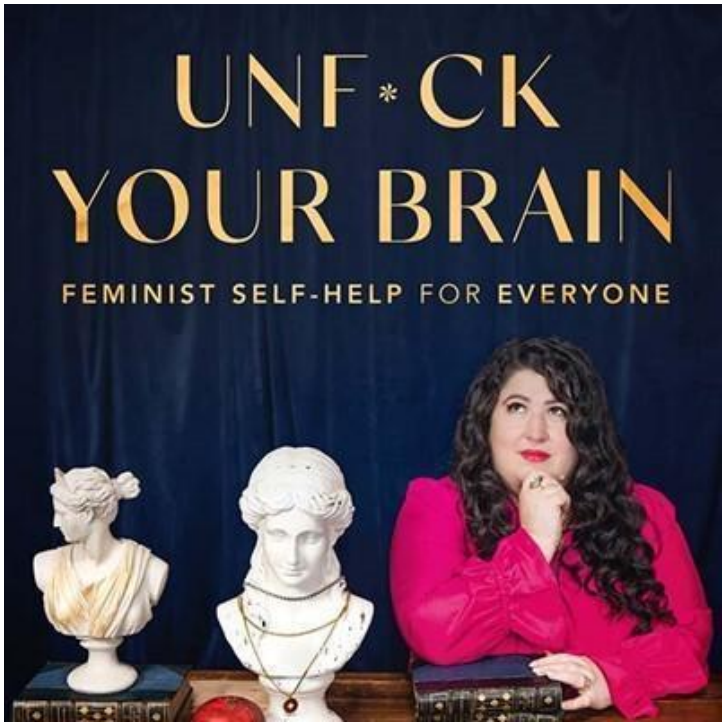
UFYB 546: The SECOND Most Important Skill for Getting What You Want



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

UnF*ck Your Brain with Kara Loewentheil

UFYB 546: The SECOND Most Important Skill for Getting What You Want

No, the title of this episode is not a typo. I really am going to talk about the second most important skill you need for getting what you want. We all know I'm always going to say the most important skill for success of any kind is managing your own mind. This is not a surprising take from me. How you manage your own mind determines everything in your life, how you think, what you believe, how you feel, how you act, what outcomes you can create on purpose, and how you navigate the outcomes you can't directly control. I've got 500 episodes about that.

That's why this episode is about the second most important skill for getting what you want in life. Because there is a second most important skill that makes the biggest difference in your success. And it's not resilience, persistence, or self-confidence. Those are three traits we talk about a lot on the podcast, but they're improved by managing your own mind. The skill I want to talk about today isn't really about managing your own mind at all. But it changes how you interact with everyone else in your life. So 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.

If you want to become a coach, it's obvious why understanding how other people's brains work is absolutely essential. But what people often don't think about as much is how crucial understanding other people's minds is to achieving any outcome you want in life. This is why so many people come through our coach certification who don't even want to be coaches. They're people who want to be better at managing their teams or managing up to their bosses or who want to be better at booking clients, at selling their services, at pitching their art or being a better parent or partner, or managing complex family dynamics.

UFYB 546: The SECOND Most Important Skill for Getting What You Want

The skills of a good coach, listening to people, understanding how they're thinking, and understanding what drives them makes you more effective in every area of your life. I'm not talking about becoming Machiavellian and manipulating people. It's not like if you understand how people think, you can then execute mind control on them. There's a reason that when I teach self-coaching, I always teach that you need to focus on how you think, feel, and act, rather than trying to control other people. But understanding and controlling are very different.

So much of our frustration and suffering in life comes from being overly focused on our own mental model and not understanding the mental models that other people are operating from. And so many of the roadblocks we hit in life come from misunderstandings, misalignments, or mistrust of other people, their motives, their beliefs, their values, and their actions. But if what you want in life requires cooperation from anyone else, if you want a happy marriage, if you want to get promoted, if you want to sell your services, if you want to publish a best-selling book, if you want to be captain of your rugby team, whatever it is, it likely involves other people. So understanding how other people think is crucial.

