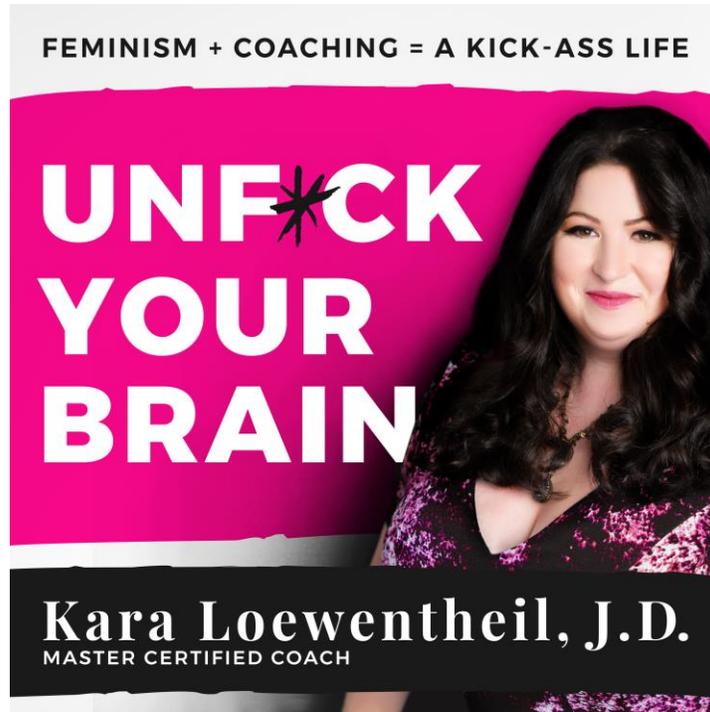


UFYB 28: How to Lead



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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Welcome to *Unfuck Your Brain*, the only podcast that teaches you how to use psychology, feminism, and coaching, to rewire your brain and get what you want in life. And how here's your host, Harvard law school grad, feminist rockstar, and master coach, Kara Loewentheil.

Okay, Y'all, when I went to save the notes for this podcast, I saw that it was episode 50. Now, if you're looking at your iTunes being like, "This don't say 50 on it," then I don't know what to tell you. The podcast started out with one name and then I changed the name when I expanded it and then the numbering got a little wacky for a little while, but it is number 50 in my notes, so I'm going with that; I'm calling that official.

And it's so – you guys maybe just heard my cat who, of course, wanted to celebrate with me. First of all, I've never told you about my cat because you are chickens and cats kind of chase chickens, but I have a cat. He's 15 years old. His name is Darwin because he has thumbs; it's like evolution. He's not evolved. He's never figured out how to use his thumbs; he's not that bright.

But we have been together a long time now because he's 15, I've had him since he was a kitten and he basically sleeps all day except for when I have to record something or get on a coaching call with my students. He hears my voice and comes running over and wants to start yelling. So if you notice that you ever hear him on the podcast, that is why. And there's nothing to be done about that because, much to my podcast editor's dismay, I live in Manhattan where a one bedroom costs the same as a Victorian house somewhere else. So we don't have a separate wing for the cat in this apartment.

Alright, so, y'all, I started this podcast a year ago and when I started it, I was so excited to be getting like 200 listens an episode. I was like, "Oh my god, 200 people listen to this podcast." And now, I just checked the stats and for the month of April, we had 75,000 downloads. That is just so wild to

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me, the difference that a year makes and the way that this podcast has expanded my reach and my business and my world is really just kind of amazing.

So I've thought about doing a podcast about what I've learned from a year of podcasting, but one of the things that I've learned is really just showing up every week to do a podcast – I think I missed one week. And I don't always feel like it. Much like writers say about writing, they don't love writing but they love having written – I'm not going to lie to you guys and tell you that every time that I see, "Do podcast," in my notes on a Monday, I'm not always jumping up and down with glee.

It's part of my job and sometimes I'm super inspired and excited to get on here and record for y'all and sometimes I'm like, "I have nothing to say." But I do it – I come and I record every week. I do an episode every week because that is my commitment. And some of my episodes are amazing and some of them may not be the best I've ever done, but it doesn't matter. I just keep showing up and taking action.

I have massive actioned the fuck out of this podcast and look at the results, right. Look at that, 200 an episode to 75,000 downloads in a month in one year from massive action. So if you're listening to this and you're like, "What the fuck is massive action?" It's pretty much what it sounds like, but there's a whole podcast episode about it so you should go listen to that.

Alright, that's not what this podcast is about. This podcast is about leadership. So someone asked me the other day what I thought my strength as a leader was, which, number one made me feel like I was in one of those job interviews where you're supposed to like brag and be humble at the same time.

