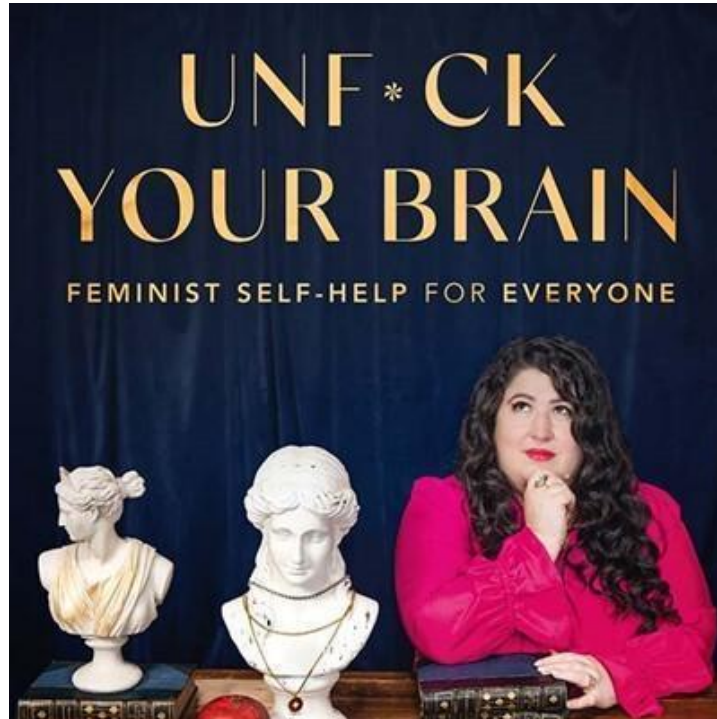


UFYB 500: The Two Biggest Ways Women Hold Back (& What Comes Next for UFYB)



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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All right, my friends, today is the 500th episode of Unf*ck Your Brain. And also, it's Thursday. Just a Thursday, the way it's been a Thursday 500 times now since the spring of 2017. That's not true. There haven't been 500 Thursdays, but there have been 500 episodes. I just want to sit with that for a second because it's a very weird feeling. 500 episodes feels like a big milestone, and yet sitting down to record this, it feels similar to sitting down to record episode four or 47 or 312. You just show up, you do it, and then you do it again the next week. And you keep doing it.

That is nine years, is one to two episodes a week, every single week, without a break. Like babies who were born after this podcast launched are now in elementary school. The world has changed a lot. My life has changed several times over, and yet every Thursday and now every Tuesday as well, there's an episode. So I want to tell you a little bit about where this started because I think that context matters for what I want to share today. And then I have some news about what we're doing next. And then I want to do what we always do, which is get to work on your brain.

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.

This podcast started in 2017 as something called The Lawyer Stress Solution, which tells you exactly how narrowly I was thinking when I started about who I was talking to and what I had to offer them. I had a handful of one-on-one coaching clients that I had found through social media and word of mouth. And in my first 12 months of working on my business full-time, I'd made fifty thousand dollars, which felt simultaneously like a miracle and not enough. And six months after I launched the podcast, my one-on-one practice was full and I was starting my group program. Within a year, I had rebranded to Unf*ck Your Brain and the podcast had gone mega viral,

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which is still one of the stranger sentences I've ever said out loud about my own life.

This podcast was the engine of everything that came next in my business in a way that I don't think I fully understood while it was happening. It put this work in front of people who didn't know they needed it and came to rely on it. And week after week at scale, it has moved the needle for me in a way that nothing else could have. And in the decade since, pretty much everything else has changed: my programs, my team, the scale of my business, where I live, my relationship status, becoming a stepparent, who I am as a person. The podcast has been there through all of that. And now it's time for something new.

Don't panic. This is not the end of the podcast, far from it, but we do have a few exciting announcements for this milestone. So the first one is our YouTube channel. We are relaunching our YouTube channel with real video. Because if nine years of feminist mindset tools and brain hacks and whatever the opposite of soft life girl bossing is worth anything, it's worth reaching more people. So you can find the channel by searching my name on YouTube or any vaguely correct spelling of it. You're going to get video versions of the podcast like this one, but we're also creating content exclusive to YouTube on the topics I know you're all working on because the patriarchy did not give us a timeline and it doesn't give us a grace period. So we're going to be talking about imposter syndrome, self-love, people pleasing, caring too much what other people think, all of our greatest hits topics, but with brand new content. So go subscribe, share it with a friend who needs it.

