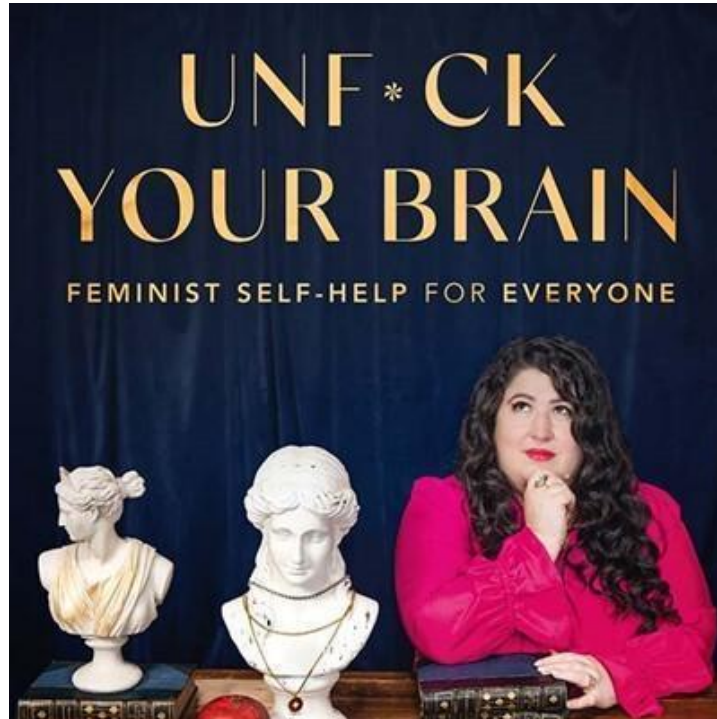


UFYB 491: Coaching Hotline: Thought Work, Moral Objectivism & The Motivation to Set Goals



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 coaching hotline, all one word. Let's get into this week's questions.

Our first question is one that I do get asked a lot and I've answered before in other formats, but I'm not sure I've answered it in one of these. And I think it's such a good question and I think a lot of you are probably wondering. So, here's the question:

"Hi Kara, I have a question about thought work and goals. Isn't any goal you set because you want to feel a certain way? Thoughts create your feelings. So if you change your thoughts, you will feel differently. But if you already feel how you want to feel, what is motivating you to set any goals to further yourself? What creates the desire to do something if it's not for wanting to feel a certain way? It could apply to career, fitness, love, or anything. I'm sure you get this question a lot. Sorry if you've already covered this."

So, nothing to be sorry for. It's a good question and I do answer it a lot because it comes up a lot because it's an obvious question for people to ask when they start engaging with the work. So that's why I want to answer it here.

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It's almost like you have to completely swap your paradigm. So right now, the only reason you can imagine doing something is because you want to feel differently. But what if it's possible to do something for another reason? Like, let's imagine if you only ever have gone to move your body because you don't want to feel guilty. And then you decide you don't want to do it for that reason anymore, but your brain can't comprehend there could be another reason.

Now, that one's probably easier for you to see like, "Oh, well, maybe you would want to do it because it feels good or because you want to get stronger or whatever it is," right? Because just for the joy of it, you can see some other alternatives, right? Or let's say you've only ever kissed someone out of obligation, and then you're like, "I don't want to do that anymore." So how would I know when I want to kiss someone? "Oh, like maybe I would want to do it just because it seems fun. Like I would like to." I'm just trying to give you a few different examples, but it's like you have to completely switch the paradigm from, we only go do things to feel better about ourselves, usually, to why might we do something otherwise?

So why would I want to have a business if I know I can be proud of myself anyway? Because I think it would be fun, is really the answer. Because I want to grow or evolve or stretch myself. I think the difference is doing something because you think at the end you'll feel a certain way or doing something because you want to have the experience and you are interested in the process.

So I don't have a business goal because I think when I get to that goal, then I'll feel good about myself, because I know I got to feel that all the way through. It's not like when I get there, then I'm going to just feel it. It's going to be work to get there. I'm not going to feel that way in the beginning, and I'm going to have to figure out how to feel that way, and that's going to be the growth and evolution. And I choose that because to me, growth is a priority. I don't think that's true for everyone, and I don't think there's

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anything wrong with discovering thought work and cleaning up your thoughts and not hating yourself anymore and getting to a place where you just feel good about your life. And you just want to stay there. You want to like keep doing the same things you do in your life and not be setting big goals and trying to do new things. And that's totally fine.

