

## Ep #109: Pre-Frontal Power



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Brooke Castillo

Welcome to the Life Coach School podcast where it's all about real clients, real problems, and real coaching. Now, your host, master coach instructor, Brooke Castillo.

Hello there, everyone, my friends. How are you guys today? I am doing fantastically well. Just about to start my upcoming training, which is sold out and I am just finishing up with some Stop Overeating Masterclass and about to start the new one, which is sold out, so that's super fun. Business is great; life is great; everybody is great, so I'm having a wonderful day. I am going to talk to you, guys, today about the pre-frontal cortex. I want to start by saying that I've simplified everything.

When I study the brain, which I'm totally fascinated with, I fall asleep whenever I start reading about the parts of the brain, the anatomy of the brain, how the brain is chemically made up, all of the terminology to define the brain, like I don't know what happens in my brain but it's like snore. It doesn't care about any of that. I care about how the brain affects our emotional lives and how it affects our functioning lives. I only get terms and hold on to terms that help me do that understanding. I don't need to read the names of ... I mean I could sit here and read you the parts of the brain with a picture or read it out the Internet, but I just don't think it's useful.

I know that I have lots of PhD's and doctors that listen to me and I know that you guys are probably cringing at my simplicity, but I also get a lot of emails and feedback that my simplicity is what makes it useful. Hang in there with me sisters and brothers. This will be useful to you but I won't be a scientific as some of you would have made it, but that's your blog and your podcast - very complicated, scientific as you're much smarter than me, I'm sure. Seriously. A lot of people say like, "Why are you so good at teaching?" I say, "Because I don't think that I have that level of intelligence where I grasp ideas really quickly, like I have to break them down in order to understand them, and I think that makes me a good teacher because I think other people are similar."

We are going to talk about pre-frontal power. The way that I

have broken down the terminology is as such: I'm going to talk about the pre-frontal cortex, the front of our brain. The cortex covers the front of the brain. I'm going to use that to describe the executive functioning part of our brain. Then the cerebellum is the back part of the brain and it's total and over-generalization to refer to it like that, but I'm going to refer to that as our automatic consciousness.

Basically, the pre-frontal cortex is our most evolved part of us as humans. It's the part of us that can think about our own thinking. It's the part of executive function. It's the part that makes us human and individuals. I'm going to refer to that the pre-frontal. I'm going to refer to our automatic consciousness or our unconsciousness as just that. The reason why I'm identifying them in this way is because it's really important to understand that your brain has two types of functioning thought processes. I'm only really interested in our thinking and how we manage it, and I only want to understand the brain enough so I can help you out.

In our automatic consciousness is all of the things that we have studied from being little tiny kids and that we have learned and repeated enough times, we paid enough attention, and repeated enough time that they become automatic. I'll give you an example. My son, Christian, is learning how to drive. He's 15. He likes to sit in the car like my husband, which is reclined and chill and just laidback. He's watched Chris drive and so he wants to mimic in many ways the way that Chris drives.

What I told Christian was I said, "Hey, buddy, what you need to know is that your dad has driven so long and so many times that he has developed automatic responses and automatic awareness that you don't have yet. If a car would have pulled out from behind a tree, your dad would immediately slam on the breaks because he's driven so many times, he's pressed the brake so many times, he would do it before even conscious thought. It would just immediately happen, whereas you, son of mine, do not have those automatic reflexes programmed yet and so you would be very slow and you would not be able to brake in time. You need to be sitting up much more upright and

much more alert."

Similarly, it's like when people drink and drive. They don't have those automatic firings. They're not firing the way that we are when we have them. If you think about when we're kids and we're learning how to walk, there's a lot of deliberateness to it in terms of learning. We're learning one step, lift up the foot, set it down, put it ... Oop. Oops, missed that one, right? We keep practicing. We keep repeating it until we know how to walk. Then it becomes completely automatic. Every single one of us has learned how to walk through the process of picking up our feet but now we don't even have to think about it. It's become automatic.

