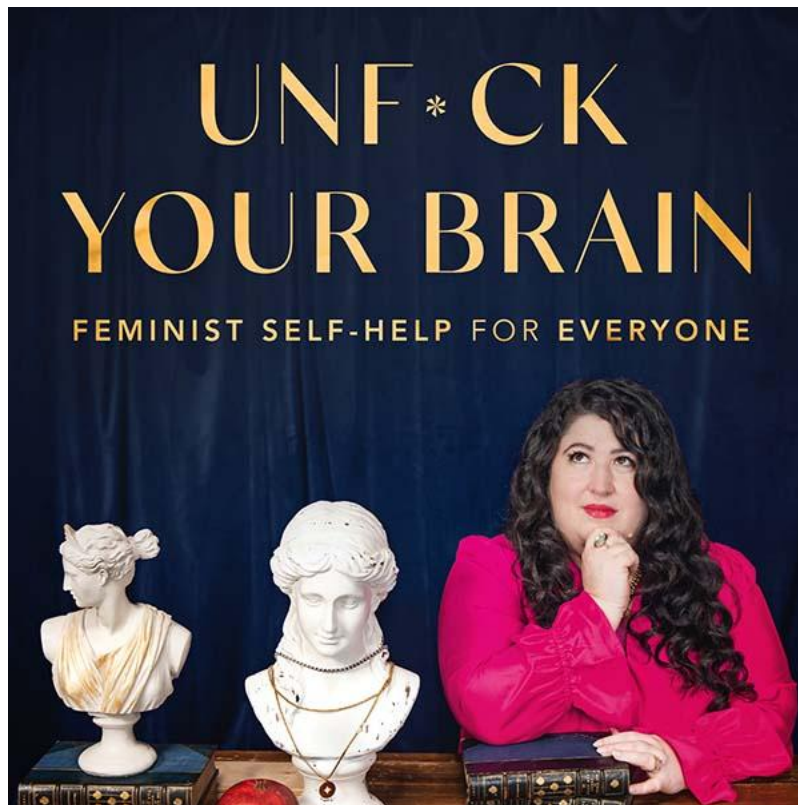


UFYB 526: Why Asking For What You Want Matters Even If You Don't Get It



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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"There's no point in asking for it if I probably won't get it." That's what a client said to me the other day during a coaching session. We were talking about her desire to expand her role at work to include more client-facing, deal development type of things. And she'd been wanting to do this for a while, but her brain had a million reasons it wouldn't work out. She didn't look as polished as the other women on that team. She'd once said something awkward to her boss's boss at a holiday party, and she was sure he thought she couldn't be trusted around clients. There wasn't a role open right now that she could apply for even if she wanted to.

There were a million more reasons, but I won't take you down that rabbit hole in detail, because the truth is, I've heard this about every ask you can imagine that a client has been swallowing for months or years. For a raise, for a title change, for a new scope of work, for commitment in a relationship, or for opening it up to see other people, for time without their kids or for more time with their kids, for a change in any element of their household and family dynamics. It seems to be a universal truth held by women who want something that if they can't be reasonably sure they will get it, there's no point in asking.

But I think that's exactly backwards. I think asking for things we may not get, or even believe we are unlikely to get, are the most important things to ask for. So that's what I want to share with you today. Listen to this episode and you will never see asking for what you want the same way again.

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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The number one reason I hear in coaching that women don't ask for what they want is that they're afraid of what will happen. They are afraid of what will happen in their minds. They are afraid of what will happen in their bodies, and they're afraid of what will happen outside of them, which is really being afraid of what will happen in their minds and bodies one step removed.

So I want to break down all three of these, because these are the barriers that are in the way of asking for what you want. And because we are trying to avoid these, the risk-reward analysis feels obviously tilted towards not asking if we don't think we will get what we want. So in order to reframe our thinking here, we have to understand what we are trying to avoid and ideally make it feel less scary.