Let me run through a few examples to illustrate why this is so important, and then I'll share a tool for how you can get better at understanding what and how other people are thinking. Let's say you're having a conflict with your boss and you are spinning out about it. When they give you feedback, you get super defensive and upset. You assume the worst about them, the worst about yourself. You get mad at them for continuing to focus on something that you don't think is a big deal. Or you take it personally and assume that they hate you and maybe they're right.

If you don't understand how other people think, you naturally think that the feedback is really about you. You center yourself in the story, you take it all personally, and you treat your boss's statements as some kind of objective truth about you. Or it's a subjective truth about their thoughts about you.

UFYB 546: The SECOND Most Important Skill for Getting What You Want

Even when it's negative, you still have yourself in the center of the narrative and you're reactive to that. But if you understand how other people think, you can understand why your boss is giving you this feedback apart from anything to do with you. You can understand what might be driving them to focus on this. Maybe they're worried about how your team reflects on them. Maybe they're nervous about their own job security. Maybe they take your work as a personal reflection on them or their potential.

It all depends on your specific boss and understanding their thought process. But when you know how to ask good questions and how to actually listen to the answers, you can uncover what's really going on rather than reacting and taking it personally. I don't mean you should try to give your boss unsanctioned therapy by asking why it's important to them that you not have typos in the board report. But by understanding what's motivating them emotionally and mentally, you're able to put things into perspective, which means you take it less personally, you're less defensive, and you're able to fix the problem and move on faster.

Or let's say you want a promotion and your boss seems hesitant about it or non-committal. If you're not managing your mind, you take that personally and you make it a verdict on your worth and value. Coaching yourself can solve that, so you aren't so distraught about not getting the promotion. But if you actually want the promotion, now you need to also understand how your boss is thinking, so you can best position yourself to get it. If you just make it about how you are bad and sad and wrong and no one has ever loved you, you are 0% closer to a promotion.

But if you think about what your boss cares about, what their goals are, and what they may be thinking with curiosity, you are a lot closer to figuring out what you need to do in order to show them it's in their best interest for you to get promoted.

Or let's say you have a direct report who isn't taking ownership and they come to you with too many questions all the time. It's a huge time suck, it's annoying, and they're not able to develop in their role. You could make it mean something about how you're a bad boss. Or you can make it mean something about how they're bad at their job and passive and lazy and this generation, blah, blah, blah. Coaching yourself and managing your mind will help you get to neutral if you are creating that kind of drama with your brain. But if you actually want to solve the problem, you have to be able to understand why the report is doing that. You have to be able to get inside their brain and understand their thought patterns, so you can actually help them change their behavior.

People act based on their thoughts. Telling them to act differently is pretty useless if you aren't also helping them see how to do that by how they can change their thoughts. When you're a leader at work, your success depends on your team. So if you don't know how to understand their thinking and motivate them appropriately and coach them to actually improve, you are hamstringing your own success. And the same thing is true in your personal life.

When you have a conflict with your spouse, you take it personally. They don't want to do Thanksgiving with your family, let's say. And you make it mean they don't like your family, they don't care about your family, they don't care if you're happy. They're selfish. They don't care about creating meaningful memories for your kids or rituals. So you fight about it every year, it always spirals, the holiday always sucks.

If you understood how people think, you'd be curious about what thought is driving that feeling of not wanting to go to your family. Maybe you'd understand that they experienced a lot of conflict at family gatherings growing up. Or you'd know that they feel bad about themselves when they're around your wealthy siblings. If you understand their objection, you can figure out how to try to meet that need or that desire or assuage that

fear. You make your relationship stronger and you have a better chance of getting what you want. Again, I am not saying you should try to manipulate people. I'm saying that when you're able to understand what's driving people, you can see how to create a win-win rather than a power struggle.

Okay, this all sounds good, right? But how do we actually put it into practice? That's what I'm going to share after this quick break.

