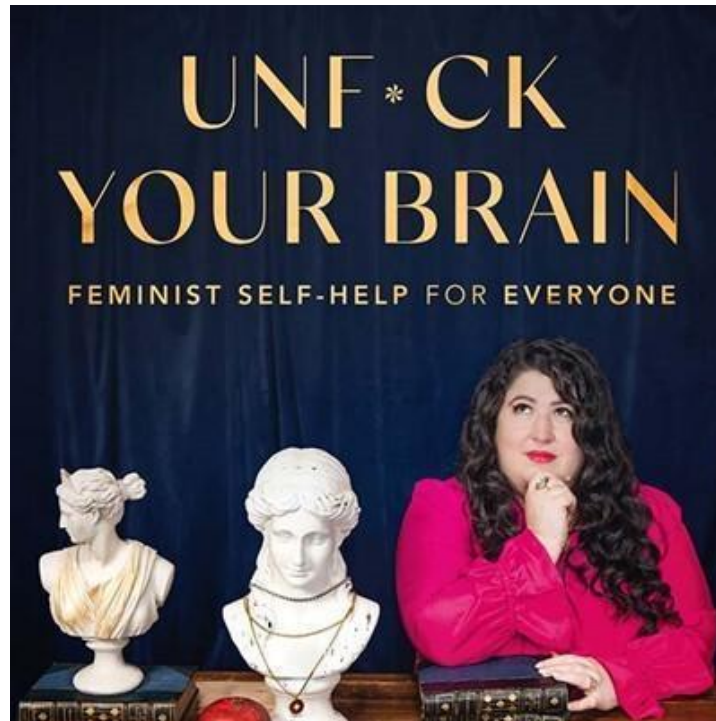


## UFYB 391: My Top 3 Lessons From Being 43



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Kara Loewentheil**

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I know all too well from coaching thousands of women and my own brain, that our brains love to focus on what we have not yet accomplished or not yet figured out and ignore everything we have. As soon as we've figured it out or achieved it, our brain decides it wasn't that hard, it didn't count, and it's onto the next thing. And that's why I think it's so important to actually look for concrete evidence of your growth and evolution.

So on my birthday every year, I like to reflect on what I've learned and what I've changed in my life in the past year, and I often share those takeaways on the podcast. This year, my top three shifts and lessons are about self-trust, making decisions, and telling the truth instead of settling. So 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.

So 43 was a hell of a year. Let's just put that out upfront. If I think about the year as April to April, the first six months were some major life highlights. I published a book that made the New York Times bestseller list, I got married, I went on a group honeymoon to Europe, I bought a house upstate. That's like a decade's worth of accomplishments and I did them in one year.

And then the second six months were some real low lights. Our political situation was destabilized. I started worrying for my family as Jews in America. I started worrying about myself and my family that financially depends on me as a feminist business owner who's outspoken about politics. I had to manage my mind about all of those things. But here's the thing that I realized when I was reflecting on the year.

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In my first six months, I didn't learn all that much that was really life changing or forcing me to grow. I learned how to get a book on the New York Times bestseller list. That's a lot of work and it was kind of interesting strategically and intellectually. I had a lot of fun at my wedding and on my honeymoon and I really value that. I don't think that life like should always be hard so we're always learning and growing every minute of every day, but none of those were like new frontiers of evolution for me.

I was already pretty good at setting and achieving big goals, even ones that have kind of outside authority gatekeepers like the New York Times. I already had a good relationship with my husband and our wedding was super fun, but getting married didn't really change our relationship very much.

The back half of this year though, the six months from November to April, I have had to grow and evolve a lot. Because the second half of my 43rd year has triggered a whole host of challenges that really required me to uplevel my perspective and my coping skills and my interrelational skills. So here are the three biggest lessons I've learned in my 43rd year.

The first one has been around allowing for difference of opinion in my relationship, even when I feel activated or triggered. Because the recent political uncertainty and chaos has really sent my primitive brain into overdrive, especially as an outspoken Jewish feminist who sees both how this political administration is going after anything that involves gender equity, among other things, and who's familiar with the history of antisemitism and totalitarian regimes.

So my primitive danger-seeking brain sees danger for my business, which is what supports my whole family, and potentially danger to my physical self down the line. So I've been working through lots of nervous system activation and I've been working on how to use thought work in a time when we're not talking about an email my brain thinks is a lion. Instead,

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we're talking about a time when a lion is already a lion for some people today, and for me may be an actual lion in the future.

