

Ep #25: Creating vs. Consuming Fun



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With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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You are listening to the *Take a Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 25. Welcome to the *Take a Break* podcast with Rachel Hart. If you're an alcoholic or an addict, this is not the show for you, but if you are someone who has a highly functioning life, doing very well but just drinking a bit too much and wants to take a break, then welcome to the show. Let's get started.

Hey everybody, what's happening? Today is the second episode on fun. It's part of a two part series. Last week we talked all about the thoughts, "I'm no fun if I'm not drinking" or "This event will be unbearable without a drink in my hand." So if you haven't listened to last week's episode, it's episode 24. I want you to go do that now, because it's really important that you understand these two thoughts, you understand how they apply in your life, and you understand how you have started unconsciously outsourcing fun to a drink before diving into today's topic on the difference between consuming and creating fun.

For today's topic, I want you to think about a time in your life when you had fun without a drink in your hand, before you started drinking. Now, I know that some of you listening started drinking at a young age, you may have started in high school, some of you maybe even started in middle school. But most everyone has probably a good 15 years at least of your life when you knew how to have fun without drinking. You knew how to create fun. You weren't dependent on a drink to have a good time because your brain had no idea that the perception of fun could be outsourced in this way.

So go back in time and think about what were you doing, what was fun for you back then? What were you spending your time on? What engaged you? What did you find exciting? I'm sure when a lot of you think back to that time and you think back to your time as a kid before you started drinking, before you started having a drink in your hand to feel like you were fun or to feel like something was fun or worthwhile attending, you might notice a difference. You might notice that those activities that you

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were engaging in may have been more connected to you creating your own fun.

So you might notice that you weren't just sitting around waiting for fun to happen to you, you were actually going out and creating out. I was trying to think of a good example from my own life to demonstrate this point, and I thought back to something that I used to do with my friends when I was probably around eight or nine years old. I spent a lot of time outdoors as a kid and I had a couple of friends that lived in the neighborhood. We all lived pretty close to a park that was adjacent to a wooded area, and there was a trail in the woods, and on that trail, my friends and I would create a human steeplechase course.

Now, if you don't know what steeplechase is, welcome to the majority of the world. Most people aren't familiar with steeplechase, and if you are, you probably think of it as an equestrian event with horses jumping over hedges and other sorts of obstacles, but there is also a human version. It's even in the Olympics, where you have individual runners who are running over barriers including hurdling themselves over a large pool of water. This is an actual sporting event.

I have no idea how we came up with this idea. We were in third grade when it started, and we did not call it steeplechase or human steeplechase. We called it the jumps. We thought the jumps were awesome, and the four of us would spend just hours and days digging up rocks in the woods and dragging tree branches to build a set of hurdles that we could jump over, and yes, we actually even had a water obstacle because one of my friends lugged a plastic container from home and we dug a hole in the ground and buried the container and then filled it with water so that we too could have an actual pool of water to jump over.

And once we decided that the jumps were finished, once they were complete, then we would start racing each other on the course and seeing who was the fastest, and we would actually spend a couple days racing, perfecting our form before we decided who was champion of the jumps, and then we would tear it all down and start all over again.

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I can't even picture doing this as an adult, spending - this is the sort of things that you do, that you have time to do when you're a kid. I thought it was such a great example, because there's so much that we were creating. So much and envisioning a course and envisioning obstacles and then finding material to build it and then racing and perfecting and working on our form and all of these things just to have fun. That's just what we thought was fun, and I have to tell you, it was an actual trail in the woods that people hike on, and I have to wonder what people thought when they would go hiking and encounter an unusual set of stone and tree branch and water obstacles in the woods, but that's what was happening. We were doing human steeplechase and it was a lot of fun.