The first thing we're scared of is what we will think about ourselves if we ask for what we want. And this starts before we even get an answer. Often we have a lot of thoughts about what it means for us or what other people might think of us for even having the desire we want to express or the ask we want to make. And this can be big or small. If we want to change roles at work, we worry it means that we're not grateful for the job we have, or that our colleagues will think that we think we're better than them.

If we want to take a solo trip without our partner or kids, we worry it means that we're a bad parent and that our partner is going to think we're unfairly burdening them. If we want to have our food made differently at a restaurant, we worry it means that we are finicky and picky, and the waiter will think we're being difficult. It really can be any size ask of any import.

Before we even open our mouths, we are dealing with our own thoughts about ourselves or the imagined reactions of others. So before we've done anything, we're already telling ourselves why we're wrong and bad for even wanting to make the ask. When we have these thoughts, of course we

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don't make the ask. We don't even really get to the point of thinking about whether or not we'll get what we want. If we did think about it, we'd assume that we probably won't since we're bad for wanting to ask in the first place, and our brain tells us that even if we did get a yes, the person saying yes would still be silently hating and judging us, since we're bad and wrong for asking in the first place.

Let's say we get past that first stage. We decide that at least intellectually, we believe it's okay to ask, or our friend encourages us to ask and we swear we're going to. But now when it comes time to do it, we freeze up or chicken out because we're afraid of how we will feel in our bodies when we actually say the words. We imagine feeling anxious, feeling guilty, feeling afraid, feeling ashamed, feeling rejected. Just imagining those negative emotions sets off the danger signals in our brain and we instinctively want to avoid those emotions at all costs.

And what's really wild about the brain is that sometimes we'll avoid those emotions and not ask for what we want, even if we're pretty sure we will get a yes, because we imagine asking and then we tell ourselves that even if we get a yes, we're still going to feel guilty because we shouldn't even want that time away from our family, or we'll feel insecure because our boss will only be saying yes to be nice, or whatever other nonsense our brain has come up with. But for sure, if we imagine we'll get a no, or we will probably get a no, of course we don't want to make the ask at all.

And then sometimes we talk ourselves out of asking because of what we imagine the consequences are going to be outside of us. So we're going to ask for that solo trip and our partner's going to say yes, but then the kids will be upset and our partner is going to sulk and it just doesn't seem worth it. We're going to ask for that client-facing role and our boss is going to say yes, but then we're going to feel insecure about our new responsibilities and anxious about actually interacting with the clients when the time

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comes. We're going to ask for the food the way we want it at the restaurant, but even if they say yes, we think they'll be mad and everyone in the kitchen will hate us and someone's probably going to spit in our soup, right? Whatever our brain comes up with as the consequence.

The bottom line is that our brain is able to come up with lots of reasons we shouldn't ask for what we want, even when we think we might get it. And if we think we won't get it, well then why on earth would we ask for it and put ourselves through any of that suffering? But I think there's a very good reason to ask for things you may not or even probably won't get, and it's going to flip your very understanding of the whole point of asking for things at all. That's coming up right after this quick break.

So we've established there are multiple levels to our resistance to asking for what we want. We're afraid of our thoughts about ourselves, we're afraid of how we'll feel, we're afraid of what might happen, which is really being afraid of how we will think and feel about what happens. It would seem natural to think, okay, if there's all these obstacles, why on earth would I ask for something if I'm not sure I can get it? Like, isn't the whole reason of asking for something that you want to get it and you think you can? Like, why would you ask for something you can't have?

This sounds really logical, I know, but I think it's exactly backwards. And there are two main reasons for this. The first is that your brain is not an accurate predictor of what you will get or what will happen. Your brain always assumes the worst. Like you've met your brain, right? Your brain prefers certainty and stability to change and risk in the unknown, even when the unknown is going to be infinitely better. Your brain pretends to be a totally logical and rational thinker, but it's making it all up and it will systematically underestimate you and undersell you on the possibilities of change.

