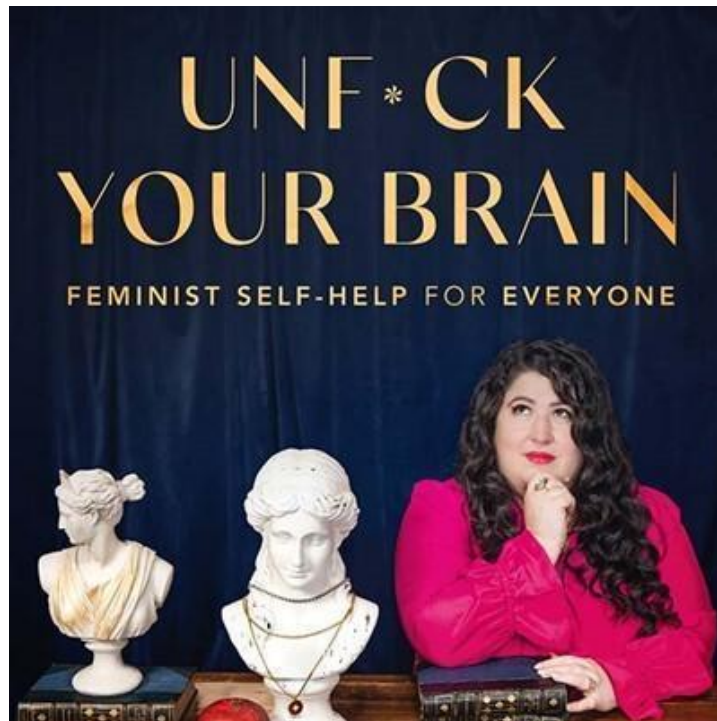


UFYB 520: Speaking Up from Activation v Peace (My Own Self-Coaching!)



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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

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Today's episode is about an interaction that had me first filled with rage and then left me in tears, and how I coached myself through it to speak up from a grounded place.

Let me just say that going through renovation with a male GC and male architect is validating all my most misandrist tendencies, but that's a topic for another episode. The reason I want to share this with you is to show you exactly how to do the process that I taught in our most recent new teaching episode. It's about putting that process of self-awareness into practice. I'm going to walk you through the process in my own brain and life. You're going to learn the difference between speaking up when you're activated and speaking up from a clear place, why it's preferable to do the latter when you can, and how to have compassion for yourself when you can't. So without further ado, let's get into it.

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.

Okay, so quick recap of the last new teaching episode I did. That was UFYB 516. In that episode, I talked about how the initial steps to being able to speak up to ask for what you want or tell the truth about how you feel are one, noticing what you're feeling. You can do this by noticing your body or by noticing what you're feeling the urge to do, check out and disassociate or manage and control, and then noticing the feeling under that. And two, get curious about what thought or story is driving that feeling.

One of the reasons women often have a hard time speaking up is that because of our socialization, we swallow so much. Some people just always swallow and never speak up. Some of us do finally speak up, but then when we do, it's usually because we're just filled with so much rage or

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nervous system activation that we aren't really in control of what we're doing. We feel out of control, we lash out or we explode, and then afterwards we feel scared of the consequences or regretful about our actions. Especially for those of us who want to be in control at all times, we hate that feeling. And so we get even more unwilling to speak up for ourselves.

And then we second guess and doubt ourselves when we want to speak up, and that's because we're socialized to do that, but also because when we don't know how to regulate ourselves or coach ourselves, sometimes our speaking up is being driven by feelings we aren't in control of and creates outcomes that we don't want.

So that's why today I want to walk you through doing this process correctly, but also how to bring self-compassion to it as you practice because you won't always get it right. So let's set the scene here. I'm not going to go deep into details because it's not about who is right or wrong on the details, except I'm obviously right. But the basic scenario is that we're halfway through a big renovation project on an old farmhouse upstate. The various parties involved in the renovation are having a lot of miscommunications with each other. So I've been repeatedly asking that I be included in all communications about the project because it saves time for me to ask clarifying questions as I see the miscommunications happening, rather than find out days, weeks, or months later by accident and then having to fix the problems at that point.

