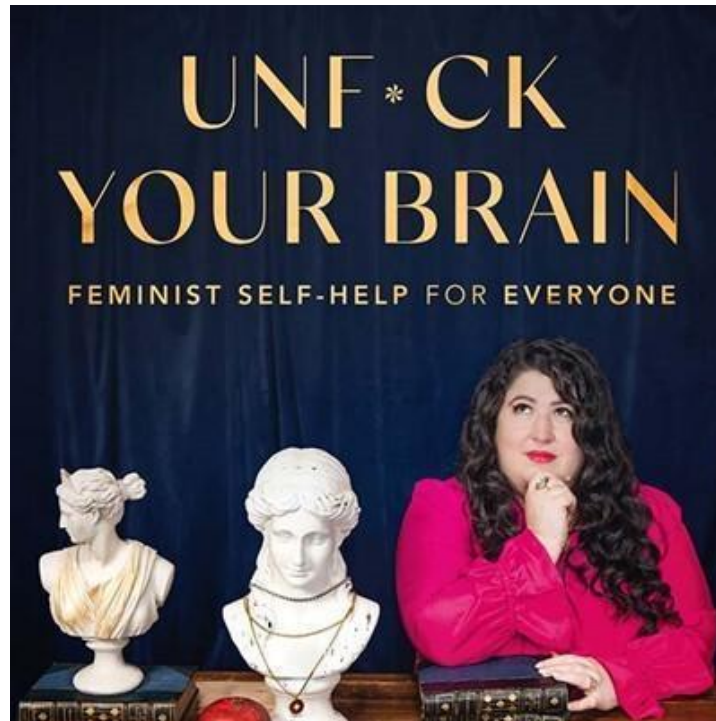


## UFYB 388: How to Plan When the Future Feels Uncertain



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Kara Loewentheil**

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## UFYB 388: How to Plan When the Future Feels Uncertain

If you've been listening to this podcast for more than 10 seconds, then you know that I am someone who really plans my life and goes after my goals. So I have definitely found myself struggling lately to figure out how to think about goals and my life path in a future that seems much more uncertain than it has before, given everything that's happening in our political system right now, here in the US at least.

So today I want to dig into how I'm handling that, how I think about a future that feels impossible to predict, and how I think about making choices, not knowing how I'll need to pivot in the next few years when it comes to my business and my personal life. If you are finding it hard to imagine what the future holds, but you don't want to just give up and lie in a puddle on the floor forever, then this episode is for you.

It may feel like a heavy topic, but I promise that by the end of this time together, you're going to feel more empowered than you do right now, and you are gonna have more clarity about how to move forward.

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.

One of the most powerful skills that coaching helps you develop is the ability to set goals and follow through on achieving them. But how do we do that when the future feels incredibly uncertain? I'm having these conversations with my clients, with my family, with friends, with strangers in line at the post office, and so many people are feeling the same way.

That the uncertainty isn't, you know, will I be able to get my dream job in my field? It's more like, will my field even exist in five years? Or it's not like,

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

## UFYB 388: How to Plan When the Future Feels Uncertain

should I take a year abroad before I settle down? It's more like, do I need to move abroad permanently before the country falls apart?

For some of you, this may sound extreme, but I know a lot of you are thinking this way because I'm hearing it, right? Should you take a job at a university or go back to school with loans if university funding seems like it could be imperiled at any time? Maybe you're marrying someone from another country and you plan to get them a green card to stay in this United States with you. But now you're thinking maybe you should try to move to their country instead.

Maybe you were going to expand your business and open a second location, but now economists are saying a recession could be coming. So is that a good idea because rents will be cheap now? It's a good time to get a lease or is it a bad idea because consumer spending might go down? Or maybe you're hearing that a recession is a great time to buy stocks for the first time or expand your portfolio. But what are those stocks going to be worth? What's going to happen with the economy?

I'm seeing this uncertainty my own life around kind of big and small decisions like whether to get a family pet or whether to renovate the fixer-upper we bought upstate because I don't feel certain about where I'll be living or what circumstances I'll be in over the next decade, depending on what happens. And again, it may sound dramatic, but I know a lot of us are thinking this way because the future just feels impossible to predict.

And if you are like me, you come from a, you know, historically targeted religious minority or some other marginalized group, this has a real historical resonance for you in terms of what happens when a society becomes more unstable and what happens to people of your group specifically. So it is easy to get overwhelmed and paralyzed, right? How are you supposed to make decisions when it feels like the conditions of the

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

## UFYB 388: How to Plan When the Future Feels Uncertain

game are changing constantly and you don't know what norms or conditions you'll be able to rely on?

Remember that your brain is a prediction-making machine. That is, in some ways, its most essential function, and the thing it spends the most time and energy doing is making predictions. Part of the problem is also that your brain hates not knowing what will happen so much that sometimes it will resort to assuming the worst or catastrophizing because it would rather be sure about that outcome than be uncertain or completely in the dark or completely unclear about what might happen.

So some of you may be responding more with paralysis and others of you may be making all these plans or acting impulsively or trying to plan for every particular outcome that could happen. And both of those can be a kind of reaction to this uncertainty and the discomfort that it causes for us. I am more the type to make too many plans about all the different scenarios I can envision. But of course, we actually can't predict a lot of what happens in the world. So we can burn up a lot of time and energy making these predictions and plans and preparations for things that don't actually happen and then not being able or ready to cope or pivot with the unexpected things that do actually happen.

So you can make plans or not make plans, but either way, if you are spinning out or you are having trouble kind of focusing or you are feeling like you don't know how to make decisions right now because you don't know what the future is going to bring, this is a sign that you need to change the way that you're thinking about this uncertainty.