I don't know, I was a weird kid. But I knew how to create my fun. I did, and sometimes it amazes me how creative I was, how creative I could be at such a young age. And if you think back, I bet that you were too. I bet that you had a lot of areas of your life where you are actually creating a lot of fun for yourself, rather than outsourcing fun, rather than turning to a drink and saying, you know, "I'm no fun if I'm not drinking", "This won't even be worth attending if I don't have a drink in my hand", "This event will be boring", because we knew how to create our own enjoyment. We didn't yet understand that we could outsource the perception of fun to something in our external environment. We didn't understand that we could use a drink in that way, and so of course we just went about and figured out ways to be fun and create our own fun.

And my question for you now as you're listening to this episode now, when was the last time you went out and created your own fun, just you? Not with the help of a drink. When was the last time you did that? When was the last time you went out and made something fun instead of just sitting back and expecting that things should be fun with little to no effort? Because that's what happens when you get in the habit of drinking to have fun. You go out and you expect things to be fun with little to no effort, because it doesn't take a lot of effort once you start drinking, to change your perception of both yourself and the event.

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And so when you tell yourself, "I'm not any fun when I don't drink", or "This event will be so boring without alcohol", what you're really doing, whether you realize it or not, is you are sitting there passively waiting for fun to happen to you, and this piece is so important because this is what we're going to be talking about today.

The difference between consuming fun and creating fun, and the difference has everything to do with your involvement in it and your expectations and your output of energy. They are very, very different, consuming fun and creating fun, and I will tell you that they apply well beyond just drinking. They apply in lots of activities in our life, and so it's really important I think, and really useful to understand this distinction so that you can start to see where you are sitting back and saying, hey I want you to make this fun, I want this external thing to entertain me, versus when you're going out and creating your own fun and why it's really important to see the consequences on either side.

So let's start with consuming fun. Consuming fun is exactly what it sounds like. It's pretty passive. It's when you sit back and you say to something else, hey you, entertain me. And this happens with drinking, but it happens with lots of different things, and I will tell you, it is how the majority of us spend most of our time. We spend most of our time that we have to have fun, that time we spend consuming fun, and what I mean by that is that we drink alcohol, we eat food, we turn on the TV, we go online, whatever it is. We keep looking for that really easy dopamine hit.

We turn to everything in our environment and say, okay, now you are in charge of my ability to have fun, so I hope you're entertaining. We choose these activities where we don't have to think, where we don't really have to do anything other than very easily consume them. And it's no surprise here that these activities tend to be things that we just keep going back to. We often feel like we have kind of an insatiable appetite for them, so we keep on having a drink, we keep on eating, we keep on watching another episode on Netflix, we keep wasting hours and hours online. And part of it's such an easy fix.

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It's such an easy way to get a little dopamine or a lot of dopamine sometimes, and our brain likes easy things. It likes to be efficient, and so it takes very little energy to say yes, I'll have another drink, yes, I'll eat some more food, yes, I'll watch another episode, yes, I'll keep scrolling through Twitter, I'll keep scrolling through Facebook. It takes very little mental energy, and so it's very easy for us to say yes over and over and over again.

But the problem is that when we say yes over and over and over and over again, at some point, we start to find that there may be repercussions. There may be consequences to turning to consuming fun, these sorts of activities over again. We drink a lot, we eat a lot, we watch a lot, and we find that we're waking up the next day feeling groggy and hungover, maybe a little embarrassed or we're carrying extra weight or we realize that we're spending all this time on stuff that we actually don't want to spend time on. And so a lot of times, after we finish these consuming type of activities, we don't feel very good. We don't feel very positive about what we just did and we actually find ourselves regretting it.

Now, on the other side of consuming fun is creating fun. Creating fun is active. You have to use your mind to produce something. Creating fun I think brings us back to a lot of the things we did as kids, so playing games, exploring, making music, making art, writing, moving our body, dancing, and I think even reading actually qualifies for creating fun as well, in part because our brain is so much more active when we're reading than when we're watching TV. You have to use all this energy to imagine a world that you can't see, imagine characters and places and events that you can't see, it's only words on a page, and so in that way it takes more energy and it's more engaging.