And if you missed the announcement from a couple of weeks ago, we also have a brand new podcast because I just can't ever do a little. This is called The Future Coach, and this podcast is for anyone who's already a coach, is thinking about becoming a coach, is wondering whether to add coaching to their current role, or hasn't even admitted to themselves that they want to

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be a coach. I see you. The podcast covers everything you need to know about building or improving your coaching practice. So go find that wherever you listen.

And now, here's what's coming next on this podcast. Going forward, most months are going to include two new teaching episodes with brand new content, one interview with someone whose work I think you all need to hear about, and one greatest hits episode where we revisit the most powerful teachings from across all 500 of our episodes. There's so much life-changing knowledge in those past episodes. I get emails from people all the time about how the podcast has changed their life. And whether you've never heard them or are hearing them for the second or 10th time, you're always going to come away from something new.

The episode that came out last week, right before this one, was about the human void. The idea that dissatisfaction is not a problem you can solve, that the restlessness, that low hum of maybe I need something else is a feature of human consciousness, not a signal that something specific is wrong with your circumstances or your choices or yourself. And if that's true, if the void can't be filled and the restlessness is permanent, then the question becomes, what are we doing with ourselves? What is the point of any of this? Right? If we're not chasing permanent contentment, if permanent contentment is not on the table, what are we doing here? And that is the question I've been sitting with as I thought about what I want this podcast to do in the next 500 episodes. And my answer, after nine years of teaching women to think differently, is actually quite specific.

Women cannot live full lives if they cannot show up fully in the world. And most women have learned to make themselves smaller, to show up carefully rather than completely, because showing up fully has always felt like too much of a risk. And the two places that shows up most clearly, the two behaviors I watch constrain women's lives more than almost anything else are these: women not asking for what they want is the first. And I

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mean that both literally, like they're not saying the words to ask for what they want, and in a bigger sense, they're not going after what they want. And second and related, women are not telling the truth about how they feel to others or themselves. And those are the two things I want to talk about today.

So I want you to think about the last time you wanted to ask for something: a raise, a change in your relationship, something from a friend. And then what happened inside your head? How quickly did you start negotiating with yourself whether to say anything, what to say if you did, how to say it? You started calculating the risk, wondering if you were being too demanding or too needy or not strategic about the timing, and you probably eventually talked yourself out of it. Maybe you told yourself it just wasn't that important. Maybe you told yourself you'd bring it up when the moment was better. Maybe you just decided to figure it out and deal with it yourself.

And think about the last time something happened where you felt hurt or frustrated or something felt wrong, and what did you do with it? By the time you had finished processing it, you'd probably talked yourself out of having that feeling or decided it was not worth raising it, not worth having a conversation about it, or that saying something about it would create more problems than staying quiet. So you absorbed it, you adjusted, and you just kept going. This is a really common and consistent pattern I see across the women I coach, regardless of age, background, career, relationship status, anything. Whether you run a company or you're just starting out in a corporation, whether you're married with three kids or you're single and dating, you could be 26 or 62. Across all of those lives, it's the same two absences, the same two voids. Not the human void, but the void of not asking for what you want and not telling the truth about how you feel.

We have to understand where this comes from in order to solve it. Women are trained from the time they're very young to believe that their wants are inconvenient. How often do we use the word needy? Mostly to describe

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women and girls. Women who ask for things are demanding. Women who express preferences are high maintenance. Women who know what they want and say so directly are difficult or bossy or too much. This training is consistent and it starts early, and by the time most women are adults, they've internalized it so deeply that they are policing themselves before anyone else even has to.

And the socialization we get around feelings is equally clear. Women's emotions are coded as irrational, overwrought, hysterical, too much. And there's a specific kind of social punishment for a woman who says she's upset and then is told she's being emotional, and then the emotion becomes the problem or the topic of discussion rather than whatever caused it. So women learn that feelings are something to be managed privately, quietly, and that the goal is to make other people comfortable rather than to be honest about their own experience.