Think about all the other things we learned in childhood that have now become automatic. Yes, we learned how to walk but we also learned how to manage our emotions when we were children. We learned how to deal with shame. We learned how to react to other people and how to show up in the world. I think it's very important to understand that we have thousands of automatic neural pathways that are in the cerebellum that are just naturally firing and functioning and producing results of things we don't even have to think about. We can go through the world and function without having to use much energy on that part of our brain because it's completely programmed.

Now, if you've been listening to the podcast for a while, you understand that the brain likes to be efficient. It likes to expend as little energy as possible. I believe that is why the brain is designed the way it is so it can have those neural pathways go into that unconscious and not be something that we have to deliberately think about it and requires very little energy. Thinking about walking requires very little energy now versus when we were first learning it.

That's what's going on in our automatic consciousness. That's everything that's happening basically unconsciously that is repetitive and efficient and neural pathwayed. The front part of our brain, which I'm referring to as the pre-frontal cortex, is what's involved in complex thinking, in planning, in executive

function. It's where we write our goals. It's how we suppress our urges. It's where our conscious decision-making is. It's where our options are decided. It's where we dream and imagine. It's where conscious awareness is, self-awareness. It's where we gain meaning. It's where we have free will, determination. It's where all of our humanness is, I think, where we can really consider and imagine and develop ideas about what we want to have happened in our lives.

Now, there's a really important distinction that we need to make between these two parts, these two thinking processes that we have. There's a whole book written on this. It's called Fast and Slow Thinking. Basically, everything that happens in our pre-frontal cortex is slow and deliberate and thoughtful, and it's where we learn new material and it's where we think up new ideas, but that process requires a lot of brain energy to pay attention, to focus, to think about new things, to learn new things. It's exciting because that's where the brain is firing up on the pre-frontal and we have a lot of attention there but it's also slow and very deliberate.

Now, when we're talking about our automatic and conscious, we're talking about that requires very little energy and it's very fast. The pre-frontal system is very slow. It's very deliberate. I was explaining this actually today to some of my students. When you're in the moment of something where you're making a flash decision or a flash reaction or you're understanding something quickly, in that moment there is your automatic consciousness that will always come up with the answer first. Two plus two, four, right? It's memorizes. That's a neural pathway that we have. We didn't actually have to do addition with our pre-frontal cortex because we had that as a neural pathway that's in there. It was quicker. We didn't have to rely on any kind of calculation. We just, boom, have the answer.

If I ask you, "Do you want a cupcake?" If you have the automatic desire for sugar and flower and sweets in your brain active, you will say yes before your pre-frontal has had a chance to even consider the long range possibilities or even the short-term consequences of having that cupcake. It's really

important to understand that because so many of us feel like we are doing things against our own will. We feel like we say yes when we mean no. We eat something that we don't want to eat. We procrastinate when we'd rather be creating. There's all these knee jerk impulsive compulsive things that happen in our life that we feel like we can't manage because they happen so quickly and without us even really noticing until they're over.

The reason why is because that automatic part of our brain is so efficient it makes decisions and directs attention much more quickly than the pre-frontal cortex, that deliberate, slow executive part of our brain. How do we solve this problem? Because this clearly is an issue, especially when it comes to the food. You're not wanting to overeat or reacting out of anger or choosing to not workout instead of workout. Like making those decisions in the moment, so often we will make a decision that isn't in our long-term best interest because that automatic part of our brain comes up with the answer before we'd had a chance to intervene.

Now, the other thing that's important to know about the pre-frontal cortex is it's very lazy, actually. When I say lazy, it's because it wants to use as little energy as possible. It's going to only be recruited for consistent big jobs that we want to put a lot of effort into. Most of us don't want to put a lot of effort into thinking. If I say to you, "What is  $24,697 \times 38,429$ ?" very few of you are excited to write that down and work that calculation out. We have to be very motivated in order to get that pre-frontal, to get our brain, that slow thinking part to get going to make a decision to actually solve a problem.