It takes a lot of energy, it does. You have to expend more energy, but when you are doing activities that are about creating fun rather than consuming fun, it rarely comes with a set of negative consequences, and the reason why is I think because you are expending energy in the first place. So you're not in that very kind of easy place where you can just say

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yes and yes and yes over and over and over again and expend very little energy. This actually takes energy to create fun, and so it doesn't bring with it that kind of insatiable hunger.

Now, the thing is that most of us don't - we don't think about fun in this way. We don't think about fun and divide it into areas that are consuming fun and areas that are creating fun. We usually just think to ourselves, well whatever I'm doing, I just want it to be fun as fast as possible. Right? So we look for the easiest route and surprise, surprise, the easiest route is in the form of things that we can consume, rather than in the form of things that we can create.

So when you think about it, think about the energy that it takes to raise a glass off a table to your lips and to take a drink, and bingo, that's all you had to do and then you get this influx of dopamine. And the same is really true about opening a bag of chips, or grabbing the remote and clicking through channels or scrolling through social media. It takes very little energy, and they offer varying levels of dopamine hits, but the point is you're expending very little. You're just consuming and you're very passive in the process. You're not doing a whole lot.

Now, it is really important that you understand that consuming fun isn't necessarily bad, and there is no need or no reason to make this an issue of right or wrong or good and bad, or virtuous and not virtuous. But I think that there should be some sort of balance in your life between consuming fun and creating fun, and the problem for most people is that the pendulum has swung all the way over into the consuming area that we do little if any creating.

And so our default when it comes to having fun is to drink and to eat and to watch and to scroll, and what we're not realizing is that we have this expectation of being passively entertained. That becomes how our brain wants to be entertained, to just sit back and do very, very little. And then we start to have these negative consequences and it's really frustrating, and when we think about the other things that we could be doing, we're kind of

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met with this, ugh, that takes work. I just want to tune out. I just want to not think. I don't want to expend any energy.

And I'll tell you that even though I don't drink anymore, I still am very mindful of how I spend my evenings, especially my evenings during the week after a full day of work when I'm exhausted and my brain is just telling me, let's just do something easy. Let's just sit down in front of the TV and watch TV for the rest of the night. I have to really work to motivate myself to go for a walk or to play cards with my husband or to pick up a paintbrush or to pick up a book, and sometimes my brain is literally like a toddler, kind of whining, no, I don't want to do that, I just want it to be easy.

I've talked about this before on the podcast, the idea that you have to supervise your brain. You have to often be the parent to your toddler brain that is telling you, ugh, just leave me alone, I just want to veg out. I don't want to do that, I don't want to get out and walk, walking takes too much energy. My brain often tells me that, I don't want to walk after dinner. Walking is stupid, let's just sit on the couch.

The thing is, there's nothing wrong with consuming activities. There's nothing wrong with turning on the TV, there's nothing wrong with pouring a drink, there's nothing wrong with having food or scrolling through social media. And I think it's really important not to make this a conversation about only spending your time doing these really virtuous things, doing these things that only add benefit and improvement to your life. I don't want to go down that route. I don't think that's a helpful conversation to have.

I do think it's a helpful conversation for you to have with yourself, to ask yourself, how do I feel after I do consuming fun activities? How do I feel after using a drink or using food or using TV or using social media - whatever it is, how do I feel after using that as my go-to way to have fun? And if you don't feel great, if you don't feel rested, if it doesn't feel good the next day, then pay attention to that. That's what I will notice. There's nothing wrong with watching TV, but if I catch myself getting into a routine and I catch myself not being planned or mindful about it, I'm just like yes, I

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guess I'll watch another, Netflix has it now, that it's just like they just start the next episode before you even decide.

You really have to work against that. You really have to say no, I'm just going to watch one episode and then I'm going to do something else. Because if I'm not mindful about that, after a week of doing that every night, I just feel gross, and I think this isn't really how I want to spend my time. So it's really not about whether one activity is good or bad, it's about how you feel and whether you like the results that you are getting.

