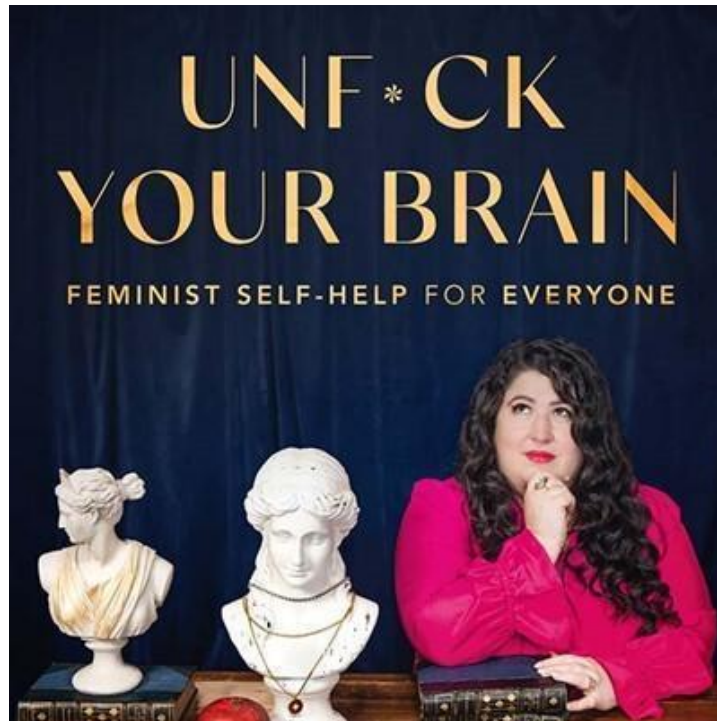


UFYB 437: Coaching Hotline: Fear of Flying and Was Elizabeth Holmes Using Thought Work?



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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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.

Welcome to this week's Coaching Hotline episode where I answer real questions from real listeners and coach you from afar. If you want to submit your question for consideration, go to unfuckyourbrain.com/coachinghotline, all one word. Or text your email to 1-347-997-1784. And when you get prompted for the code word, it's CoachingHotline, all one word. Let's get into this week's questions.

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So here's this first one. It's about a question about fear of flying, but it's going to work for a fear of anything, like public speaking or anything else you're scared of.

“Hi, Kara. I absolutely love your podcast. It's already helped me immeasurably. I found it at a time when I was lost in obsessive jealous thoughts, and your talk on the subject brought me around. There are so many other topics I'm working on. Shame and boundaries are two big ones right now, but there's a huge one that I'd love some feedback on if possible. How do you address a phobia? I recently developed a fear of flying after 31 years of zero fear towards it. I'm still trying to figure out why.

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“When I have a flight, I get terrified that I'll have a panic attack mid-flight, end up freaking out the other passengers, embarrassing myself, wearing an oxygen mask, and possibly forcing the flight to land. So much catastrophizing. I'm also fearful of embarrassing myself in front of my boyfriend, who doesn't know about the fear of flying. Is the phobia a combo of a few things like catastrophizing, shame, and people-pleasing? Or are there other tools to use in a phobia situation? What is my blind spot? Thank you so much for everything you do.”

Okay, so I have no idea why you've developed this phobia other than your thoughts, but I think even calling it a phobia is not helping you because calling it a phobia is making it feel like this very intense, serious thing that is like an emergency. And so, I don't think that's helpful. What we know is that now, sometimes when you fly, you have feelings of anxiety in your body. That's really all it is. A panic attack is just anxiety.

But what is going on here partly is that you are fearing your own anxiety. So you create anxiety about having anxiety, which is what a panic attack is, right? It's when you start to get anxious about even getting anxious and you completely freak yourself out. And this happens with kind of all fears, with fears of public speaking, with anything that you anticipate being scared about. And so the first thing you really have to do is just accept that you are probably going to be anxious.

