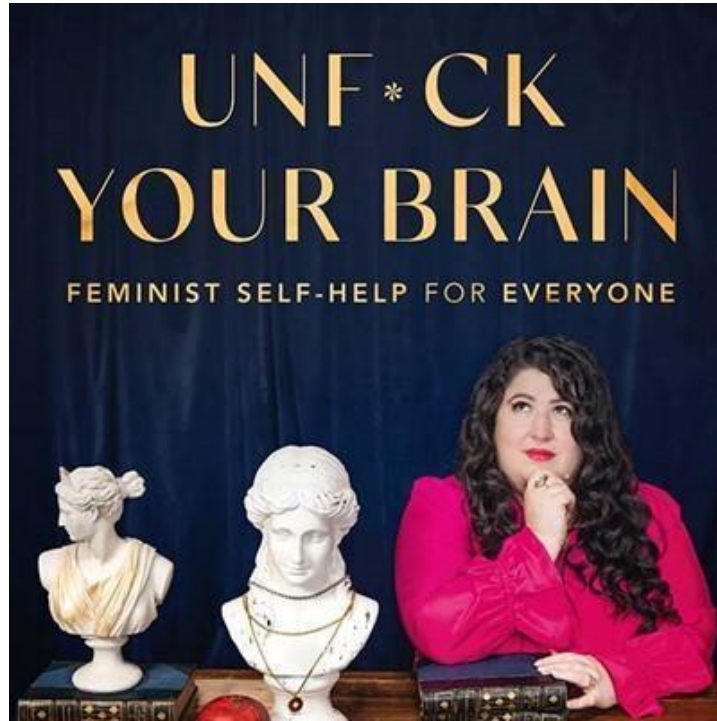


UFYB 414: How to Find Your Purpose



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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

UFYB 414: How to Find Your Purpose

Have you ever looked at someone who looks driven and purposeful and on fire and thought, "I wish I had some of what they're having?" I often coach women who feel an inchoate longing for something bigger, something more, something with greater meaning. They aren't sure what that is or what it looks like. They want purpose, but they aren't sure how to find it. And they don't know that's because purpose can't be found. In today's episode, I'm going to teach you what purpose is and how you can connect to your own purpose so that you can live a more confident, meaningful, and impactful life.

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 friends. So, I know this title was a little bit of a bait and switch, but I promise we are talking all about purpose. And I am in a way going to teach you how to find it. It's just not going to be found the way you think it is. But I want to back up before we get to that and talk a little bit about my own purpose and how I got where I am.

So I'm going to admit something right now that actually feels a little bit scary to admit because even with my well-coached brain, it sounds kind of grandiose or like I'm getting above myself, which that's such a weird phrase when you think about it. Like if you're being yourself, if you're being authentic, how can you be above yourself? What that really means is you're being above the person or station or whatever that society or your family or whoever else has decided you should be at. And like, why should they get to decide that?

So I always want to model radical honesty and vulnerability with you all, and I think that some of you listening may actually resonate with this, so I'm

UFYB 414: How to Find Your Purpose

just going to say it. Looking at me now, you might think I always had this very clear purpose in life. I seem very purposeful, very mission-driven, really clear on who I am and what I'm doing here in this world. And I feel like that most of the time.

Now, my professional career has been all about helping women liberate themselves in one way or another, right? In their rights, in the legal sense to be in control of their bodies, in their ability to be in control of their own minds and lives. But that's not how things started. When I was growing up, like most kids, my idea of what I wanted to do for a career bounced around. But I always had this weird secret belief that what I did was going to be like kind of a big deal. I don't know how to describe it better than that. I just had this sense that I was meant to live a big life that made a difference, that had an impact on the world.

And I do believe that every life has an impact on the world, of course. And it wasn't like I thought I was meant to be famous. I didn't want to be an actress or an entertainer or anything like that. But I just had this sense that I would do something unusual or maybe even extraordinary. Like that I would not just have a normal office job and live a normal, quiet life. Even though there's absolutely nothing wrong with that, and for some people that is their purpose. I just had this sense that I wanted to do something big, but I didn't really know what to do with that sense. It didn't have a specific outlet.

Sometimes I wanted to be a writer, sometimes I wanted to be a civil rights lawyer, sometimes I wanted to be a poet. Sometimes I wanted to somehow just get paid to write and talk about my ideas. And that one actually ended up being the closest to what I do. And to be clear, this did not mean I was perfectly confident. I still had tons of mental drama about my performance in whatever I was trying to do: school, work, everything.

UFYB 414: How to Find Your Purpose

And this feeling that like there was something more or I was meant for something bigger was too vague on its own to be called a purpose. It wasn't a specific purpose. It was more like the potential of purpose. It was like this intuition that deep inside, there was a flicker of something that could be fanned into maybe an important flame.