So women end up developing an extraordinarily sophisticated set of strategies for not asking directly and not saying how they actually feel. We ask in the form of questions, we couch our desires in apologies, we say we're fine when we're not. We say it doesn't matter when it does, right? We say whatever it takes to keep the temperature in the room from rising, and then we wonder why we're so burned out and feel so alienated.

Many women, if you ask them right now what they actually want in some area of their life, would have to think about it. And that's not because they don't really know deep down. That's what they think. But really, it's because they've been editing themselves in real time for so long that it's become hard to connect to what they actually want. The wanting has become attenuated because they have been suppressing it. And what I've learned coaching thousands of women is that when a woman says she doesn't know what she wants, it's not really true.

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On some level, she does know what she wants. The problem is that she's already decided it's impossible or too much to ask for or just not available to her. And once you've convinced yourself that what you actually want is off the table, then you can't connect to wanting something else in its place either. So you end up feeling like you actually don't know what you want or can't articulate a preference. But it's not because you don't have something you want. It's because once you've taken what you do want off the table, nothing else feels all that compelling. And the cost of these little moments across a whole life just compound.

If you have been working outside your job description for two years, but you've never said that you want more compensation or a promotion, then you're performing the job and you're performing competence and you're waiting to be recognized, but you're not speaking up for yourself. You tell yourself that eventually someone is going to notice and reward you and you won't have to ask. But that's not really how life works and that's not how most jobs work. And you maybe already even know that. But asking out loud feels like too much, so you wait. And sometimes you get passed over, not because you weren't good enough, but because you weren't actually telling anyone what you were doing and advocating for what you deserve for it.

If you've spent years going along with what your partner wants in a relationship because your wants seem like too much to introduce, think about all of the cost of those little things or big things you've never said. Maybe you've never told them that you want more affection or that the way you handle conflict isn't working for you, or that you want to talk more concretely about the future. Maybe you haven't shared that you feel like a roommate rather than a spouse or that there's something you want in bed that you've never been able to bring yourself to ask for.

When you don't tell the truth about who you are in a relationship, you end up performing a version of you, and the relationship that you're having with

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your partner isn't really you at all. You're there, but you're not really there. And then you question your compatibility or if you just need a different partner, but you can't know if you're compatible with someone when you aren't actually being your full self.

If you are carrying the invisible load of organizing and remembering and anticipating and managing for everyone in the household, but you are not telling the truth about how that makes you feel, you're never going to get the change you want. Maybe you're hinting or you're sighing or you're being passive aggressive, right? Or you're crying in the bathroom and then saying you're fine, but none of that is going to get you the outcome that you want.

In each of these examples, you are living a smaller version of your life than you could be. You have a full interior life full of wants and feelings and perceptions and opinions, even if you've gotten a little disconnected from them, they are there. But you are not really living that life because you are playing small, staying quiet, not asking for what you want, and not telling the truth about what you feel. So even though you may be physically present, you are emotionally and mentally absent in ways that matter.

All right, I know that sounds bleak, but of course, I would never diagnose the problem and not give you a solution. So we're going to take a quick break, but stay with me, and when I come back, I am going to tell you how to start fixing this.

So here's the part where I tell you the solution is just start asking for things and telling the truth. Easy peasy, right? There you go. We don't need any more podcast episodes. We're done. But of course, it's not that easy. The reason you're not asking for what you want isn't because you don't know how to form a sentence, and the reason you're not telling the truth about how you feel isn't because you have a character flaw. Let's all say it together. After 500 episodes, we know the reason: it's your thoughts.

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So you're thinking, if I ask for this, I'm going to seem like too much. If I say how I really feel, I'm going to hurt someone and that'll be my fault. What I want is not important enough to make it a whole conversation, or just, I shouldn't need this. I should be able to be happy without it. These thoughts are the product of socialization. They are not true, but you were taught to think them.

