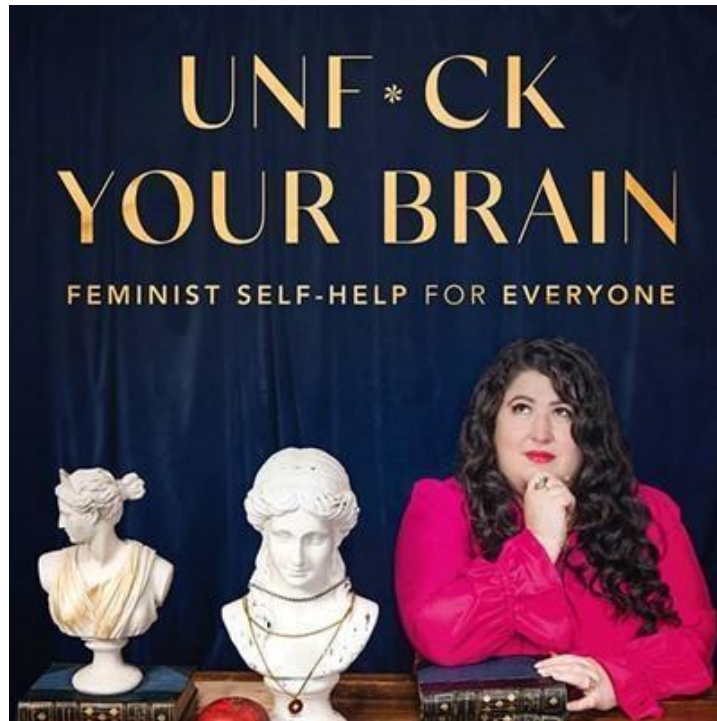


UFYB 453: Coaching Hotline: Making Mistakes at Work & Coping with Stress



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.

The first question is such a great question, I think, because this comes up a lot with people who have professions where there are very high standards and there's like a licensing authority and, right, so lawyers, doctors, even, you know, architects or nurses, like lots of professions, right, where you need to be licensed and if you make a mistake, there can be professional consequences. So question is, "I'm a graduate student going into a field that requires clinical licensure. I have heard horror stories of people making mistakes with billing that ended up being accidental fraud and then going to jail, losing their license, and getting fined hundreds of thousands of dollars. There are also horror stories regarding other people going to the ethics board about other fellow clinicians in regards to how much they charge. Things like this make me terrified to graduate. I know I'm not perfect and I make honest mistakes. This is why I didn't go into anything that requires precision and perfection. How do I get over these fears?"

Okay, this is a great question. So the first thing to remember is that your brain is not good at evaluating how likely extreme outcomes are to happen. So the studies show something called a recency effect, which is if you have heard about something more recently, you are likely to vastly overestimate the statistical likelihood of it happening to you. So for instance, if people

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have heard about a hurricane on the news lately, they will hugely overestimate the actual statistical chance that they could experience a hurricane where they live.

And this happens in law a lot. I actually think one of the biggest problems with lawyer brain is that you spend all of your time studying what has gone wrong, similarly for doctors or other healthcare professionals too, right? You are constantly just reading and studying what happens when things go wrong. And so you get way overstimulated almost. Like your brain has this recency effect going on all the time and so it vastly overestimates the odds that something quote unquote bad, a particular outcome is gonna happen to you. So that's the first thing, right?

Just because you've heard some stories doesn't mean your brain is giving them the accurate weight. It's also true, of course, that you've heard stories. We have no idea if those stories are true, if they're really circumstances, how often it happens. Which is important in the sense that it's all still your thoughts, but if the truth is that there's a 0.001% chance of something happening to you, but you think it's an 80% chance, right? Your thoughts about that are gonna make a big difference in how you feel.

So the first thing is not to take how much you think you've heard it, which is super vague as being actually any evidence about how common it is, right? It may be like this happened to two people and everyone tells the same story over and over again. That's just kind of the superficial level. Not superficial, it matters to kind of know that, but here's the deeper level of the work, because it's true that you can never be positive that this won't happen, just like we can't ever be positive that a meteor isn't gonna hit the Earth, right? We can't be 100% sure about the future. So we have to think about what we would do if that happened, and more importantly, how we're gonna think and feel.

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So this is classic catastrophizing, right? I recommend that the person who asked this question go back and listen to the catastrophizing podcast, but you need to work through what would happen. What happens if you go to jail, lose your license, and get fined hundreds of thousands of dollars? It's quite probably extremely unlikely, but if it did happen, here's what's crazy. The thing you fear would still be how you think and feel. That's the thing that you would fear. There are people who think, well, in jail at least, I know where my next meal's coming from, and there are rules, and there's order here, and I have a community, and outside I didn't have any of that. I've watched a fascinating documentary about this once, but I've also coached other people on this. I've had clients who are terrified of jail. It's all about your thoughts.