If you think about meditation and what a lot of those traditions teach, it's not necessarily about setting big goals to achieve them. It's about learning to enjoy the present. I think that's a totally valid approach. For me, I personally found that I actually do want to stretch and grow and learn and evolve. Those are experiences and processes that I enjoy, just for the fun of it, just for the joy of existing.

I just feel like we're here. It's a limited amount of time we have here. I want to have a lot of different experiences, not because I'm going to feel happy at the end or feel good about myself at the end or feel content when I don't now. It's not about the goal. It's not about getting to a certain place so I can feel a certain way. It's just because it seems like fun. I want to experience something different.

Maybe, you know, I had a partner and I did work on that relationship and I learned a lot and I learned to love them and I learned to love the relationship. And now I want to have a different relationship because I want to learn to love some other totally different thing, right? I want to do some other kind of work. Like maybe when I've learned to love a job, maybe then I do want to leave it because I just want to learn to love something else. I, for me personally, am very motivated by always getting better and more skillful at understanding what's happening with my mind and being able to manage my thoughts and feelings and being able to manage my mind and create a deeper and deeper like intimacy and mastery of my own experience. And so I'm always going to choose the things that lead me in that direction. But it's not really because of how I want to feel in the sense of I think I'll get a positive emotion if I do that thing.

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So it's normal for this to hurt your brain and I had this exact question when I started doing thought work and it really took me a long time. My teacher would always just say like, "Because it's fun." And it took me a long time for my brain to get it, but now I really do. It's like, if I love myself and I love my life and I know that my self-acceptance and my self-regard and my happiness aren't conditional on any particular goal or outcome, I have to come up with a new reason for setting goals if I want to have them.

And in my experience, I do think there's something in a lot of humans that does lead them to want to stretch and grow and evolve. And so I don't find that most people end up just being like, "Oh, this is actually good. I'm just going to hang out here." But if you do, that's okay, too. Some of what's implicit in this question is like an kind of assumption that we should have goals. Like, "Well, if we just feel good about things, we won't have goals. Then why would we have goals?" Well, I don't know. Do we need goals? We don't have to have them. I don't think that's necessarily a given. But I do find for a lot of people, we do still want them just because we want to, like for me, I always want to blow my own mind. That's really the bottom line. I'm like, "That is so cool. Look what I can do. I had no idea I could do that."

But my happiness isn't dependent on it and my self-regard and self-assessment, self-love are not dependent on it. I just think it's fun. What else am I going to do with myself? I don't want to take up knitting. No offense to knitting. Knitting is great. You could totally blow your own mind with knitting. It's just not my particular thing.

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

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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 review is titled, "Buh-bye B*&CH. I hope everyone finds this podcast. I have been listening to Kara for years. I have changed my mind and thoughts so much. I started with thinking neutral thoughts about my body and that allowed me to move on to and manage other thoughts. I was able to try something I've wanted to do for years because I managed my mind on the matter. Just because I might fail doesn't mean I shouldn't do it. I am a person who tries things. I just hope everyone can find freedom from negative thoughts that hold us back."

Second question. "Okay. Hi Kara. I've been trying to understand the philosophical underpinnings of thought work. Does thought work require that you reject moral objectivism in order to be an effective tool? It is often stated that there's no objective good or bad. Is thought work grounded in moral relativism? Judgments are only true or false relative to something that can vary between people. Or moral emotivism? Judgments are only direct expressions of our emotions and are neither objectively or relatively true or false. Is thought work a tool that only applies emotivism to the domain of the individual mind? Is there space for the idea that there are objective or relative truths in the domain of organizing society, like public policy? And that's why there's a point to working against patriarchy despite there being no good or bad."

So, number one, I have got to be one of the few life coaches in the world who gets questions like this, which I love. I'm going to answer this question in normal layperson talk, not philosophy categories, okay? Because I want it to be accessible to everybody and I don't want to have to teach a

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philosophy 101 class to get it there. So even if you don't understand what moral relativism is or emotivism is or whatever, don't worry about that. Here's my answer to this.

