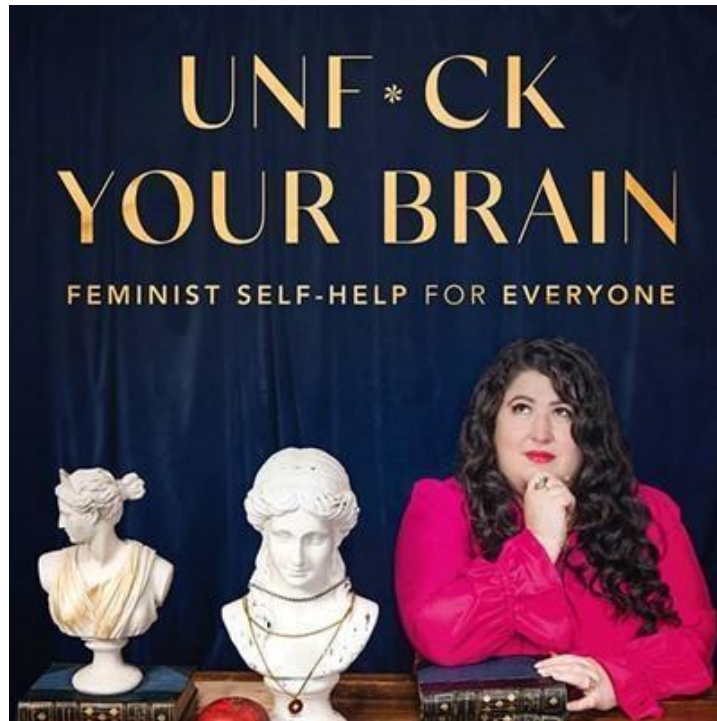


UFYB 457: Coaching Hotline: Will Practicing Thought Work Make Me Less Emotional?



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.

Here's your first question. "In the past, I've been told by many that I tend to be emotionless, rigid, and generally a hard ass or hard arse when it comes to feelings. I've worked a lot on expressing my emotions better and becoming more empathetic. Will all this thought work undo this? The more thought work I do, the more logical I become and the less emotional I am."

So, I think this is a fascinating question. It really depends on how you define all of that. Some people are "emotionless" because they are resisting and shoving down their emotions. Resisting or avoiding your emotion or not being comfortable having it is very different from thought work. Thought work is all about experiencing and processing your emotion and taking control of what you're going to think and what emotions you're going to keep creating. But it's never about shutting down or resisting an emotion just because it comes up, right? Because emotions are harmless. They're just sensations in our body.

What I find is not that I am less emotional because of thought work. I am less reactive because of thought work. So I don't fly off the handle as much. I don't get kicked into a cycle of loneliness and anxiety and depression immediately if somebody doesn't text me back. I'm less

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reactive. When I do have emotions, I find that they're able to really flow through me much more clearly when I coach myself.

So, to me, it's not about becoming less emotional. It's about clearing away all of the kind of thoughts that create emotions that are not helpful. It's not even about being productive, but it's almost as though I feel like there are emotions, both positive and negative emotions, which are part of the full spectrum of human life that I want to feel. I want to feel sadness about something sad. I want to feel grief if somebody I love dies.

And then there are negative emotions that are just stuck and repetitive and stagnant. And those are the ones that I feel like I no longer have. And I don't get angry as much and I don't fly off the handle as much. I'm just not as emotionally reactive. But I'm actually more purely emotional in some ways in that when I'm having an emotion, I'm able to fully have it. And I find that I am more emotionally responsive to art now. I cry more at plays or TV shows because I think I'm able to just receive it so much more cleanly without all of my thoughts in the way.

So that's one thing, right? What other people think about this is up to them, right? And so you have to decide, would you want to be emotionally reactive just because other people find that more comfortable? Some of them might. And you have to get to decide what to do with that. But nobody would describe me as rigid, right? Or emotionless, I don't think. So I think when if people are describing you as rigid and emotionless, I think that you're repressing emotion, not allowing it.

And while thought work may help you become logical and less reactive, I think my guess is that you, the person who asked this question, is not practiced at having their emotions in general and thought work is not really changing that at all. You maybe were repressing them all along and now you're just doing thought work to change them.

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So the work for you may be the same, which is allowing emotion. But there's no correlation to me between doing thought work and becoming emotionless. That's not what I've experienced. I've become less reactive and less volatile, but I don't not have emotions. And in fact, I think I feel my emotions more purely. I mean, I don't love the word pure because it has a moralistic value, but more it's clean, like it's just it can flow through without so much drama.

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.