So the thing you really fear, the thing you are emotionally experiencing now, is what you would make that mean. That it's a horror. That you have failed. That you should be ashamed. That your life would be terrible. Whatever you think you will think and feel, if anything like this happens, that's what you need to work through. So it's two things. You wanna adjust your understanding of the probability, which is quite likely very wrong. It would be interesting for you to Google, like how often does this happen? How many people have actually lost their license, gone to jail, and been fined hundreds of thousands of dollars for true accidental fraud? It's got to be quite small. How many people have truly been disbarred because somebody else went to the ethics board about how much they charge? Again, probably quite small.

So it would be useful for you to get the facts because it'll make it easy for you to think, oh, it's really 0.001%. But even so, the next step is doing that catastrophizing work, right? Figuring out what it is you're afraid you'll think and feel, and then deciding ahead of time what you want to think and feel. Basically not telling yourself, oh my unmanaged mind would make my life horrible if this circumstance happened. That's what you're doing right now,

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and until you manage your mind now to show you that you can do it in the future, you'll be scared. The solution is in your thoughts.

Alright 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. This week's review comes from Nicole in MD and the subject line is life-changing insights. She writes, "thought work is a ticket for learning how to minimize emotional spiraling. Kara spells it all out. It's made a tremendous difference in my relationship with myself. I highly recommend this podcast."

Okay, second question. "Do you have suggestions on how to change my thoughts to not numb out when faced with stress? When I'm stressed or upset, it seems like my mind makes the jump to all is permissible, i.e., it's fine to eat a bag of Cheetos from the snack room at work or drink, quote unquote, just one glass of wine when I get home, which ends up being a bottle. These are things I can avoid normally, but under pressure, my mind freaks out and I let myself wild out. Then the next day I feel guilty, which I know probably not the best for having let myself indulge."

Okay, so this is a big question, but you have a story about what you do, right? You said, when I'm stressed, my mind jumps to it's all permissible. So how do we fix that? You have to change your thinking about whether it's

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all permissible, right? I think permissible though is the clue to why you're having trouble because I think that you are trying to enforce rules on yourself about what's allowed and not allowed. And so you've made some things forbidden, like Cheetos or a glass of wine. And so then of course, when we forbid ourselves something from a kind of punitive or authoritarian standpoint, we create rebellion in ourselves and then we're always looking for excuses to break the rules.

So you're caught in that restriction rebellion cycle. And that's why your brain looks for an excuse, quote unquote, to do the thing that it wants to do. Your brain is of course gonna want Cheetos and wine. Your brain wants dopamine and those are easy dopamine, right? When you're stressed and upset, your brain wants dopamine to feel better, totally natural. But because you are trying to have rules of things that are permissible and are not permissible, you're getting stuck in that kind of ping pong between restriction and rebellion.

It's totally different to tell yourself, I'm not allowed to eat Cheetos, I shouldn't eat Cheetos, or to tell yourself, even though my lizard brain wants Cheetos because it just wants me to feel better and it thinks that this dopamine will help, I don't want to eat Cheetos. Even though part of my brain wants to, I also don't want to. And I'm going to have a thought that I practice or I'm going to have a practice that I use to stick to what I really want, which is not to eat the Cheetos or not to drink the wine.

But I don't think that you are ready for that yet because, like you say, the next day I feel guilty for having let myself indulge. And I think this is one of those situations where your idea for how to deal with the guilt is to not do the thing in the first place. This is like when people have a thought and then they judge themselves for the thought and feel shame, and they wanna solve that by just changing the underlying thought. And what I teach is that's not gonna work because the creation of shame around it is making

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you avoid it and is putting too much pressure on it, and so you can't get to the underlying thought until you resolve the shame.

Same thing here. As long as you are creating guilt about your behavior, you will not be able to change the behavior. I know it's counterintuitive. We would think that feeling guilty would motivate us, but it doesn't. Think of it like an electric shock. If every time you touch something, you get an electric shock, you're gonna wanna stop touching it. That's what you're doing with your brain. If you create guilt because you ate something or because this thought pattern produced the action of eating something, you're not gonna be able to get to know that thought pattern or change it because every time you go near it, you get the electric shock of guilt.

So your brain's gonna avoid it. And then you're gonna have what you have now, which is avoid the food as long as you're not feeling too stressed out, but then when you get stressed out, want dopamine, already start fighting with yourself in your mind, already start feeling guilt preemptively, finally just do it to stop the debate and discussion in your head and then feel guilty again. So you've got the guilt as this like parenthetical at the end, as if we could just skip that and just work on the stress and the numbing, but we actually have to resolve the guilt first. You gotta work on those thoughts and come to see it as morally neutral before you're gonna be able to stop doing it. All right, my dears, those are your questions and answers for this week. I'll talk to you next week.