Number one, I think thought work can be effective at any stage. It's not an on-off switch. Thought work is not a purity exercise. There are people who believe God is a circumstance and would put that in the circumstance line and they still use thought work and it's still super helpful. I mean, one of my colleagues, Jody Moore, is a coach for Mormon women. She has thousands of people in her membership. And they're from Jesus Christ, the Church of Latter-day Saints, so they call God Heavenly Father. And she will always say like, "Heavenly Father exists outside the model.

The model helps us understand human life." And like the model works for her, even though somebody else might say, "Well, God is a thought." So I think that the model and thought work are tools and we can use them halfway or only in some circumstances or kind of be using them wrong, and they're still helpful because they're insights that help us understand what's happening to us and help us get some perspective. It's just like meditation is useful even if you meditate five or 10 minutes a day, even if you don't do a week-long or three, five-year-long meditation retreat.

So I do not think that it requires anything in order to be helpful. I think there are people probably who listen to my podcast and find it really helpful and still secretly believe that some things are right or wrong, but it helps them deal with the 20% of life that they don't think that applies to maybe. And great, it's still helping them.

So that's the first answer to that question. There's like no purity test. You always get to decide what you want to believe. I personally am pretty radical in my relativistic beliefs, but that's me, and also I'm a coach and this is my whole life. You know what I mean? This is the work I do. Of course, it

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makes sense that I would take it to a pretty far extreme personally. That doesn't mean you have to go there with me to find the work useful.

So that's the first question. The second question is, I would say that thought work for me, especially really, yes, is grounded in moral relativism. I definitely don't think judgments are expressions of our emotions because I think our thoughts cause our feelings. So for a judgment to be a direct expression of our emotion, that would mean that the emotion comes first and then we decide the thought. A judgment is a thought in the sense of the model, right? So I don't believe that. I do believe it's all completely relative because all of meaning is created by a human mind. I don't believe that we are discerning moral truths about the world by using our mind, the same way we might discern physical truths. And honestly, half the shit we think is a physical truth we've discerned, we later find out to be wrong.

So I am really pretty radical in my belief that humans kind of have no idea what's going on most of the time. We're just operating in a world that is created completely of our thoughts and understandings and sometimes those might be accurate and sometimes they're not. And to me, that doesn't mean it's nihilism and nothing matters. It just means it's sort of a version of humility of like, "Listen, everything humans have been so sure about, it's turned out they were wrong or at least later generations thought they were wrong. And so that's probably happening to us right now. And so let's focus on what seems to produce the results we want now while we're alive for ourselves or, you know, we might want results for future people, but it's still like what we see now as what we think is a good outcome and that's what we're working on and without sort of claims to absolute truth about it."

In terms of the idea that there are objective or relative truths in the domain of organizing society, I don't think that there are objective truths in organizing society. I think that's all still relative. Right? It has to be because societies have had totally different ideas of what was acceptable or not.

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Even things like murder have not been taken the same way by all societies. There have been societies where it was okay to murder certain kinds of people for certain kinds of offenses. And then societies where that was never okay. And then societies where like murder is okay, but only if the state says you can or the state does it. I don't believe that any of it's objective. I'm not an anarchist. I think that what society is just a group of us getting together and being like, "Okay, for right now, these are the rules we're going to use so that there's a dispute resolution process." Like that's really what I think government is in the beginning is just a dispute resolution process. And we all agree on like what those rules are going to be, but I don't think they represent any objective truth.

Now, the last part of this question is, "Why is there a point to working against patriarchy if there's no good or bad, basically?" And my answer to that is, because that's my preference. This is where so many of you get stuck, and I understand that. It's a complicated concept. Well, it's a simple concept, but deep understanding is required, like most things with thought work. I don't think that I can prove in any objective way that patriarchy is worse than non-patriarchy. It's better for straight rich white men, right? I have my preference, my individual value and preference is for more equality and access to opportunity.

I don't believe I can prove that's objectively right. That's just what I want. I personally like those thoughts. And so that's what I work to create. And that's really what I see government and democracy especially as being about is just people with competing visions of the good life trying to achieve it and trying to convince each other that their vision is the best one. They're all subjective. So I don't believe that there are objective truths in organizing society.

Okay, so for the person who answered this question, I understand that may not have been satisfying in the sense that I'm not making a lot of subtle discernments between different philosophical schools because I do want

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this work to be, I want this answer to be accessible and make sense to the most people. But hopefully you can extrapolate from that as you like to narrow it in more academic terms.