And then on top of that, I've been navigating the fact that I'm having a different reaction than my white cis male, you know, generically unreligious but raised Christian husband. And to be clear, like we aren't super far apart. He's progressive, he's liberal left, he takes my concerns seriously. He's willing to do whatever I feel is necessary, right? He knows that he doesn't have the same kind of historical and family experience as somebody who is not Jewish. He is as on board with my concerns or beliefs or desires as anybody could be and his own beliefs are very close to mine.

But even so, my brain has wanted to turn on him for not feeling exactly how I feel, not coming up with some kind of magical plan that would resolve our major complications, and not having the exact same opinions I have. Because it's easier to be mad at someone close to us, especially if they tend to people please and apologize and agree they are wrong, which my husband does. And it's easy to tell ourselves that if they would just be different, we would feel safe and secure.

But of course, that's not true. They're not the lion. And even if my husband wasn't willing to go along with whatever I wanted to do, even if he didn't take my concerns seriously, I would still have the responsibility to make whatever decisions I need to make for myself.

What I realized when I coached myself around this tension was that I had the belief that he wasn't taking it seriously. And when I asked myself how I would know if he were taking it seriously enough, the answer was that he would have the same beliefs I do. So in my mind, subconsciously, there was no scenario where he could think about it, take it seriously, evaluate it, and have a different set of beliefs than I did.

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And you can see how this could apply to many scenarios outside of, you know, current political events. This is a thought pattern I think we all bring sometimes to our relationships about a variety of issues. I always think about this line from George Carlin, who had a standup routine where he said, I'm paraphrasing this, but you get the idea. He said, "You ever notice that when you're driving, anyone driving faster than you is a maniac, anyone driving slower than you is a moron?"

I love that so much because it's such a good description of how our brains operate. I'm sure I've used it on the podcast before. Whatever we are doing is correct, right? And anyone doing more is being crazy and anyone doing less is being stupid. Like that is our assumption.

So I can decide that I'm going to take action on my own interpretation instead of needing agreement from my husband to proceed if I want. But it's not helpful to believe that my perspective on this is the only possibly correct one, that I am clairvoyant and know the future, and that anyone who is giving it serious consideration could only possibly end up agreeing with me 100%.

And one way I tested this was that if he had come up with an even more alarmist interpretation than I had, I probably wouldn't like that either. Right? So it wasn't just like, oh, not concerned enough. If he had had a different opinion, I would have thought that's too concerned, that's overdoing it. Like there was no way I was going to be happy unless he somehow proactively on his own came up with the identical opinion to what I had. Right? It wasn't even enough for him to listen to me and then agree with me. It was like he needed to have the exact same thought and feeling in his body as I did on his own.

So I think this can apply to so many areas of our lives when we disagree. Right? Where are you believing that if someone else respected you, valued

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you, took something seriously, really thought about it, or understood what you were saying, they would then have the identical opinion you have?

My second lesson has been about making decisions in times of uncertainty. Part of the reason I wanted my husband to have the same thoughts as me is then my brain said I would feel more certain or sure about what decisions to make. That's why it wasn't enough for him to say, well, I'll, you know, handle this however you want to. No, no, I want you to have the exact same thoughts as me and then I'll know, quote unquote, that this is the right way to handle it.

But of course, that's not true. If I'm second guessing myself and doubting my decision, then I could second guess it and doubt it even if he agrees. The bigger issue is that I am making high stakes decisions around circumstances I really cannot predict or control. And the truth is, I could never predict or control circumstances. I just had the illusion that I could. I'd forgotten the truth that I can't. So I have had to think about how do I make decisions? And I'm going to explain to you how I am doing that right after this quick break.

So if I accept that it's an illusion that I can predict or control circumstances, how do I make decisions? I am using the concepts that I have been teaching for 10 years. I look at what I'm afraid will happen and why, which generally comes down to believing either one, I'll be powerless to help myself, or two, I'll blame myself for having made the wrong decisions along the way.

So I have had to make peace at an even deeper level with making decisions that could have big impacts on my future without knowing what will happen or whether they will seem wise or foolish in retrospect. I've had to get comfortable with uncertainty at a much deeper level, really coming face to face with the limited amount of control I have over the outside world.

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But that has also brought me deeper into appreciation of the control I do have over my internal world. Of how much power I have to decide how I'm going to think and feel, whether I'm going to criticize myself or support myself, whether I'm going to believe in my own resilience and trust my own decision making, or whether I'm going to snipe at myself and second guess myself and criticize myself.