Most of you are like, "Yeah, no thanks." That's how most of us are because we're not excited to get our brain working on something unless there's a reason. Like if I told you, "Hey, you add those two numbers up, I'll give you that amount in cash," then most all of you would do it versus just offering it to you. You're not going to do it, but if you have a good motivation.

This is important to remember because you want to be able to use your humanness. You want to be able to use the executive

function of your brain. You want to be able to use the best part of yourself as a human being in a way that will serve whatever goals you want in your life, but you need to work with your brain and understand that it's programmed to be efficient, to expend not a lot of energy and that the brain has to have a great motivation, a great commitment in order to use the energy that is required to think on that higher level.

How can we apply all of these in a way that will serve us? What I basically told you is "Hey, you have this really slow part of your brain that can make all your dreams come true, that can decide ahead of time, create goals, envision dreams, devise plans," and then you have this other part of your brain that's already programmed that comes up with reactions and solutions and actions without even any kind of energy happening. How do we utilize this to our advantage? I'm going to tell you that in a minute. There's a couple more things I want to tell you before I tell you what to do.

The first thing is that the brain, because it likes to be efficient, it likes to be familiar and comfortable, which makes sense. We have an attachment to the familiar in order to survive. If we're alive and this thing is familiar, it probably isn't killing us. We should stay around things that are familiar to keep us alive. It's where we get a sense of comfort. Now, the brain may or may not know that that familiarity is serving us in the long-term into our emotional life. It may not have taken the time to evaluate that. It just knows that it's very effective to have it. It's like when you hear about these stories about the children getting beaten and you go to get the children out of the abusive situation and they just want to stay there because it's what's familiar and comfortable to them. It's what they understand. It's what the brain perceives as normal and comfortable.

Think about that in terms of your life. All of those neural habits ... A neural habit is just a model that you have spinning in your automatic unconscious, just happening for you. It's like you've delegated it to the manufacturing site and it's all dialed in. There are neural habits and models that you have in the brain that are really serving you and helping you and making your life

so you don't have to think deliberately about glancing into your rearview mirror before you back up. You don't have to really remind yourself to do that. It's just already there because you've done it so many times.

There are other things in there that aren't serving you; thoughts that you need food to deal with your life or you need to smoke a cigarette or you need to drink a cocktail in the evening or you need to take a break or things are too hard. Those things have all become comfort to you because they're familiar. They're neural pathways that aren't serving you but because they're familiar, they seem comfortable.

Now, here's the trick. The brain is not motivated to go in and evaluate things that it does really well. You have to direct that pre-frontal to do that evaluation because it's going to have an upside on the backend. Why am I going to do that multiplication problem? Because I'm going to get the cash on the end because it's worth expending that energy. Why am I going to look at all my automatic neural pathways that are going on? Because I know that I can change them and get more of the results I want in my life. Think about the things that you have in your life that are automatic neural pathways that aren't serving you.

One of the best examples that I've already shared with you is desire. So many of us have neural pathways of desire that are in our brain and we think that those neural pathways are part of our personality, that are part of our character. That's just part of who we are. I'll talk to a lot of my students about this and they will say, "Oh, I just like this or I just don't like this." They think it's like part of our DNA. Really, we've all learned to like something or not like something. That's why when we go to a foreign country, most of us don't like food that were not familiar with.

It doesn't feel right. It doesn't feel comfortable to us, so a lot of us don't want to even try it because it's not familiar. We prefer to be comfortable and familiar. You want to think about what are the automatic pathways that you have created in your brain



that aren't serving you. Having a look at them, really evaluating them, seeing are these pathways that I want to have, is this a neural pathway of desire that I want? One of the cool terms that I have been using lately is false desire. It's a neural pathway that produces a feeling of desire but it's not something I want.