So much of what is incredibly scary about a panic attack is that you are resisting your own anxiety. You don't want to feel anxious. You anticipate feeling anxious. You start to feel anxious, then you start to freak out that you're feeling anxious, and you're resisting it the whole time and wanting it to go away. And that's what freaks you out. Like, let's imagine you just got a headache when you flew. If you just knew every time you flew, you were going to have a headache and it was just that's that. You're going to have a headache and not a big deal. It wouldn't be nearly as big a deal.

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Anxiety is just a feeling in your body. So the first thing to do is just accept that this is happening and that when you fly, you are probably going to get anxious. Just not resisting it and being willing to have it happen because it's going to happen anyway is going to take down the like intensity of this so much for you.

And then the second thing is what you're making it mean that you get anxious. You think it's embarrassing, you're going to freak other people out. You got to work on all of those thoughts. You don't cause other people's feelings. If anyone sees you having a panic attack, the odds are they're just going to feel bad for you, right? Not freak you out. And you're the only one who thinks it's embarrassing. No one else is going to be thinking that, right? You're the one who's thinking that.

So all of this is just part of the same thing of like making this big serious problem. And what I really recommend you do when you have something like this is you just take down the intensity. Don't call it a phobia. Don't call it a panic attack. Don't sit around hoping it doesn't happen. Don't think about all the things that could happen if it does, right? And then resist it even more. Just completely prepare and accept that you're going to be anxious on the flight.

So now, what do we do? Right? If we know that you're going to be anxious on the flight, you're going to feel it, it's going to happen, and it's not a big deal. It's just a feeling in your body. It's just a sensation in your body. Then what do you need to do to prepare? Just the willingness to be with the reality that you're going to have some anxiety is going to change this up for you. Once you do that, then you can start to uncover the thoughts causing the anxiety. But at this point, most of your anxiety is about maybe having anxiety, right? So that's what we have to allow and get comfortable with. The other place I see this a lot is public speaking with people.

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All right, y'all, I know you're as tired as I am of having the top podcasts in wellness or health and fitness categories be a bunch of dudes who don't know anything about socialization and who are not taking women's lived experiences into account. So if you are looking for ways to support the show and more importantly, make sure the show gets to more people, please leave us a review on Apple Podcast or Spotify. And bonus points if you include a few lines about the way you use thought work and self-coaching or anything you've learned from the podcast in your daily life. Those reviews are what teach the algorithms to show us to more new people. It helps us get new listeners all over the world. And I'll be reading one story from a recent review in each of these question and answer episodes.

Today's review has a great title. It comes from Thimbles and Buttons, although we're missing some of the vowels there. And it's called, lovingly yelling, shut up, Kara. The review says, "I found Kara on New Year's Eve, 2023. And over the next 12 weeks, listened to every single one of her podcasts, plus all the bonus material. The way Kara presents information makes it easy to comprehend without feeling like you're being talked to like a child. Whenever something particularly hits right about something I'm in denial about or a behavior I recognize in myself, I lovingly shout, 'Shut up, Kara.' And then I save the podcast and re-listen to it. I'm about to start the podcast over again because I feel like the first time smacked me in the face, and now I really want to listen again and dive deep into the words and in the work. Thank you, Kara, for putting this out there and being a friend of mine because after episode 49, I know I can count you as one."

Absolutely love this, and I love the idea of re-listening. It will always hit different as your own awareness and the place you are in your journey deepens as well.

Second question for this week, I love these meta questions. I just find them really interesting and I love when people are engaging with the work this

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way. So, here's this person's question. It's a little bit long, but I am going to read it all because I've actually been thinking about this exact thing.

“Hi, Kara and company. Many thanks for your work. I've been doing some very intense attempts at self-coaching and I've been getting a lot of traction with it. Changing my thoughts to let go of guilt, accepting that I don't control other people's thoughts, stuff like that. I used to think about escaping my life all the time and I literally don't think about that anymore. It's pretty incredible.”

So first of all, let's just talk about how incredible that is, right? And how fun.

“One thought I have about thought work, a meta thought, if you will, is that maybe I'm training myself to be a sociopath. I don't believe this thought, by the way. Instinctively, I believe that I'm moving towards more big-heartedness and away from ego. And I buy your argument about not taking responsibility for people's thoughts as a way of holding space for their experience without making it all about you. Also, your argument that there are often a lot of ways to view a situation that are all equally true, so why not pick the one that makes you feel the way you want to feel? 100% on board with all of that.