And let's just say this request is not being honored by these various parties. So miscommunications keep happening. And this week there were three significant ones in about 24 hours that cost money and pushed the project back. By the time we got to the last one, I was furious. So the first step to take, right, was noticing that I was feeling very activated. For me, I've built the body awareness at this point, so there was no mystery about what was happening here. I was very aware. My signals happen in both my brain and

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my body. So I felt red hot in the face, I felt tense in my body, my heart rate increased. My mind started spinning with a verbal narrative about how fucked up this was, how mad I was, how I hated everyone involved, how wrong they all were, etc. Right? Just a torrent of thoughts about how wrong other people are is usually a good sign for me that I am activated. And I felt a rising desire to scream in my body.

So we'll talk more about identifying emotions in your body in a future episode, and I recommend a silent or out loud primal scream when you need one. But if I had not been as in touch with my body, I would have still been able to identify what was going on because I would have been able to notice that what my brain wanted me to do right now was control everyone. So I was not in a calm mental state thinking about what I can actually control and what I can't, recognizing other people's agency, and focused on speaking up about my own truth. That's not where I was. I was focused on thinking about how they were wrong for what they were doing and they should change their behavior and I was right and everyone should do what I said, and how can I make them do what I want. So even if I didn't have that awareness of my body, I could have noticed that and used those thoughts as a signal to myself that something was happening. I was obviously having a feeling.

The next step is getting curious about what the thoughts are. In this case, the thoughts driving this were things like, this is infuriating. I can't fucking believe this. This is outrageous. I'm paying these people to do a job, so they should do what I say. I would never let this fly in my own business. I can't control this.

So now I knew I was mad, and I knew what my thoughts were. What I wanted to do was fire off an email response expressing my anger. I wrote several angry drafts in my head. I texted my husband with a lot of all caps about it. But then I started second guessing myself. I started thinking through all their possible responses and whether I could defend myself

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against all of them. I started wondering whether I was overreacting, maybe this wasn't such a big deal, maybe I was getting activated in a way that was undeserved, quote-unquote. I started feeling preemptively afraid of their reaction.

So now I was not just spiraling because of my thoughts about the situation, but also because of my thoughts about my own reaction. Wanting to say something to speak up for myself, but scared to do it because I didn't fully believe I could justify it. And because I could tell on some level that I was activated and not grounded and that I might later not love the way I showed up in this moment if I took impulsive action.

So right there is where a lot of women get stuck and just spiral for days or weeks until their brain finally moves on and they never said anything. But obviously that's not what I did. So after this quick break, I'm going to share how I coached myself through this.

Welcome back. So if you were going to guess what I did first, you would probably guess that I coached myself to become calm and clear before communicating, right? Nope. I told myself I had full permission to respond while activated, even if I was going to later see things differently. Now, that seems weird, right? Why am I, a world-famous life coach, telling myself to go ahead and act unhinged without managing my mind at all? Because that's what self-compassion means.

Now, I wasn't saying to myself, whatever you do is right and you are perfect and always justified and always correct. So even if you send an email when you are full of rage, it's going to be objectively perfect. I was saying to myself, you're a human. Sometimes humans react before we're regulated. We're going to try to regulate, but if we do react before we can get there, I still love you. You're allowed to be human.

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Because the truth is that while it's easier to be aware of really intense dysregulation, sometimes we're able to get like 80% of the way to calm, and then we mistake where we are for having fully worked through it when we haven't. Or sometimes the circumstances just don't allow us to wait until we're fully regulated. If we're going to shame ourselves and beat ourselves up and dismiss our feelings, if we think we're not perfectly regulated and correct, then we're never going to speak up. And when we treat ourselves that way, we're mimicking exactly the kind of parenting or socialization we got growing up that taught us not to speak up in the first place.

So telling myself this immediately took down some of the activation because I was deploying self-compassion ahead of time. I was allowing for the fact that I might not be objectively correct, I might not be perfectly measured or fair in my reaction, and that I'm allowed to be a human and sometimes that happens.