Now, here's why this is so important. Again, I've talked about this before but it's really important to remember that when you have a neural pathway in your brain that's producing desire, desire is pleasurable, so you're also getting rewarded for that neural pathway firing. As soon as that fires, you feel pleasure of desire. As soon as it fires, you feel the pleasure of desire. You're motivated to repeat it over and over and over again until you get whatever it is. Maybe it's a donut or whatever, so it's just firing and firing and firing and firing and that desire is just building and building and building because you keep firing that neural pathway. If you can recognize that desire for what it is, a false desire, which means it's a neural pathway that has been established, but I genuinely don't want a donut because I want to lose weight, then you'll recognize it as a false desire.

The other terminology that I really like to use is a thought error. I think that's such a brilliant way of thinking about it. It's like, "Eee! Thought error. You should go get cupcakes. Eee! Thought error. You should take a break instead of working on that program. Eee! Thought error ..." It's just something that's running in your brain that you haven't really taken a look at and decided whether it's a neural pathway you want to keep or not.

Okay, so let's talk about what has to happen to make something an automatic neural pathway. What do we have to do to make something a neural habit? There are two main things that have to happen. You have to learn it by paying attention to it. You have to have your attention on something and then you have to learn the pathway, and then you have to repeat it. For many of us who are overeaters, we have been stressed, thought about food, desired food, eating food, overeating food in order to feel better.

Rinse and repeat. Rinse and repeat. Rinse and repeat. We've done it so many times that we don't even think about it. Now, we just go right to the fridge to get something to eat or if something is put in front of us, we just eat it immediately. If we're not feeling well, emotionally, we just drive to Starbucks or the fast food restaurant to be able to handle that. That's really, really important to think about when you're wanting to change because when you understand that paying attention to something and repeating it is what makes it automatic, then you know that that's the effort that you have to put in.

Here's the thing. It takes effort and energy and it's going to be unfamiliar. Your brain will not like it because it's unfamiliar, which will make you uncomfortable. That is just your brain going, "Warning, warning, we don't know what this is." In fact, we're very good at the opposite of this thing. You have to be aware that if you want to learn something new in terms of a automatic neural pathway model that you're going to put in your brain, you have to pay close attention to it and then repeat it enough times. It actually can replace the neural pathway that is already there. That slow, deliberate effort consistently repeated is what makes something unconscious and effortless.

I've talked about this before, that river of misery. That idea of "I know where I am and I know where I want to go and I have to be willing to be uncomfortable long enough and repeat it enough times that it becomes my new reality, that it becomes my new neural habit in my brain." Now, what about all those neural habits that are already in there. Don't you want to go in there and just clean them out? Well, maybe. I was talking to a student today and I asked her, I said, "Hey, do you really want to be a person who doesn't care about overeating? Are you willing to give up the cupcakes? Are you willing ..." I talk a lot about cupcakes. I don't even like cupcakes. "Are you willing to give up the cupcakes, the ice cream, the potato chips, the French fries? Are you willing to not want those things? Are you willing to get rid of that neural pathway that you have for those foods?"

It's not an easy yes for a lot of people. It's familiar. It's

comfortable. It feels like part of their identity, so to change that feels awkward to people. Ask yourself that same question. Like "What are the neural pathways that are creating something that you don't want and are you willing to give them up?" I think that's the best way to understand if a neural habit or neural pathway is serving you is "Is it ultimately producing the result you want in your life?" People ask me, "Well, is there something wrong with desiring French fries?" Absolutely not. The desire for French fries, talking about French fries, maybe feel really good to you, but if that desire for French fries leaves you to eating French fries which leads you to being overweight, then maybe that's a neural pathway that you want to change.