Growing up in a culture with a specific, narrow, highly inconvenient set of rules about what women are allowed to want and feel and say produces these thoughts. We want to change these ways of showing up, we're going to have to change the thoughts that keep us from asking for what we want and telling the truth about how we feel. And that is exactly what we're going to work through together in the episodes that are coming up on this podcast. But what I want to leave you with right now is a vision of what life can be like on the other side when you do learn these two skills. Because I think sometimes we need to be able to see where we're trying to get to.

So imagine a version of yourself who can ask for what you want. Not every time, not perfectly. I'm not saying you're going to do it without any anxiety, but who can do it consistently in the places where it actually matters? You ask for the raise and you don't spend the next three days apologizing in your head for having done it. You tell your partner what you need and you say it without the long preamble where you try to soften it so much it barely lands. You ask a friend to reschedule when you're exhausted without a detailed justification.

And imagine the version of yourself who can tell the truth about how you feel, who can say, don't leave me out of the loop on these project meetings, that's why things are going wrong, who can say, the way we divide our household labor isn't working for me, we need to re-juggle this, who can say, I want to go to a kink party, whatever it is. When you do that, your relationships become real ones because the person on the other side is finally relating to you rather than to the carefully managed version of

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yourself you've been presenting. The people who want the real you will be thrilled. And the people who don't, that can be a loss, but it will be revealed quickly and you will spend less time on those relationships trying to make them work than you would have otherwise.

At work, you stop being invisible. The people who make decisions about your career now have the full information because you actually share it. You may not get everything you ask for, but you'll stop watching opportunities go to people who maybe are even less qualified than you, but were willing to put themselves out there and ask for what they want. And most importantly, your relationship with yourself improves. The low-level resentment that builds when you're giving everything and never telling the truth is exhausting. The loneliness of being surrounded by people who don't actually know you is the worst loneliness.

When you start to tell the truth about how you feel and ask for what you want, your life isn't going to become suddenly perfect, but you're going to be actually living in it with presence. That's what I'm talking about. It's not a bigger life necessarily in the sense of more achievements or more recognition, although often that follows, but it's a fuller life where the person moving through the world is actually there, mentally, emotionally, as themselves. And that's what the next chapter of this podcast is going to be about.

We have spent nine years building this foundation, understanding how your brain works, where your thoughts come from, how patriarchy shapes the way you see yourself and what you believe you deserve. And we're going to keep doing all of that. We're going to get really specific about these two things because I think they are the hinge that everything else turns on. A woman who can ask for what she wants and tell the truth about how she feels is a woman who has, in the most fundamental sense, set herself free. And that is what I'm here to help you do too.

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So go find us on YouTube by searching my name, Kara Loewentheil. We've got new content every week, including things you'll not hear anywhere else. And if you're a coach or have ever thought about becoming one, go find The Future Coach podcast wherever you listen.

Now, one more mission of mine for this next decade because it connects directly to everything we just talked about. For years, before I became a coach, when I was still a lawyer, I used to joke constantly that I was going to quit and become a life coach. And I meant it as a joke. That's what I thought it was for years. But of course, it wasn't a joke at all. It was the thing I actually wanted but had already decided was impossible, which, as you may have noticed, is the exact pattern we spent this entire episode discussing.

A lot of you listening or watching are in that same place with coaching. You've been obsessing over this work, you've been evangelizing about it to friends, you've been privately wondering what it would feel like to do it yourself, and then you've been dismissing that thought, usually with something like, who am I to be someone's coach? Because you've been taught to dismiss your dreams. But that isn't just a cost to you. It's a cost to the world and all the people that you could help. Helping the women who are meant to be coaches actually become coaches is one of the core missions of my next decade of work. And I've created something called Coach Curious Prep School for exactly that person.

Over five days with me, you will find out whether coaching is genuinely right for you. You'll identify the specific traits and skills you need to develop, and you'll get the beliefs in place that will carry you into a coaching career rather than leaving you in the someday loop indefinitely. And if it's not the right fit for you, you'll walk away knowing that and you won't have to wonder anymore.

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To find out more, visit unfuckyourbrain.com/curious or text your email to +1 (347) 997-1784 and use code word curious when prompted to get the link to enroll. Thank you for being here. Here's to the last 500 episodes and 500 more to come.