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I want you to think right now about something that you thought you couldn't do or wasn't possible for you at a point in the past that you then did or now you have. If you only ask for things that your current brain tells you are possible or probable, you will not ask for much. If you only ask for things that your brain is sure no one else can have any negative feelings about, you will not ask for much. You can't trust your brain to accurately predict what is reasonable or smart or strategic or safe to ask for, because your brain has been primed by evolution and then programmed by society with all the beliefs that keep humans from taking risks and women playing small.

So listening to your current brain about what's possible for your future self is a great way to never improve your life. The only way to prove to your brain that it's wrong about what you can get is to actually ask. Which is where your brain predictably pulls the emergency brake of, "well, it won't happen so why bother." And so you can see how this is a vicious cycle.

So that's why I want to talk about the second reason to ask for things that you don't believe you can get. And that's because the purpose of asking for what you want is not actually to get it. It's to be the person who asks. Let me say that again. The purpose of asking for what you want is not to actually get it. It's to be the person who asks. You cannot control whether you'll get what you want when you ask for it, if it involves another person having to take action or agree with you. But you can control whether you get what you want long-term based on your actions and your resilience and your persistence.

In any given interaction with another person, you may or may not get the response you want, but long-term, your persistence guarantees that you get what you want. And it is still worth asking because when we swallow our desires and we swallow our hopes and we swallow our dreams, we turn down the volume on our own lives. We take everything from technicolor to gray. We limit ourselves and hold ourselves back and it's not just about the

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actual actions that we get to take or the roles that we get to play. It's about our self-conception. It's about who we think we are. It's about what we think we deserve. It's about what we are telling ourselves is our capacity, our potential, our identity, and our future.

When we continually stifle and smother and shove down the asks that we want to make of ourselves, of other people, of the world, we give ourselves the message over and over again that we can't have what we want and we don't even deserve to want anything. That we don't even deserve to ask. That we are not even worthy of attempting. So we become someone who swallows our desires. We become someone who smothers our own goals. We become someone who turns away from our own purpose and our own destiny. And we blame it on the world around us, but we're the ones doing it to ourselves.

There is a dignity and an integrity and a self-respect to speaking up and telling the truth about how you feel and asking for what you want whether or not you're going to get it. Focusing on whether or not you're going to get it as the deciding factor means putting other people in charge of what you believe you're allowed to even want or say out loud. And that's a recipe for feeling disempowered for your entire life. But when we put the focus on ourselves, on what we want, on our own support for ourselves, when we make it about whether or not we tell our truth regardless of what happens, then we feel grounded and powerful regardless of the outcome.

The more we don't speak up and tell the truth about how we feel and ask for what we want, the more distant and disassociated we get from who we really are. But the more that we do speak up, the more that we do tell the truth about how we feel, the more we do ask for what we want, not because we have to get it to be happy, not because it's only worthwhile if we get a certain outcome, but because we want to be the person who tells the truth,

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who asks for what she wants, who reinforces to herself that she matters and she's worth speaking up for.

When you make it about whether or not you're likely to get what you want, then you can engage in a back and forth with your brain about the probability of the outcome forever. That debate never ends and you never get around to saying anything at all. But when you make speaking up about who you want to become and who you want to show up as in your own life, then you go around, you sidetrack that whole argument. It's irrelevant. It doesn't matter whether you're going to get what you want.

The probability of the yes doesn't matter at this exact juncture from this exact person. What matters is you're becoming a person who speaks up and asks for what she wants. By definition, some of the time you won't get it. Nobody has a 100% batting rate. But that person is much more likely to get what she wants, big picture long-term because of the number of asks she's going to make and continue to make. Statistically, she is just much more likely to get what she wants. But more importantly, she's also going to feel like she's the main character of her own life.

This is exactly why I'm hosting our challenge that's coming up very soon called How to Ask for What You Want. In this challenge, I'm going to help you identify the most important ask that you could make in your life right now, and I'm going to teach you a script and a process for doing it. And I'm going to make sure that you understand what's getting in the way of making that ask so you can finally learn to speak up.

You can join us at unfuckyourbrain.com/whatyouwant, all one word. Or text your email to 347-997-1784 and the code word is whatyouwant, all one word.

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