Once I extended that compassion to myself, I was able to relax a little bit. That little bit of calming down helped me start to get curious about why I was reacting so strongly. Right, so that's that second part of the process where we get curious about what thoughts are driving this reaction. So this literally just looked like asking myself, why am I so upset about this? Of course, at first, my brain offered all the same thoughts about what was wrong with everyone and how outrageous their behavior was. Obviously, that's why I'm upset. But then I asked myself two of my favorite questions: So what? And why is that a problem for me?

And the answer was, because I'm paying them and they're ignoring me. And that brought out the tears, which is really unexpected for me. Because I realized that after spending a lot of my life feeling like my feelings or experience didn't matter, and that people around me blamed me for all of their own feelings and behavior, I have changed a lot in my life to have a different experience. Obviously, I changed my thinking to take back my own power over what I can control. But I've also used that new way of thinking

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to prioritize decisions in life that allow me a lot of autonomy not to be in relationship with people with whom I cannot communicate effectively or who don't take responsibility for things.

I run my own business where radical responsibility is one of our values. I chose a husband who apologizes and owns his own half of things, and I keep relationships with people who can't own their side of things at arm's length most of the time. But now, on this project, I'm in a relationship with people I can't control who are impervious to my attempts to solve the problems I see happening from my perspective in the way I think is best. And that allowed me to see how I was resisting reality, which is always the cause of our suffering. The reality is that these other people have human autonomy, even if I have hired them to do a job. I have human autonomy too, of course, right? I could fire them if I truly don't want to tolerate this behavior and if I'm willing to suffer the consequences of increased delay and cost and whatever else might happen. But I can't control their behavior.

My brain has the thought that if you pay someone, they should not ignore what you ask them to do. And a lot of you would probably agree with that, but that doesn't make it objectively true. It's just a thought. Some of you might not agree with that. Some of you might agree with it under certain circumstances. Every human has the agency to agree or not agree with it, including people I hire. As soon as I saw that, I felt free. And this is why I will never stop beating the drum about why you must have these cognitive coaching skills and why simply regulating your nervous system is not enough. You cannot regulate your way out of a repeating thought pattern that causes activation because your brain just keeps repeating the thought and restarting the activation.

So, does this mean that since I was calm and I recognized everybody's agency, I just said nothing? No, I did speak up for myself. But instead of trying to control, I told the truth about what I was feeling. I said I'm frustrated that my previous ask hasn't been respected and that

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miscommunications are continuing to happen that impact cost and time. I explained that I wasn't saying any one person was at fault. I was trying to identify a problem and attempting to solve it. And then I asked for what I wanted. I reiterated that I wanted to be on all communications about the project.

Now, the substance of this was probably not very different than it would have been if I were still activated when I responded. I would have had the same feelings of frustration and the same ask to keep me on the communications. But the articulation and presentation and emotional experience of it was very different. I didn't insult anyone, I didn't make any personal attacks, I didn't inflame things further with extreme language. I can't control how people react to me, but statistically, those things tend to make tension worse, at least with men who haven't been socialized to be peacemakers. But more importantly, I felt totally different about it.

Having coached myself meant I was able to speak up, send that email, and go about my day. I didn't spend the rest of the day angry and ruminating. I didn't get scared of my email and avoid it or compulsively check it for a response. I checked my email as much as I normally would, and my stomach didn't drop every time I checked it out of fear that a response would have come in. And in the end, when I got a response that was, as you might expect, not satisfactory to my brain, I just accepted it and moved on because I had clarity. I knew what I could control and what I could not control. I knew what I was willing to do or not do. I had said my piece, I had made my ask, and I was able to leave it at that without feeling like I had abandoned myself in the process.

On our next new teaching episode, we're going to slow things down again and spend some time on really understanding the brain-body connection that I touched on here and how you can get better at allowing your emotions so that you can get through them as fast as I did. But for now, I

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hope this story has given you an idea of what is possible with this work and reassured you that I am indeed still a human being after all.