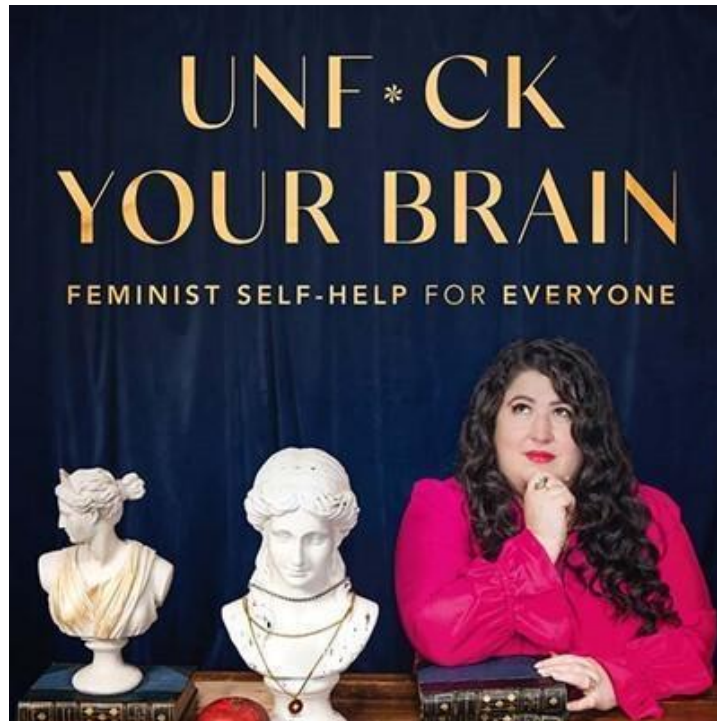


UFYB 480: Motivation is a Fuckboy - How to Follow Through Without It



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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

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I've been getting a lot of DMs lately, and they all basically say the same thing. I want to build something, I want to work on something, I want to create something, but I cannot get myself to do it. I just don't feel motivated. How do I fix that?

Here's what I want you to know. The way you're asking the question is actually indicative of the problem. You're asking, how do I get more motivated so I do this thing? But you're thinking about this all backward. You were sold this idea that motivation is the thing that separates the people who make it from the people who don't. Like if you just had enough of it, you'd naturally get where you want to go.

But that's not how it works. Motivation doesn't build things because motivation is a fuckboy. Think about it. Some days he shows up, everything clicks, you feel like the person you always knew you could be. You get more done in one afternoon than you did all week. You're vibing. But then, he's just gone. And instead of working, you're now lying on the couch, doing a full analysis of what you did to drive him away. And just like a fuckboy, every day you spend waiting for motivation to be what kickstarts you into getting into action is a day you could have just moved forward without even thinking about him.

So today we're going to talk about what actually moves you forward when motivation doesn't show up.

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.

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So one of the reasons I wanted to do this episode is someone in my community DM'd me that she's been writing a book for years. Being a New York Times bestselling author myself, which I will never get tired of reminding myself, I always have a soft spot for authors and the writing process and I know what a grind it can be. And I know how it can feel when you don't feel motivated to write.

And so this person is almost done and she's completely stopped working on her book. She's been working on it for literally a decade. She's so close to the finish line, but she's just stopped. And she's convinced that by the time the book comes out, it'll be outdated, it will be irrelevant, nobody's going to read it. So what's the point of even finishing it?

And she's calling that a motivation problem, right? She says has no motivation to write anymore. And this is exactly what I mean when I say motivation is a fuckboy. The second things got hard and scary and uncertain, he was gone, right? He does not stay when it counts. And if you have built your entire ability to work around whether or not he shows up that day, you've given a very unreliable person, or a very unreliable emotion, an enormous amount of power over your life.

In order to break up with this way of thinking about motivation, you need to understand what you think it is and why those misconceptions are leading you astray. We think that motivation is a natural feeling that just arises in us and is somehow inherent, right, either to the task or to us. So we may think that certain tasks or projects motivate us or don't motivate us. And in this framing, the motivation is either created by the external thing we need to do or by some interaction between us and the thing that either makes us feel motivated or not.

Or sometimes we generally personalize it. Like we'll say we just don't feel motivated in general. We feel tired, we feel overwhelmed, we feel hopeless, we feel distracted, and we're missing motivation as if motivation is the

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same as some kind of general just get-to-it-ness that we don't have but want and that we think would cause us to attack all of our life with more vigor.

The second piece of our unconscious belief system around motivation is the belief that we need motivation to do things and that if we don't have motivation or feel motivated, we can't do things. The problem is this makes us powerless victims of this emotion that we believe we can't create or control. Just like if we give somebody who only texts us "you up" at 3:00 a.m. every other week the power to determine whether we're desirable and wanted and we'll have intimacy.