The big problem that we have is that we are so focused on trying to predict the circumstances. This is like the first really important thing in this episode to understand. We think we need to know what the circumstances will be in order to make plans or feel secure or know what to do or make decisions or take action. But we can't know what the circumstances are, right? So that's

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

## UFYB 388: How to Plan When the Future Feels Uncertain

why that subconscious belief that we have to know what the circumstances will be in order to move forward leads us to paralysis or to like unhelpful misplaced certainty.

We need to change what we're focused on. We're focused on what are the circumstances going to be? I must know in order to know what to do. And that is not helpful because we can make our best guess, we can make our best prediction, we can see what the experts say, we can make plans based on that, but life is unpredictable and your brain is never going to feel certain or sure. So if you aren't already taking the action, doing that is likely not going to lead you to take it. So I want to share with you a better way to think about how to move forward when the future is so uncertain after this short break.

So here's our dilemma. Our brains are prediction-making machines and they want to know what's coming in order to make decisions about how to live and what to do now. But when things feel very uncertain and unpredictable, our brains short circuit or freak out because they don't know what will happen. And then they resort to paralysis or to catastrophizing to feel sure.

So here's the essential insight you have to absorb to change the way that you relate to uncertainty. You have to stop fighting the perception that the future is uncertain and unknown. To stop resisting that. Stop wanting it to be certain and known. Stop trying to decide what it will be ahead of time when you don't know.

And instead we need to embrace the fact that the future is unknown. I don't mean embrace it like, la la, aren't we lucky to be living through what is potentially the fall of our democracy forever. That's obviously we're not doing any spiritual bypassing gratitude spackling as I call it on this podcast. But I mean to really accept the reality of the universe, which is that the future was always uncertain.

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

## **UFYB 388: How to Plan When the Future Feels Uncertain**

The future is uncertain now. It was always uncertain. The future has never been clear, reliable, or guaranteed. We simply had the illusion that the future was certain. And this is true on the micro level personally and the macro level politically. We make decisions all the time in life not knowing what the future holds or being wrong about what we think it will hold.

We get married thinking it'll last forever and then we get divorced. We take a dream job and then the company closes or we hate it. We come down with a chronic illness we never expected to have, or we've been struggling with an illness for years and suddenly there's a cure. Right? We choose not to have kids and then we change our minds at the last minute. We make decisions all the time not knowing what the future holds.

We never know what the future holds. When political and social conditions are more stable, we just have more of an illusion that we know what is coming. We have more of an illusion that the past can be relied upon to accurately predict the future. Our brain wants to believe that, but that was always an illusion.

A decade ago, we weren't making decisions based on believing that we'd be in our current circumstances that we're in right now. We didn't see this coming, but it was coming. We were just wrong about that. So our belief that we know the circumstances of the future is always an illusion. And we are just being called, we just have to grapple with that on a much more fundamental, deeper level right now.

So if we never know the future, but we don't want to just give up on having goals or dreams for ourselves and we need to make decisions about our lives, what do we do? We have to focus less on what we want to see happening around us and more on who we want to be.

We need to focus less on the circumstances of the future and spending all of our brain energy trying to figure out what those will be, and more on who

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

## UFYB 388: How to Plan When the Future Feels Uncertain

we want to be as people when we meet those circumstances. Because that is the only part of the future you can actually control. You can't control what circumstances you will encounter. You can control who you are going to be when you encounter them. You can't decide ahead of time what circumstances will happen, but you can decide ahead of time who you will be when they do happen. Right? You can't control what's going to happen. You can control who you are going to be.

What kind of a person are you going to be? What kind of decisions are you going to make? What kind of values are you going to base your decisions and your life on? What kind of person are you going to be now and in the future? That's the part you can decide. And you will find that paradoxically, that feels much more safe and stable than believing that you can control or know exactly what will happen outside of you.

The key though is you can't just wait for those future circumstances to happen and then just see what version of you shows up. I mean, you can do that if you want, but I do not recommend that. Because remember that our brains are habitual. Our brains repeat the thoughts they've been having. We tend to continue to be who we are and who we have been if we don't change it on purpose. So if you just wait to see who shows up as your future self, it's probably going to be who you are right now.

And I totally believe that who you are right now is probably awesome in a lot of ways. And she's not necessarily all that you're capable of being. She's not necessarily as brave as you're capable of being. She's not necessarily as resourceful as you're capable of being. She's not necessarily as resilient as you're capable of being.

Your future self is capable of more than you are now. But if you're paralyzed and overwhelmed now and you don't change that, your future self will be too. If you're frantic and impulsive now and you don't change that, your future self will be too.

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



## UFYB 388: How to Plan When the Future Feels Uncertain

So you have to decide on purpose who you want to be. Who is your future self and how do you start becoming her right now? How do you do that work now? How do you start becoming that future self now? So that when or if things happen in the future that are hard to cope with, you're ready. You're confident in your capacity to pivot, to change, to survive. You are grounded in yourself, and you are strong in yourself, and you have faith and belief in your own ability to make decisions, to figure things out, to take care of yourself and your loved ones.

Humans have encountered all sorts of extremely challenging situations in history, many of them much more dire than the ones that most of us are encountering today. And humans have survived and thrived in all historical eras. But if you want to be one of the ones who do, you need to be rock solid in yourself. To navigate an uncertain future, you need to be actively becoming the person you want to be right now.

Now is when that person gets formed. Now is when that person gets birthed. Now is when that person develops because that is the person who will know what decisions to make, how to plan for what you can expect and how to rise to the occasion when the unexpected happens.

How can you be that future self now is the question to be asking yourself. Envisioning who you want that future self to be and connecting to that version of you now is what will help you prepare for whatever might come next.

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

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



## UFYB 388: How to Plan When the Future Feels Uncertain

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