As I got older, I narrowed in on working on women's rights as my professional area of focus. But I didn't know the moment I started down that path that it was my purpose. Right? Most of us don't know that much about ourselves at 18. I had this diffuse potential in me, the sense that I wanted to really do something in the world, and then I had the work I had chosen to do, and those were not necessarily the same thing. And of course, my life led me to many twists and turns along the way that eventually brought me to both the career and the purpose I have today.

And so now, 20 years later, I would say I have two purposes in life. To grow emotionally and mentally as much as I can, to blow my own mind with who I can become, and to teach women all over the world how to do the same. But I didn't stumble on this purpose like it was a rock out in a field. It developed along with me because I made choices to take risks, go after what I wanted to do, and believe that I could create something meaningful. I took that vague sense I had and I turned it into purpose over time. I created this purpose, on purpose, pun intended.

So I want to explain to you how I did that so you can use the same technique to create your own purpose, too. And there are two big mistakes that we need to talk about that I see people make when they're trying to figure out or find their purpose. And the first mistake is in the name. When I say figure out your purpose or find your purpose. People think that purpose is something you can either figure out like a math test if you just think about it enough, or like a multiple-choice quiz, or something you can find like it's a pre-existing rock in the forest.

UFYB 414: How to Find Your Purpose

Like your purpose is this thing that magically exists outside of you, like your birthstone, right? Like assigned at birth and you just have to find it. Like it's a knowable fact that you just don't know yet. Or that they just have to do the math often enough, like think in circles often enough, or that their purpose will just like arrive somehow. They're just kind of waiting for it to manifest itself and make itself become clear.

And the second mistake is believing that purpose, when it is found, is fully formed. People believe, oh, I'll know my purpose when I see it. I'll know my purpose when I find it. And what they mean subconsciously is that they believe they will feel a sudden sense of calm and meaning and, well, purpose, right? That they won't feel self-doubt, they won't second guess themselves, they won't be afraid anymore.

And then that means that whenever they feel aimless or dissatisfied or unfulfilled or burnt out, they assume that means they haven't found their purpose. Right? I'm just dissatisfied because I'm not working on my purpose. I'm not working in, I don't have my purpose. I'm just doing this job or I'm just in this marriage or I'm just raising these kids or whatever, and I don't know what my purpose is. And if I found my purpose, if I can finally figure it out or if I can finally find it, or if it just arrives somehow, then I'm going to feel sure and confident and grounded and I won't have questions or second guessing or self-doubt and I'll know what to do. So we just end up like daydreaming about how great things are going to be once our purpose magically appears.

And this combination of beliefs makes purpose this kind of mysterious thing that is going to change our life if only we can ever get it to happen to us. And in that way, it functions the same psychologically as any other perfectionist fantasy: losing weight, getting married, getting your novel published, performing on Broadway, making VP, or getting hired as a CEO, having a baby. It's like all these things that we think are the thing that's finally going to make our life click into place and give us a sense of meaning and give us a sense of value and tell us what to do.

UFYB 414: How to Find Your Purpose

So, spoiler alert, when you think about purpose that way, it never shows up. Because it's not a thing you can just find in the woods. It's not a thing you can just think your way towards. It will not be fully formed. And even if an inkling of purpose does hit, you can't even recognize it because it's not the fully formed, perfect, gift-wrapped package of certainty and fulfillment you were waiting for.

And in fact, so many women who tell me that they just wish they knew what their purpose was are also the women who tell me that they don't know what they want, they don't know what they want to do, they don't really know what they're interested in. And I think that's true in the sense that really that's what they're experiencing. They believe that they don't know. But I think it's because they've a lifetime habit of ignoring those little flickers of interest or desire or curiosity.

I've talked about this a lot, that when I coach a woman who tells me she doesn't know what she wants to do, it's almost never true. Like 5% of the time, 10% of the time, most of the time she does know, but she has dismissed or invalidated that desire, told herself it's unrealistic, it's irresponsible, it's not really an option, and then she doesn't know what to do, what she wants or what she likes when she's taken off the table the thing she really does want or like.

And so the same thing happens like when you have been ignoring your flickers of interest or desire or curiosity, you think you don't know what you care about or what your purpose might be. But that kindling for the little flicker that can become the flame is already in there. It's already ready to be ignited. You just have to learn how to pay attention to it and how to build that fire instead of thinking that you are just going to like burst through the trees one day and find a roaring fire waiting for you and that's your purpose.

So I'm going to share how to do that on purpose right after this quick break.

