself up for success for your next attempt. What went wrong? What circumstances came up? What thoughts and feelings did you have? How can you solve for those or prevent them from happening or equip yourself to overcome them on the next attempt?

Step 3 is what everybody just wants to jump to, but you cannot skip Steps 1 and 2. Steps 1 and 2 literally prime your brain for step 3. Step 3 requires your prefrontal cortex, that's your higher powers of imagination, creativity, problem solving, strategic thinking. Those are scientifically proven to be harder to access when your nervous system is activated and you are flooded with anxiety or shame. And that's what happens when we look at failure and are mean to ourselves about it.

So doing step 1 and step 2 is not just like being nice for no reason. It's actually literally soothing your brain, calming it down so you can use it to its best ability and actually learn something. So you need to do 1, 2, and 3 in this order. Look for success, be nice to yourself, then analyze and see what you could do differently.

That is how you can make 2025 the year that you actually keep your resolutions and achieve your goals.

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

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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.