“But I just listened to The Dropout about Elizabeth Holmes and Theranos. And it seems like one of the points the podcast was trying to make was that she was a master of deception and it leaves it ambiguous whether she deceived herself as well as her employees and investors. The only one who knows the answer to that is probably Elizabeth.”

So sidebar, because some of you are like, what the fuck is this? Elizabeth Holmes was this young woman who dropped out of Stanford and got all these kind of famous people to invest in her company. It was basically a giant fraud. Nobody really knows whether she thought she could do it or

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not, but she said that she was inventing this technology to test blood with just a tiny little finger prick. You wouldn't have to take a whole vial of blood, and basically just they never got the technology working. They tried, it wasn't working. She lied to everybody about it, and then eventually the whole thing went down in flames. And I've actually been thinking about her a lot in relation to this work. So I just love this question.

Okay, so back to the question. So, she says, "The way they painted on the podcast, I imagine her thinking things like, 'We're cheating and we're going to get caught. Oh no.' And then realizing that thought was leading her to fear and anxiety, and that wasn't the emotion she wanted to feel. Then she would think, 'I want to feel confident, what should I think?' And then maybe the thought she came up with was, 'Well, these are trade secrets. We're on the cutting edge of innovation. We're going to get right eventually. We can't let anything stop us.' and liking how that thought makes her feel and deciding to keep it. So my question is, how is my vignette above different from the kind of thought work you recommend? Here's my stab at answering my own question."

Which by the way, I love. All of you who send me questions, try to answer them yourselves first. It's so good for your brain, and then I really can see where you're going wrong.

Okay, so she says, "Here's my stab at answering my own question. In my vignette, the Elizabeth Holmes character feels great as the result of her thought that these are trade secrets. But probably in real life, there would be a little bit of guilt or duplicity because a real person's brain wouldn't quite believe the thought unless they are already a sociopath. But what if your brain did truly believe this thought? And it enabled you to feel confident and not at all guilty while cheating and hurting other people? My instinct is that it still would not be the kind of thought work that you recommend, but why not? Is there a qualitative difference between changing your thoughts in a

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positive way on the one hand and systematically deluding yourself on the other?

"Or is it just a matter of what emotions you want to move towards? Like maybe if you justify cheating other people to yourself, that might enable feelings of confidence, but also leads you away from other feelings like love. But what if you could just change your thoughts to feel lots of love, too? Someone like Elizabeth Holmes could and perhaps did convince herself that her product was eventually going to help people a lot. I could imagine her thinking about that and feeling love towards people even as she was hurting them. How do we know we're not all using thought work to turn ourselves into sociopaths?"

Okay, I love this question. My clients have this question all the time. So first of all, you can't turn yourself into a sociopath. Most people believe that it is a condition that is formed in very early childhood with extreme experiences and that there may be a genetic component. So it's just very unlikely you're going to turn yourself into a sociopath. But that's not really the point here.

So there's a couple things I want to say about this. Number one, well, I just said one, you can't really train yourself to be a sociopath. In terms of Elizabeth Holmes and Theranos, here's what I think is interesting about this. On the one hand, I think that she is proof that if you think thoughts that produce confidence, it will take you pretty far. Like I think about this with Donald Trump, right? Like say what you will about him, he thought he could be president and a lot of people didn't, and now he is. And so on some level, his thoughts did produce that result for him. The model, which is what we call how your thoughts produce your results, the model isn't inherently moral one way or the other. It's more like the law of gravity. It just shows us that what you think you will produce. And that might be something you like and value, and it might be something you don't like and don't value. You still have to make that decision for yourself.

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Right? Like Hitler's models produced a lot of results for him that he probably liked, the rest of us don't like them. But the fact that your thoughts produce your results is not inherently moral. I'm not teaching you your thoughts produce your results and they will always be good, right? Based on your own values. I'm just teaching you what you think will produce your results and that's why we got to choose our thoughts on purpose so much.