The most important thought I've been practicing is, I trust myself to know what to do when the time comes. And that can apply to anything. How to make decisions in my business, how to parent, how to decide where to live, right? Anything.

Because the spinning comes from trying to predict what will happen and decide ahead of time how to respond. But there's only so far you can do that. I can game out various scenarios in my business or in politics or in my personal life and I can come up with plans for them. But at some point that stops being smart planning and starts being just a futile effort at control over something, the future, which is uncontrollable.

What is a more valuable investment of my mental and emotional energy is strengthening my belief in my own capacity to evaluate what actually happens in reality and make decisions accordingly when the time comes. Right? People who do well in a crisis or are great leaders are not people who have pre-gamed everything out completely and then follow that script perfectly, because that never ever happens or works. It's people who, yeah, maybe have spent some time thinking about things that might happen, but more importantly, have built the skills of responding and reacting and bending and flexing and adapting and pivoting as they need to when the unexpected happens.

It's not about making the right decision because there's no way to ever know whether a decision was objectively right or wrong. But I can trust



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myself to navigate circumstances and do my best. And the more I believe in my own resilience, the more resilient I will become.

My third lesson was something I've learned many times over, but can always learn again, which is that there is no one thing that changes your life. In some ways, I guess this was a little bit of a lesson from the first six months of the year since that's when I got on the New York Times bestseller list and got married, but I think the lesson of it really sunk in the back half of the year after those things had happened. So I'm still counting it as a last six months.

I spent a lot of time and effort and money also invested on my book launch and I succeeded in getting my book on the New York Times bestseller list and selling tens of thousands of copies, which was a huge goal and a huge accomplishment and 99% of books don't ever do that. And I think that's amazing and I give myself a lot of credit and I am very grateful to everyone who bought the book and made up my audience. So I am not diminishing any of that. It was a big fucking accomplishment.

But you know what? My life is not really all that different. It didn't catapult me to Oprah's stage. It didn't make millions of dollars rain down on my business. It didn't get me immediately booked onto the prime Ted Talk stage or headlining South by Southwest.

And I got married and that was a huge accomplishment in the sense that not marriage itself, but having the kind of relationship I have now had been a goal for a long time and I had done a ton of work on it. But getting married did not also immediately change my life. Didn't change how I felt about myself, didn't change how I felt about my husband. It didn't transport me to some world in which I never felt unworthy and always felt beloved. Right? I mean, I do feel beloved, but right, it did not change everything overnight.



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But the good news is, I didn't expect either of those two things to change my life. I didn't do them to make any fantasy come true. I did the work on my book because I wanted to show up for my book like I already believed it was a New York Times bestseller. I wanted to show up for myself like I was already a best-selling author. I wanted to learn how to accomplish this very specific, very difficult, very contingent goal. But the purpose of it was never the goal. It was always who I was going to become and what I was going to learn along the way.

And the same is true of getting married. My goal was never get married, have a ring on my finger, have a legal commitment to someone else that will be a pain in the ass to dissolve. Like that wasn't the goal. The goal was become the kind of person who can show up and be truly emotionally available and vulnerable in a relationship. Become someone who believes in my own desirability and lovability enough to form a real connection and a bond, right? Become someone who's willing to do the hard growth that's required to go from being more solitary and independent and childless by choice and all of those things to being somebody who is very interrelational and interdependent and committed and step-parenting and all of that. It was that journey. Right? I wanted to learn how to become that person.

And that's what I think the beauty of coaching and thought work is. When you learn how to coach yourself, you inherently are living in a growth mindset. You don't have to like put on the growth mindset occasionally. It's like you're living in it. Your life is a growth mindset.

When you don't coach yourself, the only way you have to evaluate anything is whether you quote unquote failed or succeeded. So it's all external and it's all like appearances. When you know how to coach yourself, every single thing you experience in your life is an opportunity to learn something about yourself, to deepen your self-awareness, to make you more resilient, more thoughtful, more considered, more empathetic, to feel more happiness and to feel more freedom.

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So there's really no such thing as like wasted effort or wasted time or wasted money when you are living in that growth mindset. You're always learning and growing because you have a method for always evaluating and understanding how you acted, what you were thinking and feeling, what outcome you got, whether it was a success or a failure, and you're always able to improve on how you approached something the last time around.

I first got certified as a coach around my birthday in 2015. So this is not just a birthday, but 10 years of self-coaching. And it's truly the best gift I ever gave myself. And I think learning to coach yourself is the best gift you can ever give yourself too.

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](http://www.unfuckyourbrain.com/society). I can't wait to see you there.