Maybe that's a desire that you want to change in your brain so you don't have to have to chatter and contend with any kind of deprivation around it. That's true for wanting to take a break when you're in the middle of working or wanting to procrastinate, wanting to indulge in fear or overwhelm; noticing those neural pathways. Once you notice an efficient neural pathway, you know that you're going to have to deprive it of its reactionary force, so if you're trying to change a pathway of overeating French fries, you're going to have to stop overeating the French fries. If you're going to change a pattern, neural pathway of procrastination, you're going to have to stop procrastinating. That's how you have to put so much effort into changing that neural pathway.

Now, a lot of people ask like, "How long does it take to change a habit? Have you ever wondered what they've meant by that?" What they're asking is how long does it take until what I want to do is as effortless as what I'm already doing? That's as long as it takes to create that new neural pathway. I could say 28 days, which a lot of people will say, "But that's not necessarily true. What matters is how many times you repeat the neural pathway in your brain by either visualizing it or literally doing it." If it's literally doing it, it may take 28 times once a day, but if you're visualizing it, you may be able to change it within 3 days depending on how much time you spend visualizing the new neural pathway

You have to associate belief to it and you have to associate the idea that you have to repeat it enough times so that it becomes effortless to think it. Just like 2 plus 2 is 4 is effortless, you want to create your new neural pathway, so it is then effortless. That includes anything in your brain that is a thought error and anything that's a false desire, you want to replace it with a new thought pattern. You want to replace it with a new desire for something else and that requires attention and repetition.

The other thing I want to leave you with which is really important when you're thinking about these two sections of your brain and you're thinking about how they work together is that you cannot rely on yourself in the future to do what you are planning without using your pre-frontal planning mode in detail. You can say to yourself, "I'm going to exercise every day." That's what your pre-frontal brain is saying right now. You're putting some effort into "I'm going to make a change. I'm going to go exercise every single day."

This is what you're going to do. When you get to the time, at 5:00 after work, will you go exercise? Only if you're not letting your automatic brain takeover, which most of us do. Most of us have this well-intentioned plan but we don't use the pre-frontal to plan for that automatic pattern to click in. This is how you do it. You say, "I'm going to go exercise tomorrow. I'm going to go at 5:00 right after work." Then you plan on what your automatic neural habit is going to say and do in that moment. You can't reopen the decision at that point because your automatic brain will win and you will go home.

The decision has to be made the day before and then it has to be non-negotiable once you get there. Because in that moment, again, you will want to be efficient, especially at the end of the day when you're tired, your pre-frontal will just give up very easily. If you've created a non-negotiable situation and anticipated what will happen with your automatic brain, then you will have an answer for everything and you will go work out. The way that you do this is you think about what will my neural pathways be firing at that moment? "I'm too tired. It's not going to make a difference anyway. There's too much traffic."

Like anticipate all those automatic familiar thoughts. It should be easy to anticipate because you're very good at them and you probably thought about them a lot.

Make sure when you get to that moment, when it's time to get in the car and go to the gym, that you've already anticipated those thoughts, you know that they're coming, you're ready. You're totally ready for those thoughts and you have an answer for them and you don't let them drive your action. That's true for anything you want in your life. You have to use your pre-frontal cortex to plan what you want, but you also have to anticipate what your automatic brain that's already learned how to do the opposite will give you in that moment.

I like to imagine it saying, "Nah, it's not familiar. That feels awkward. That's uncomfortable. This is the river of misery. We shouldn't have to be here. Let's just stay in what we already know. Let's stay familiar. Let's do what we already know. Let's go to Jack in the Box instead or wherever it is. Let's do what we already know." If you know that your brain is just trying to be efficient, just trying to keep you alive, just trying to get you to survive, that's how it's evolved to take care of you, then you don't think there's something wrong with you. You don't think that you're weak willed or that you don't have enough motivation. You just recognize your brain for what it's programmed to do. You anticipate the chatter and then you go workout anyway, because you've already decided ahead of time with your pre-frontal.