But that kind of gave me pause because I don't know that I think of myself as a leader. Not in a bad way – it's not like I think I'm not qualified or not

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good enough to be a leader or something, it's just not a term that I really identify with. I think of myself as a coach. I think of myself as a teacher, maybe a thinker. I think of myself as an example of what's possible, which is something my teacher taught me. I can even imagine thinking of myself as a thought-leader, like I have ideas and beliefs and theories that I don't hear other people saying and that I want to share with people. And depending on your scale and scope of influence, that can make you a thought leader.

But when I think about my relationship with other people, I don't think of myself as a leader until I start to think about how in every given team or group I've ever been in, I naturally tend to assume control and get everyone else organized. And then, of course, I'm a leader to my clients, my students, right. And I'm a leader of my team. I have a business now, so I lead my team.

So I was mulling this over and I was talking about this concept with one of my students and she was telling me how she works in a big organization where she has to get other people to agree with her in order to advance her projects. So she has like an institutional leadership role and she was saying to me, "You know, I know you always teach us that we don't cause other people's feelings and we can't control them, but part of my job is to lead other people, so how am I supposed to lead them if I don't care about what they think and what they do?"

So, I think that's such a good question and that's what I want to explore on the podcast today because, in a way, leadership is based on the idea of making other people do what you want. That's how a lot of us think about it, right. We call someone a great leader if he or she can rally people to a cause, right, can get them to follow.

And I say he or she but I think leadership tends to be gendered. We're more likely to see men as leaders than women because of how we're

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socialized to think about them. So in one way, leadership is based on the idea that other people will kind of do as you want. But on the other hand, one of our foundational teachings in thought work is that we don't cause other people's feelings and we're not responsible for them.

So how can we be a leader if we don't believe that we can cause other people's feelings? What does leadership look like if you don't believe that your job is to change other people's thoughts? So this is what I have been thinking about and I want to share with you guys where I am in my thinking about this.

I think that leadership is about authenticity and, contrary to what you would think, it's not about attachment to a certain outcome. It's actually about detachment, which is really different from how most of us think about it. Most people think that to lead, you have to be really passionately attached to the outcome and kind of attached to making people see things your way.

But I think a good leader is a good leader not because she is focused on changing other people's minds but because she's focused on showing up authentically as herself and being an example of what is possible to other people. It's not about controlling what other people think; it's about controlling what you think about yourself. When you are focused on what other people are thinking, you can't lead from that place because trying to control someone's thoughts, number one, does not work; if you've learned anything from the podcast, you've learned that.

Number two, it doesn't produce confidence, it produces anxiety. That's what we've learned doing this work, right, that when you're anxious, it's often because you are trying to control what other people think. And just imagine it, if you're trying to control the varying opinions and thoughts of lots of different people, you can't possibly craft a clear strong message. Then it's like you're trying to be dozens of tiny focus groups.

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You're trying to fit what you're saying into whatever you predict someone else thinks and trying to manipulate and manage a whole bunch of people's thoughts and that makes you feel anxious and overwhelmed and powerless and it completely muddles your message. You are not able to have a clear message that you can communicate to other people when you are trying to control and manage what they think because then you are not coming from yourself.

Instead, you're sort of just trying to respond to what you imagine other people think or even what they've expressed, right. There's a real difference in trying to rebut or respond to what other people think versus presenting and coming from a sort of well of confidence of what you think. So if leadership isn't about trying to predict and control other people's thoughts, how do you show up as an effective leader?

And I think being a good leader is all about setting aside your own ego. People who are inspiring leaders are not people who spend a lot of time worrying about what other people think of them. Like, you never hear someone say, "that Martin Luther King Jr. was such a great man because he was so focused on making sure everyone around him liked him at all times."

Leadership comes from confidence in yourself and your ideas, not from trying to manage other people. And, in fact, when you think of a lot of our great leaders, someone who inspires you, they've often had to pursue their own path in the face of adversity. It's like not inspiring leadership if everybody's on board and everybody agrees to do the thing, right.

Leadership is really when there are a lot of people out there who don't agree with you. We're not all civil rights heroes, some of us are just trying to move a project forward in a corporate environment, but the message, the point, the lesson is still the same. Leadership is a response to having a

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group of divergent opinions and being able to show up authentically as yourself, rather than trying to control everyone to agree with you.

So leadership comes from confidence in yourself and your ideas and that's actually the kind of confidence that allows you to hear feedback. It allows you to accept divergent views, it allows you to process other ideas without taking them personally or making someone else's point of view mean something about your own abilities or intelligence.