So I have to say, I hesitated to read this week's review because I still struggle with the socialization of being told as a woman not to promote myself too much. But to show you that I will be brave and go first and do things I'm uncomfortable with, I'm going to share this review from PinkV27. It says, "obsessed with this podcast. I've listened to episodes so many times to really absorb the lessons and keep blowing my own mind. Kara is a genius and an important philosopher of and for our generation. Her work will be renowned for ages to come. But what's most important is listening and improving your life now. Love you so much, Kara. We're besties, even though you don't know me yet."

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That was uncomfortable for me. I feel a little nauseous, but I do love that she points out that what's most important is improving your own life, right? What you do with what I teach in your own life is what really matters. And we're all besties, even though I don't know all of you yet.

Second question. "Hi Kara, I have a constant thing in my life. Every weekday, I spend an hour driving my kids around DC each morning for school drop-offs and then repeat it all every afternoon. So two hours of being cut off, stuck behind someone taking an illegal left turn, missing the light because the guy in front of me is texting, et cetera. I spend pretty much the entire time pissed off. Mostly it's about what I see as selfish behaviors, like someone blocking traffic because he wants to turn where he's not supposed to, or when two lanes are merging and some guy flies up and cuts in line. Please help me come up with a way to look at this that won't frustrate me. I heard your thing about the butterfly effect, and it works for me occasionally, but most of the time I can't really convince myself there's any benefit to being cut off or stuck behind someone driving in two lanes."

So, here's one thing I would offer. I think the benefit is you get to know your brain, right? The benefit is you get to learn how to manage your mind because you don't have another option that you want to take here, right? So here's the way I would think about this. Number one, you're choosing to do this, right? You're a little bit in victim mode about this. This is just happening to you and it's so horrible. But you choose to drive your kids around, right, for drop-offs and repeat it all every afternoon.

You presumably had some choice in where they went to school. You have some choice in how they transport. You have some choice of who in your family is going to do this or if you're going to pay someone or if you're going to carpool or if you're going to just send them to the school down the street you don't think is as good or put them on a bus, right? So you chose to have children, right? You made choices here. And thinking about this as

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this thing that is happening to you and you have to be part of where this is starting, I think. So I think you have a little bit of self-pity mode going on.

You also pretty much say straight up that you have decided to believe that these behaviors are selfish, that what other people are doing is selfish. And so of course it's going to feel terrible to you. But you only have a problem with those because you think there's some problem with being in the car for these two hours, right? That's why I really think it's about owning the choice you made. You've made the choice to have this life and schedule. We always have a choice. And you're telling yourself that you didn't and kind of making yourself the victim of it.

And then you get this kind of woe is me pile on, right, of how other people are making it even worse because they're blocking traffic or they're turning where they're not supposed to or two lanes are merging. But why is any of that a problem? It's because you are believing there is no benefit to being cut off. There's no benefit to being stuck behind. You don't believe there's a benefit to being in these car for this time. But there 100% is if you decide to see it. And you get to decide what that is.

Maybe you want to see the benefit as your children getting to go to these schools that you want them to go to. Maybe the benefit is you get to listen to podcasts. Maybe the benefit is you get to learn how to manage your mind and stop resisting reality. So it's not about convincing yourself. You may not be ready to change the thoughts yet, and that's fine. But I think the core of this is you feeling victimized by your own choices and reality, and then feeling self-righteous because of that. But if there's no problem with being in traffic, if people are allowed to cut in line, right? If people are allowed to block traffic, then we don't have a problem.

And you do also want to pay some attention to how much you are. It's so interesting, right? Your thoughts about this are all about why it's so terrible for you and then you think other people are being selfish. Right. This is

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what brains do. Of course, your thoughts are selfish in this scenario, right? You are prioritizing your own convenience and assuming that anybody who does anything you don't like is selfish, right? And you're really focused on yourself and how terrible it is for you and your own experience. Whereas we have all been that person who misunderstood the lane merge or is new to the area and didn't know we couldn't make a left turn here, or we're fighting with our grandma on the phone and missed our turn, right, whatever it is.

But you see this behavior you know nothing about and you assume that you know that it's selfish. And I think the result in that model is that you're being selfish in the sense of you are just believing all your own thoughts, being righteously indignant, blaming other people, and only thinking about you and your own experience. And that feels terrible. It's not morally wrong or anything. Selfishness is not bad or good, right? It just means self-focused, self-involved. And that's what's happening with your thoughts here.

So what I would do is just number one, practice noticing how much you're resisting this reality, which you have helped to create. Number two, notice how your self-pity that you "have to be in the car" is coloring how you see everything around you, that your own self-pity is making you view other people as selfish when you have no idea what's going on or why they're doing the things they're doing. And I think just working on accepting those will kind of help. I don't want you to try to convince yourself about something because that's that resistance and rebellion that comes when you're in self-pity a little bit. So don't try to convince yourself, but just notice those 2 things I just described and try paying attention to those and see where that gets you. All right, my dears, I will talk to you next week.