I like to be pretty authoritarian with that. I like to say, "Look, I'm going to schedule this time. I'm going to do this thing." I know for sure in the moment I'm not going to want to do it because my automatic programming will jump up and that's fine. I don't need to want to do it in the moment because I want to do it now. That's the difference between genuine desire and a false desire. I'm using my highest executive brain functioning to design my life instead of letting my automatic lower brain functioning decide for me in the moment.

I hope that was helpful for you guys. It's really made a

difference for a lot of my clients I've been working with and it really helps me in understanding why I have a lot of impulses, knee jerk reactions and why I don't follow through on the commitments that I'm going to make to myself the day before. You need to anticipate what that part of your brain will do. Let me know how that goes for you guys. You can go over to the comments at [thelifecoachschool.com/109](http://thelifecoachschool.com/109).

For those of you who are interested, I wanted to let you know that we have a brand new training coming up starting in July. I believe it's going to be July 18th and 19th in El Dorado Hills, California. This training is open for everyone. It is called Thought Work 2.0. It's an advanced training. I'm going to teach at a very high level and very quick paced and it's two full days of training, but I designed it for coaches who are already certified through other organizations that want to get advanced training from me, but don't want to go through the whole certification process. I designed it for clients who have been listening to the podcast and feel like they've mastered a lot of the work that I presented there but want to come in person and get a sense of the training live and taking all of this work to the next level.

I'm thrilled that so many of you that I've mentioned this to have been so excited about it, so I think we'll have a good collection of coaches that already have some training and some clients that really just want to take their work to the next level. All of my certified coaches will be able to come at a discounted price, of course, the master coaches, of course, are always invited.

I'm going to be covering using the model at an expert level, faster, using it backwards, using it in difficult situations. I'm going to be covering complex relationship issues. I'm going to be doing advanced coaching on the manual and boundaries. I'm going to be teaching you how to coach yourself and others through severe anxiety, depression, procrastination, compulsiveness, debilitating shame. I'm going to talk about how to overcome a severe past and I'm going to talk a lot about working with narcissism and addiction. If you have those people in your life or if that's something that you're dealing with

yourself, I have a lot of advanced techniques that we're going to cover.

That's going to be two full days of non-stop material. There will be information on the website within the next week. You can sign up from the website for that course coming up in July. If you have questions about it, of course, you can always email [jody@thelifecoachschool.com](mailto:jody@thelifecoachschool.com) and she will answer questions. This will be an advanced two-day training. This will not include certification. This is a completely different training than our year-long now certification training.

The way that I have changed my business is that I will now be offering one certification training per year and it will be a year long program and we will take people from brand new coaches to thriving business owners in that year and then I will be offering advanced trainings for the remaining part of the year, two-day advanced trainings that will be open enrollment to anyone who would like to attend - that we'll really teach at a high, very advanced, exciting level, so if you are a coach and you listen to my podcast and you use some of my tools with your clients, I'd really like to encourage you to come.

If you're one of my long-time listeners that's improved their life tremendously by the work that you've done through the podcast, I want to encourage you to come and take it to the next level. Of course, if you're one of my coaches, you absolutely should come. After using the model and practicing on clients, this will really elevate you to that next level of thought work with your clients. Head on over to the website, [thelifecoachschool.com](http://thelifecoachschool.com), and check out our advanced training and see what you think. Hopefully, I'll get to meet you in person and see you there. Have an amazing week everybody. I'll talk to you soon. Ba-bye.

Thank you for listening to The Life Coach School podcast. It is my honor to show up here every week and connect with people that are like-minded, wanting to take their life to a deeper level with more awareness and more consciousness. If you are interested in taking this work to the next level, I highly

encourage you to go to  
[TheLifeCoachSchool.com/howtofeelbetteronline](https://TheLifeCoachSchool.com/howtofeelbetteronline). It is there that I have a class that will take all of these to a deeper application where you'll be able to really feel and experience how all of these concepts can start showing up in your life. It's one thing to learn it intellectually. It's another thing to truly apply it to your life. I will see you there. Thanks again for listening.