UFYB 414: How to Find Your Purpose

All right, so I'm going to break this down for you, but here's the headline. Purpose is made, not found. Purpose is chosen, not figured out. Purpose is not a pre-existing thing that destiny attached to you before birth that is waiting in some secret room in your brain or some point on the timeline in the multiverse until you stumble upon it. And it's not a logical problem you can solve through thinking about it until you finally land on the perfect answer.

Your purpose is something you create by following the flickers of creativity and desire and curiosity and interest that you feel deep down inside. Purpose is often disruptive. It's not always clear and neat. It is not always aligned with what your parents want you to do with your life or what society tells you to do with your life, or what your college friends are all doing with their lives, or necessarily with the choices you've already made for your life.

And purpose does not arrive fully formed. If it did, if we felt that deep conviction, then we think, oh, it would be easy. I'd feel so confident in pursuing my purpose. But that's not how it is. Purpose may not be loud. It may not feel obvious. It may in fact be something that brings up a ton of self-doubt because it requires following these little flickers of curiosity or interest or desire and prioritizing doing that over the kind of safe certainty of your current life and circumstances and choices.

And that goes against how we think of it. We think purpose is the antidote to our self-doubt. We think that we are self-doubting because we aren't sure about our purpose. And if we knew it, then we would feel confident, right? If we could just figure out or find our purpose, then we'd feel confident in pursuing it. But that's not how it works. You actually build confidence by taking small steps to pursue your purpose.

Listen, some people may have been born feeling confident about their purpose. Maybe that exists, but they aren't listening to this podcast. And there's nothing wrong with you if you don't feel that way. I did not feel that

UFYB 414: How to Find Your Purpose

way, and most people don't feel that way. That's not because we don't have a purpose. It's because for whatever reason, we were taught by our family or society or whoever else not to follow those flickers of desire and interest, right? To tamp them down rather than oxygenate them into flames.

And I want to be really clear that purpose doesn't mean something like high profile in the world. My husband and I have very different purposes. He feels that his purpose is to love and care for the people in his life and make their lives better and help take care of them and have time with them. That's his purpose. And my purpose is lead a global movement to change women's lives all over the world. Right? We have very different purposes. A purpose does not have to be big, it doesn't have to be loud, it doesn't have to be public, it doesn't have to be high profile. It's just a recognition of what you want to be doing with your life.

So I want to explain how I kind of aligned with and found or created, right, my purpose, because again, it's not the way that people think it happens. So people think that in order to quit my job as a legal academic to start a business as a life coach, which obviously, as I've said many times, had no business experience, barely felt life coach was a real job, right? I must have been like so confident and so sure. Right? I must have been so brave. And I think I was a little brave because you only have to be brave if you're afraid, and I was afraid.

But I also did not have a fully formed purpose that descended in a moment and told me to make this huge leap. That's not how it was. It was actually a series of small actions that came from following the flicker of interest and what I found compelling. I didn't quit my job and upend my whole life immediately. I learned some coaching concepts and applied them to myself. I was not even looking to be a coach or make that decision. I just was trying to feel better, and they helped me. And I wasn't intending at that moment to become a coach. I just followed my interest, right? I learned some things. I thought, oh, this is really interesting. I applied it to myself. I

UFYB 414: How to Find Your Purpose

was like, oh, this is really helping me. I'm understanding the world better. And I just followed that, right? And then I signed up for a coach training.

And this was definitely like a big step, but it still wasn't a radical overhaul. I didn't quit my job at the moment I signed up. I took vacation from my job to go to the coach training with the intention of seeing what it was like and seeing what that experience showed me about what I maybe wanted to do next. So I obviously was like curious about becoming a coach. I was interested in the idea. Like I was signing up for a coach training. I didn't just like stumble into that Holiday Inn.

But I didn't have a fully formed business plan ready to go. I didn't have a resignation letter drafted. I wasn't like sure. I didn't come in saying, "Being a coach is my life's purpose." Right? I came in saying, this is really interesting, it's really helped me, and I'm kind of curious about what it might be like to do this in a more structured and professional way and possibly as like my job. So I was following those flickers of interest. The fire that was slowly being built up by trusting what was compelling to me and just taking each step down the road as it came.

When we imagine purpose arriving fully formed, that's just this version of perfectionism and control where we want to know that we're right and know the outcome ahead of time. I did not do that. So at the coach training, I really fell in love with coaching even more and coaching other people, right? Until this time, I had only coached myself and, you know, I had sort of like informally talked about the concepts with my friends. This was my first experience getting to actually test it out. And I saw really clearly that, oh, I do love this, I am good at it, and this aligns with something that's already important to me, which is helping women liberate themselves.