And so when we do this, when we think about motivation as something we need to get things done, but that we don't have control over, that means that becoming the person we want to be and creating the results we want to create is out of our hands. That's what it would mean if it were true that this is what motivation was and how it operates and how necessary it is. But none of that's true.

For our purposes, I'm not going to focus in this episode so much on what motivation is psychologically speaking, because there are different theories and it's really not one thing. People use the word to describe a different set of skills and impulses and behaviors depending on their perspective. For our purposes, I want to talk about the story and beliefs we have about motivation because that's what's really leading us astray and where we can use thought work to help.

So there are two ways that those beliefs about motivation that I just described can get in our way. First, because we believe that we need motivation to do things, if we don't feel it, we don't do things. And worse, we think that makes sense and that's necessary and unavoidable and can't be changed. So we may never start something that's important to us, or we

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start and stop, and if we wake up without feeling motivated, whatever we think that feels like, we just don't make progress.

And because we think motivation is what makes us do things, if we aren't feeling motivated, quote unquote, if we aren't doing something, we don't actually look any deeper. We just attribute it to this mysterious motivation that's missing. So when we aren't doing something, rather than really diving into what is going on in our brains about it and coaching ourselves, we just chalk it up to not being motivated and give up.

The good news is if we change these two beliefs about motivation, if we stop believing that it just is something that happens to us, and if we stop believing that we need it to happen to us to do things, we can get unstuck very powerfully. So after this quick break, I'm going to give you some examples of how that looks in some client stories and in my own life.

Okay, so what does it look like if we change our relationship to these ideas we have about motivation? Let's go back to that person who DM'd me that I mentioned at the beginning of the episode who isn't working on her book. So she's telling herself she's not motivated. But what's really causing her inaction is her thoughts. Right? Her thought that she told me was, by the time this comes out, nobody will care.

That thought creates a feeling of hopelessness. And when you feel hopeless, when it seems pointless to you, you obviously are not going to sit down and write. You scroll your phone, or you reorganize what you have, you clean your house, you watch TV, you tell yourself you'll come back to it when you feel motivated, which is just a nicer way of saying that you're just waiting for that fuckboy to come back into your life and give you the gift of getting something done.

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And so the result is the book doesn't get finished. And that proves her thought true, right? It feels and becomes more and more irrelevant to her because she keeps not working on it. Nobody's going to read a book that never comes out. Correct. A book that never comes out is irrelevant. That's true because she's not working on it. So her brain created the exact outcome it was afraid of and then pointed at it and said, see, I told you so. No wonder you don't want to do it.

When she was writing the book, it wasn't because she was in a magical state called motivated. It wasn't because the fuckboy had moved in, showing up consistently. It's because she had thoughts that created the emotion of excitement or willingness or interest or whatever, to actually do the work.

So what is a different thought that's actually true and that her brain could work with without immediately rejecting it? This book is definitely going to matter is not the thought, right? Her brain has been around long enough to know that fake positivity kind of isn't going to help. She can't know for sure that it will definitely matter. And that's going to kind of keep her where she is, trying to believe something that's too far.

She needs a new thought her brain can't argue with. And here's what's actually and arguably true. She's already shown up to write this thing for 10 years. She was writing it. She was making progress until she started having this thought as she got to the finish line. So what she needs is a thought that connects her to the identity of the person who can finish the book. For instance, I'm someone who finishes what she starts. Or I'm almost done, there's only a little way to go. Or it's important to me to finish the book whether or not someone ever reads it.

Now that thought is not going to probably fill her with excitement. It's not going to be that feeling of what we associate with motivation, flow state, excitement, energized. That doesn't summon the fuckboy out of nowhere.

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But what you feel is something that a fuckboy can never give you, which is commitment. These thoughts will help her feel committed. They align her with the identity of a committed person. When she feels committed, she will open the manuscript and do the next thing because that's what commitment does. Commitment sidesteps the question of whether you feel like it. It's not about your feeling at all. It's not about whether it seems exciting or interesting or anything else.

Waiting for that excitement is what creates inconsistency, but commitment is a long game that works every time. And it is decided by which thought you practice thinking. The thought that keeps you waiting by the phone for the fuckboy to text you, waiting for any little sign that motivation might be coming and not doing anything in the meantime, or the one that affirms for you that you don't need to wait for a magical state to descend on you, you can just work on something anyway.

So that's a story of someone who was working and stopped. Now, what about if you aren't getting going at all? So I recently had a client who left her corporate job to build a consulting practice, and she was all excited about the idea at first, but then she just hasn't gotten going. She has not sent a proposal. She has not reached out to clients. And she came and was like, I just don't feel motivated.