So one way of answering this question is just that Elizabeth Holmes had different values than you do, and her thoughts produced her results. Now, I don't think that she was using thought work because the place that I think somebody who is using thought work the way I teach it would have gone differently is that I think that the problem that Elizabeth Holmes had is that she was not willing to fail. So much of what was going on with Theranos it seemed like was about her image.

If you watched the documentary or listened to the podcast, she like modeled herself after Steve Jobs, and she artificially, like, not artificially, I mean she did it herself, but she literally trained herself to speak an octave deeper than her normal voice because she thought that made people take her more seriously and she dressed all in black, modeling herself on Steve Jobs very consciously, like, and she didn't tell people the truth about what was going on with her company and a lot of what you see going on, I think when you watch the documentaries or you listen to the podcast about her is that she was really fixated on what people thought about her and controlling people's perceptions of her. And to me, that's not someone practicing thought work.

So her model, in other words, like was kind of mixed. She had a mix of thoughts and she got a mix of results, right? And the thoughts that created like true confidence, which probably there was some of, she probably, maybe she did believe she could do this thing, right? Did produce the result of her getting closer to doing it than if she hadn't tried at all. But I think that all these thoughts she had about trying to control other people and what

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they thought, those are not what you would have if you were doing real thought work with yourself.

Like what I imagine someone doing real thought work on themselves, like what would their story be? They probably would maybe listen to that first professor in their freshman year who was like, "Hey, this is literally physically impossible, this thing you want to do." Right? And then if all of her investors had been doing thought work, they would have been like, "Huh, she's a freshman from Stanford and doesn't know anything. Maybe she hasn't solved this major problem." Right? Like it's like everybody was doing a lot of wishful thinking.

And then I think of somebody who's doing thought work, even if they had believed they could figure it out, if they were taking responsibility for their thoughts and feelings, and they were willing to let other people think whatever they wanted about them and they were willing to fail to try to get better, they wouldn't lie about the state of the company. So to me, that's how I know that someone like Elizabeth Holmes is not practicing thought work the way I teach it because it's so clear that she was not willing to fail. She was fighting reality the whole time. She was lying about reality to everyone else.

And, you know, it is possible that she had the thought like, well, we're going to get there. So the end's justify the means. But I don't think that's a managed mind thought, right? Because you have to ask like, but why not tell the truth about it? Like what are you so afraid of? So, I think that like what is going on with somebody like Elizabeth Holmes is not really a managed mind because so much of it is about ego and deception. And I just don't believe that someone who is managing their own mind and who is truly like loves themselves the way they are engages in a lot of ego and deception. In fact, it's really the opposite.

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So, of course, I can't know what was going on in her brain, but if I could diagnose it from external symptoms, I would say trying to control what everyone else thinks about you, lying, not being willing to fail, not being willing to admit you're having trouble or making mistakes, and trying to like manage everyone's perception of you all the time is not what happens when you are truly confident.

So, that's how I would answer that, and hopefully that is helpful and explains it. So, don't worry, I have not turned anyone into a sociopath yet, and I don't really foresee that happening. I really think thought work teaches you how to love more, not love less. It's just that what we associate with love is often guilt and obligation and insecurity and ego. So I think this work makes us like less and less like a sociopath. I think often what we think of, I mean, if you listen to my people-pleasing and people-deceiving podcasts, right? Often what we think of as being the sign that we are a good person who cares about other people is actually just us trying to manipulate other people to feel better about ourselves.

So to me, that is not the good thing we want as opposed to being a sociopath. What we want is to be able to operate from a place of low ego and high love, high self-confidence, high love, low ego investment in what other people think about us and in having to like look and succeed a certain way. That's I think what drives people to lie or fraud or all of the rest of the mess that Elizabeth Holmes ended up in. And I kind of love that like her end result was what it was. Like clearly her thoughts were not all positive and productive because she didn't end up with a positive productive result. She ended up with a mess.

Okay, great question. I'm glad someone asked me about that because I've been thinking about it a lot.