When you are all wrapped up in your own ego or trying to be a leader, you can't possibly because you can't see things clearly. And you're going to take it so personally if someone else disagrees with you. Someone else just has a different thought in their head, like just a different sentence in their mind than what you think and you make it mean so much about what's wrong with them, what's wrong with you, why and how you can't be a leader, how they're stymieing your plans, how they're terrible and whatever they are; misogynistic or racist or old-fashioned or behind the times or just being contrary or whatever it is.

When you don't have confidence in your own goal and vision, when you're focused on controlling what the other people think, you're going to take everything so personally. And that's the opposite of effective leadership. No one's inspired by someone who takes everything personally, right. No one's ever been like, "You know that Glenda? I just admire her so much, the way that she flies off the handle whenever anyone disagrees with you and seems to really make everything a referendum on her."

That's not inspiring. That's not how you lead, but that's what a lot of us do. When we focus on leadership as being, "I have to control these people and make them do what I want," we are unavoidably going to produce the opposite of leadership. We're not even leading ourselves. I can't even manage my own mind, but I need to manage all these other people's brains. It's the opposite of leadership.

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When you're a leader, you have a vision of where you want to go. You can communicate that vision confidently, but you don't take it personally when other people don't share it. You aren't bothered by rejection and you certainly aren't stopped by it. You don't make disagreement mean something about you as a person and you're more interested in hearing what other people think and want than in talking and asserting yourself to prove that you're important.

That's the other thing; when you're trying to lead and you want to try to get people to where you want to go, if you have an objective you're trying to achieve, the minute you make it about you and a referendum on you, is the minute you lose control of trying to get to your objective because now you've stopped making it about getting where you want to go and you've started making it about you.

In no situation does taking shit personally help you get where you are trying to go. So when you are able to show up authentically as a leader, you are able to actually hear what other people's concerns are. You're able to hear their opinions. You're able to actually give those opinions and thoughts some space. You're able to listen to them, see what you truly agree with or don't and you're able to approach those people and communicate in a totally different way.

And, of course, you're way more likely to have a successful outcome when you're in that headspace. When you're in the headspace of, "I have to control you and if you disagree with me then it means I'm a terrible leader and I'm stupid or you're a terrible and a horrible person," of course, you're stymieing yourself, right. You're blaming other people of stymieing you, but really, you're the one getting in your own way. When we take other people's agreement or disagreement personally, we cannot lead effectively.

When it becomes about your ego, you are not managing your mind. And when you are not managing your mind, you cannot inspire and you cannot

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advocate effectively for your ideas. You cannot have real conversations, you cannot understand what other people's goals and objectives and concerns are and so you cannot move a project forward, whatever that project is; civil rights for everyone or getting a new manual written for the HR department.

Whatever it is, leadership comes from the confidence that allows you to share your vision with other people. You're focused on your mission, on your value, on your project, on the goal you have. Confidence allows you to hear other points of view and other ideas without resenting people simply for having different thoughts in their heads than you would prefer they have.

Leadership is not about manipulating other people into agreeing with you or brow-beating them into it. It's not about using other people as a stage on which to prove your merit to yourself or other people. Leadership is about having a commitment to a value or a goal or an objective and showing up authentically as yourself with a managed mind, not authentically as your ego-ridden, unmanaged temper tantrum mind; showing up authentically as yourself with a managed mind to move to move towards that objective.

The irony is that, as with so many things in life and in thought work, when you stop trying to control the outcome of any given interaction is when your success goes way up. When you remember that your only goal is to show up as yourself and tell the truth as you see it, life becomes so much easier. That's your only job.

And as it turns out, people are attracted to truth, they're attracted to authenticity, they're attracted to integrity, they're attracted to calm and to confidence. Leadership is developing the confidence in yourself to show up authentically as yourself, and that is what inspires other people to follow you. And that's true if you're a spiritual teacher or a stay at home mom or the general counsel to a Fortune 500.

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We all have opportunities in our life to lead by example and that's the only kind of leadership that matters or that works. Alright, my chickens. That is it for today. So go forth this week, lead someone, practice being a leader, practice showing up as a leader and if you think you need a little leadership training, you know what to do.

Check out www.unfckyourbrain.com/program and take a gander – that's a goose pun in case you didn't get it. It's like a two-part pun away from chickens. I amuse myself. Take a gander at the Unfuck Your Brain program and if you feel called to, fill out an application and I would love to read it and talk to you soon. Okay, bye.

Thanks for tuning in. If you want to start building your confidence right away, you can download a free confidence cheat sheet at www.karaloewentheil.com/podcastconfidence.