So here are the premises I've shared so far. Managing your mind is how you understand your own mind and manage your feelings and actions more skillfully. Learning how to understand other people's brains is how we can create better outcomes in any endeavor that requires other people to cooperate with us. It's not a way to manipulate people, control them, or guarantee you get any specific outcome. But it is a way to create more win-win scenarios. It's a way to create more compassion and empathy for people in your life. It's a way to see things more clearly because it gets you out of your own perspective.

It actually makes your self-coaching better too, because the imaginative process of thinking about how other people are thinking makes you practice seeing a circumstance from different points of view. Every time you try to imagine what someone else might be thinking, you actually practice the skill of coming up with alternative thoughts and perspectives that we use in our self-coaching all the time to shift our own thoughts.

This is why people who understand psychology, who understand the thought-feeling-behavior cycle, have an unfair advantage at anything they want to do. If you've been trained to see beneath what people say and do, in order to understand what they're really thinking or feeling, you have an unfair advantage in understanding what is going on around you.

People are always telling me that I cut to the very heart of the matter and solve a problem in 15 minutes that they have been working around for years. It's not because I'm knowledgeable on every topic area on Earth that

people talk to me about. Far from it. It's because I have so much practice with the skill of listening to what people are saying and hearing the logical gaps, the patterns, the self-doubt, and the conflations, so I can reframe what's going on in just a few moments to unlock it for them. I use this skill for coaching because that's my job.

But you can use it in any area of your life. In managing down to a team or up to a boss or a board or laterally for your colleagues. In pitching your book, in auditioning for a role, in creating compromise in a marriage, in parenting more effectively, in marketing or sales, in supporting students or patients or clients in any kind of helping, supportive role you have.

The best way to really understand this is to get trained at the Socratic Coaching Academy as a coach, of course. Even if you don't plan to be a coach, going through our coach training teaches you how to understand the way everyone around you is thinking better. You learn a ton of tools that we can't go into in depth in a podcast context because you have to learn them, study them, practice them, get feedback and guidance. So that's what we do in the certification. But if you're going to try to DIY this, you can start with the coaching model that I talk about on the podcast all the time.

When we are dealing with other people, we can most readily see their actions. Without even realizing it, we construct a subconscious model of what they're thinking that is making them act a certain way. And that subconscious model is usually wildly uncharitable and self-centered. Which is normal and human. It doesn't make you a bad person, but it's why you may find it difficult to get what you want. So what we have to do is bring that unconscious modeling into our conscious mind and do a better job at it on purpose. Of course, we may not ever find out what the truth was. But how we imagine someone else's mental model makes a huge difference in how we react to them or how we go about interacting with them.

UFYB 546: The SECOND Most Important Skill for Getting What You Want

So if you're familiar with the coaching model, you know it's circumstance, thought, feeling, action, return. When you're practicing this to imagine another person's mindset, you can just focus on the thought-feeling-action part. And you can reverse engineer it by starting with the action. You see the person's actions, so you write that down. Then write down what your brain tells you is their thought and feeling. Notice again that it's often uncharitable or centers on you and makes you the main character of the story.

Your next step is to brainstorm five other thoughts that the person could be having that could produce the same action. And it's extra credit if none of these thoughts are about you and what's wrong with you. Obviously, sometimes people are thinking about us. But it's less often than we think. And even when they are, those thoughts are running through the filter of their own beliefs, insecurities, and preoccupations. The more you practice seeing what thoughts someone else could be having, the more you will see obvious places you could try to connect rather than retreat.

You will see more places that your interests actually could align. You will see more opportunities to speak to what is really motivating someone rather than trying to just argue for your position. You will see more ways to help other people get what they want, which is the fastest way to getting you what you want. You'll see more win-win scenarios and options, and that means you'll see a path to getting what you want more often.

If what you want is to be better at this, then this episode came at a good time because we're currently enrolling the next cohort of our Socratic Coaching Method Certification. Whether you want to be a professional coach, you want to add coaching skills to your current career, or you just want to better understand the people around you and be able to manage, mentor, coach, and work with them more effectively, this is a certification for you. You can go to socraticcoaching.com to learn more.