I was already doing work on that from the legal side, and then this was like the personal emotional side of it. But it aligned with my values and what mattered to me. And noticed it was not something out of left field that

UFYB 414: How to Find Your Purpose

landed in my lap and said, "Hi, I'm your purpose." It was me taking each step towards something that felt compelling and exciting to me, something that felt meaningful, and noticing how it brought together my core interests and values, which were human psychology, how to live, and helping women get free.

And listen, if I had gone to that coach training and I had realized, I don't really think I like coaching other people or I don't really want to do this, I would not have thought that was a failure, right? I would not have said to myself, "Oh my god, like this isn't my purpose or I shouldn't have done this. Now I made a mistake, now it was a waste of money." I decided that pursuing these flickers was meaningful in and of itself. This was something I was interested in. It was something I wanted to learn more about. It was an opportunity I wanted to explore, and I decided to give that to myself regardless of the outcome.

The same way, you know, with my step-kids, we give them opportunities to explore what they're interested in, and we don't require that they agree that they are going to become a professional pianist if we pay for piano lessons. It's enough that they're interested in it right now and they like making music, and we think it will contribute something to their development.

So that is the attitude I had towards myself, which is what allowed me to take each of these steps without this like pressure of, "I have to know this is my purpose, and I have to do it for the rest of my life to vindicate and validate it." So I kept taking those small steps. After the training, I posted a bunch on social media about coaching and what I'd learned. I got some free clients from my network first, and then eventually my first couple of paid clients. And I made the final decision to quit my legal career a few months after the coach training, probably like six months. But even then, I was not filled with certainty that I had found my capital P purpose and now my life was going to be one glorious, confident mission. I just knew I wanted to try this. I wanted to see if I could do it. I loved the work and I wanted to share it, and I wanted to help women change their lives. I had a

UFYB 414: How to Find Your Purpose

very strong desire by that point. I didn't have confidence that this was going to be 100% successful and this was my life purpose and I was on the one true right path.

I just knew I felt really drawn to it and it felt important and it felt meaningful and it aligned with my values and what I wanted to be doing in the world. And now it's 10 years later and right now, I feel confident saying that my purpose is to grow and evolve and help others do the same. But that purpose was co-created with my own decisions and my own life. It's not that I knew that was my purpose, so I made these decisions. I made each decision moving towards what I found interesting, what I found meaningful, what I'm found exciting. And those things helped form my purpose along the way.

And I don't believe it's permanent and light or necessarily lifelong, because my purpose is not like an identity characteristic that predates my birth or my knowledge of it, right? It's not a static, set thing that I discover and then have to live by. I think we want our purpose to be this definite, permanent thing because that would relieve us of the responsibility of making decisions we aren't totally sure about, taking risks we can't be certain will, you know, produce specific outcomes and working our way towards the person we want to become.

But your purpose is something you create. It doesn't descend in one fell swoop. It has to be chosen over and over with each move you make towards the things that light you up and feel meaningful. And you'll make a lot of choices along the way probably that don't move you towards it, that don't become your purpose, right? Or it will shift. Like I thought that my purpose was to be a women's rights lawyer when I was younger. That's why I went to law school and why I clerked and why I did these fellowships and academia and all those things. And then something shifted for me. And that doesn't mean that like I had the purpose wrong and now I can't trust myself or one of them was the real purpose. It's okay to have different

UFYB 414: How to Find Your Purpose

purposes at different phases of your life because your purpose is just something you are creating.

It's really just a way of talking about what is meaningful to you and what you try to intentionally direct your effort and action and emotional energy towards to live out or implement or create or embody in your life. The good news is that means you don't have to jump off a cliff to have a purposeful life, and you don't have to have certainty. But you do have to trace your way down the mountain. The path gets smoother and smoother as you go and clearer and clearer. But from the top, you have to be willing to take a step into the brush, not sure what's waiting for you, not needing to know the end result, but with just enough courage to put one foot in front of the other and see what happens and keep doing that all the way down to the bottom.

Okay, so listen, before you go, if you, like me, think becoming a coach could be one of the things that might be your purpose, I have a juicy tell-all that you are going to want to read. It's called "Three Things I Wish I Knew Before I Became a Life Coach." It is short, but it is packed with crucial information and perspective that I wish I had when I became a coach. And I've written it, and it's totally free. It's for all of you who are considering becoming a coach or interested in becoming a coach, everything that would have saved me so much mental mind drama if I had known when I was contemplating going to that coach training.

So you can get it by going to unfuckyourbrain.com/three, just the word three written out with letters, or text your email to +1 (347) 997-1784 and the code word is the word three, t-h-r-e-e.

All right, my friends, make sure you grab a copy. You don't want to miss all the tea I'm spilling in there.

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

UFYB 414: How to Find Your Purpose

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.