I think for so many of us, especially if you end up taking a break from drinking, or if you decide that you want to drink less, you don't want to drink as much as you are, so you start to have more free time. You have more time that you used to spend drinking, and all of a sudden you look around and think, okay, well what am I supposed to do? And that is the moment that I think is so important to really understand the difference between consuming fun and creating fun. Because if you don't understand this distinction and you are in the habit of consuming things, you're in the habit of just sitting back and passively saying hey you, entertain me, I don't want to think at all, then if you're in that habit and you take a break from drinking or you're trying to cut back and you have more free time, it can be so easy to fall into the trap of just turning to another consuming behavior.

So maybe you're not drinking in the evenings, but now you're just sitting in front of the TV, right? Or now you're smoking, or now you're just finding that you're eating a lot more than you used to. And that's probably not getting you to a place where you want to go either. So you have to really understand okay, how do I want to spend my time? What do I want fun to look like for me? Am I willing to do things other than just consuming passive activities? Am I willing to create fun as well?

And I think a really smart place to go is to go further back and look at the fun you had as a kid. Where did you like to put your energy? What were you doing? Were you making music? Were you making art? Were you writing? Were you dancing or drawing? Did you have hobbies? What were your interests? Start there, because as a kid, first we don't realize - we

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haven't developed the habit of using a drink to change our perception of ourselves as more fun or events as more fun. So we're more able to just be present with what we truly like. We're more present in the moment. And we're also - I think as kids, we're so much more open often to taking risks and trying new things and we're not stuck in this kind of self-consciousness that is so stifling, and we also haven't fallen into a routine of life.

So we're open to doing more, trying and doing, and so that's what I did when I all of a sudden had all this free time in my life that I didn't know what to do with, and I just looked around and thought, I don't know how to spend my weekends. I don't know how to spend my evenings. That's where I turned my attention. I turned my attention to what I did as a kid and when I was really enjoying myself as a kid, when I was really having fun, I was creating that fun. I wasn't consuming that fun, and I think that's a really important place to start.

So this week I really want you to challenge yourself. I really want you to ask yourself first, alright, in the spectrum of things that I consume for fun and things that I create for fun, what does that look like for me? Where is the pendulum? Is it all the way over in consumption? Am I expecting everything to just entertain me while I sit back passively? And if it is, there's nothing wrong with that, that's just good information for you to have. What it means is like hey, let's try something different. Let's challenge yourself to try to create fun. Let's do something, let's make fun. Let's use energy, and you will have to work against a brain - if you have conditioned it to expect that it can just sit back and do nothing to be entertained, you will probably have to work against a brain that's just saying I don't want to, takes too much work, too much energy.

But that is where you have to start. You have to start changing that habit. You have to go back to seeing what can be fun for me, and I will tell you, I tried a lot of different things. I looked in my childhood, I looked to the things that I liked to do before I started drinking as a roadmap, but I still had to try a lot of different things out. I mean, I'm not still doing human steeplechase, although, who knows. But I still had to try a lot of things out

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and see what I really enjoyed as an adult and what I want to spend my time on.

So challenge yourself this week, try something new this week. Try to create fun instead of just passively consuming fun and see what the difference is like for you. Alright, that's it for this week. I love hearing from you guys. Send me an email if you want to reach out, if you have ideas for the podcast at podcast@rachelhart.com. Otherwise, tune in next week.

Alright, so before I go, I want to share with you a new free resource that I put together. If you are struggling to change your drinking, I created a worksheet, it's called Your Complete Picture, that I promise will completely change your perspective. I always tell people, if you only ever do one exercise about your drinking, do this one, it is that powerful. It is the exercise that changed everything for me. If you want to go grab it, all you need to do is go to rachelhart.com/picture and download it now.

Thanks for listening to this episode of *Take a Break from Drinking*. If you like what was offered in today's show and want more, please come over to www.rachelhart.com where you can sign up for weekly updates to learn more about the tools that will help you take a break.