Now, when she said that, of course, I knew who gives a fuck, right? That's not the point. We got to get to why are you taking the actions or not taking the actions that you're taking? What are you thinking? And when we coached on it, discovered that underneath that quote unquote lack of motivation was this subconscious fear she had. She had been excited to start her own business because she wanted to get out of her full-time job. But she had this belief that if you are going to be an entrepreneur, you have to work all the time.

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And at the same time in her personal life, she felt that she was getting older, she wanted to have a family, and so she was actually afraid that if she hit the gas on her consulting business, she wouldn't have time or attention to find a partner and build a family. So this is not an issue of motivation. The issue isn't that she's not motivated to build a business. The issue is that her brain had created this false dichotomy that was paralyzing her, and she wanted motivation to show up to propel her over the hump of this problem that she had created in her mind. But no amount of motivation can get you over a subconscious block where you have made up this danger for yourself.

She was the one who had decided that she couldn't work on her business because that would preclude her from finding a partner and having a family. And her brain came up with that story because it had absorbed all the socialization women get, that work and family are at odds, that successful women aren't attractive to men, or they end up lonely old spinsters, that moms who work are not good moms, that a woman can't have both a successful career and a happy family. We get all that messaging. So her brain had absorbed that and her brain was sabotaging her business, trying to in its own weird way be helpful, to quote unquote make space for the family life she wants, but she was not aware of any of that.

All she saw or experienced was being stalled, being stuck. And then her brain used that as more evidence that she'd made the wrong choice, right? Oh, you bet on yourself, you were going to try to be an entrepreneur, you put yourself out there, but look, you're not motivated, you can't do it. You're never going to get it done. It's never going to succeed. And then she's looking for motivation and trying to coach herself to be motivated, but it's not an issue of motivation. She feels dread and overwhelm because she's telling herself that these two things she wants are incompatible and then she's paralyzed.

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So the solution is not to get motivated, right? The solution is changing her thinking so that she can both pursue a family and pursue her business, right? It's to consciously make space for spending time dating and looking for a partner or starting a family on her own, however she wants to do it, while also making space for working on her business and building her belief that both family and work can coexist, and that will return her to her ability to take action.

I'll give you one last example, which is me writing this podcast. Even though I feel really passionately about this topic, when it came time to write the podcast on my calendar, it was just a day that I did not feel excited or motivated to work on anything. And I am someone who is neurodivergent. I can get into a really easy flow state when I am like getting dopamine from something I'm really interested in. And when I'm not or when my nervous system is fried or I'm too tired or whatever, hormones of perimenopause, there's a million reasons. There are days that it just feels like trudging through mud to get anything done. And it probably takes four times as long.

But you know why you're listening to this podcast? Because I still got it done. And it's not from berating myself. We talk about forcing ourselves like that's this very negative, punitive thing, and it can be when we talk to ourselves that way. But for me, I got it done, not because I berated myself, but because I don't believe that I have to feel good to get something done. I believe that I can get something done even when I don't want to. Even when I don't feel motivated, even when it feels four times as hard and takes four times as long as it might on another day, I don't make that a problem. I don't tell myself that means something and I don't tell myself I can't do it.

Now, when I can, maybe I'll shift things around on my schedule, but I couldn't do that today. This podcast needed to get written. It needed to get recorded, that needed to get done today. I was not willing to not release a podcast after eight years of weekly podcasts because I had this feeling or a lack of feeling on this day.

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I have been building a business and doing this podcast for a decade and I often don't feel motivated. There are a lot of things about building a business and running one and being a podcaster and teaching and writing a book and all these things that are not things I feel emotionally excited about in the moment. I just don't think that's a problem. Motivation is nice when it shows up. That's fun, but I can't build a life with it. It's not a partner I can depend on.

So if on a given day, which is probably more days than not, the fuckboy doesn't show up, even though he texted and said he would, right? Okay, so what do I actually believe about what I'm doing and why it matters? Who am I? What is my identity? What matters to me? Why am I doing this? These are all things I can connect to that get me to take action without feeling motivated.

Sometimes I just need to remind myself that I don't need motivation to get something done. I can just do it without it and it might take longer, feel worse, be more boring, but I can still do it. Sometimes I need to do some deeper thought work like the client examples I gave. When it comes to this podcast, I didn't need to do deeper thought work, but sometimes that's necessary. But either way, I'm not letting whether motivation happens to have texted me you up determine if I'm going to make progress.

The people you look at who seem like they have it together, they are building things, they are finishing things, they are putting things out in the world, they're not more motivated than you. They just stop making motivation the prerequisite. They made a decision about who they are and what kind of person they're going to be and what kind of follow-through and commitment they're going to have. And they show up to that commitment even when they don't feel the exciting feeling of motivation in their body. They just show up anyway, over and over, on the days it feels good and on the days it absolutely does not. When you do that, you can accomplish whatever you want, whether you feel motivated or not.