

Ep #68: Disappointing People



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With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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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, how are you? Listen, today we are talking about people pleasing. People pleasing – do you do it? I used to do it a lot. We're going to talk about it, how it's connected to drinking and why you need to change it.

Now listen, I've touched on this topic before in the podcast because I see it come up time and time again from my clients. So if you've been listening before, you heard me talk about this, probably, in episode 12. I did a whole podcast about perfectionism and people pleasing and how these two things often go hand in hand.

So, you know, perfectionism is that idea that if I do perfect, if I be perfect, if I never make a mistake, if I never cut myself any slack then I can finally feel good about myself, right. If it's all right, if it's perfect, then I can feel good. And people pleasing is a little bit different. It's that idea of, if I can make sure everybody's happy, everybody's needs are met, then I'll feel good; then I'll feel worthy.

Of course, people pleasing and perfectionism are often done at the expense of our own happiness and our own needs. Now here's the thing, why do they go together? Why do perfectionism and people pleasing go hand in hand? And it's because they are rooted in the same emotions; they are the product of insecurity. They are the product of a lack of self-worth.

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So if I'm perfect and everyone is happy, then I can feel better. But, of course, that comes from the place that you don't feel good about yourself as you are right now. Now listen, both of them really are impossible tasks and they're exhausting because you know it's impossible to do everything perfectly and you definitely cannot ensure that everyone is happy. And when you commit yourself to trying to do these things, you run around frenzied. It's exhausting.

The thing is, it doesn't work because guess what, you are going to make mistakes. Things cannot happen 100% perfectly. But not only that, you don't control other people's think-feel-act cycles. I say this all the time to my clients. You are not in charge of how other people are thinking, feeling, and acting.

So the question is, how does this connect to drinking? And I really want to dig into this today because a lot of times, I hear from you guys that drinking, at the end of the day especially, can feel like you are putting your needs first for a change, right, you're giving yourself a break, you're carving out me-time when you pour that glass of wine.

But here's the crazy thing, what feels like putting yourself first is often just, not only covering up how you feel, but also creating negative consequences for yourself. Isn't that crazy? We think we're doing ourselves a favor when we have wine time, but we look at the consequences we're getting and it is no favor at all.

You know, I also talked about people pleasing a little bit in episode 56, Your Opinion of You. And there, I really delved into how much the brain is so focused on imagining what other people are thinking of you – and let me tell you, it is usually negative – and not at all focused on what you think about you.

So we're really focused on, like, do they like me? Am I doing enough trying to get everyone to think that I'm great? And it sucks all your energy. And here's the thing, even if you're really, really good at it, even if you like master this skill, you're probably only going to succeed 50% of the time,

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right. And then you have another 50% of people to worry about; the goalpost just keeps moving.

So no matter what, you just cannot reach inside someone's head and tinker with their think-feel-act cycle. They're going to have whatever thoughts they're going to have about you but being so focused on other people's opinions of you just works against you. It keeps you in this cycle of people pleasing.

And here's the thing, if you are going to expend energy trying to change someone's thoughts, why not do it where it counts? Why not expend that energy trying to change your own thoughts about you because, guess what, that's where you actually have some control. That's where you actually can start to change your think-feel-act cycle.

So if you haven't listened to those episodes, I really encourage you to go back and take a listen because today I really want to dive deeper into understanding people pleasing and how it connects to drinking because I see this happen time and time again. But not only that, I want you to really understand the results you get when you are a people pleaser. They are probably not the results that you expect.

Okay, so again, people pleasing is trying to make sure everybody is happy; everybody's needs are met. And here's the thing, it seems so selfless, "I'm just taking care of everybody. I'm just trying to make sure people are happy; get what they need, get what they want." But I'm going to tell you something and this may be hard to hear for those of you that are people pleasers out there; people pleasing is not selfless. It is selfish.

People pleasing is selfish because the reason that you have gotten into the habit of people pleasing in the first place is because you are trying to control how you feel. "I'm going to bend over backwards for my boss in the hopes I'll feel good about myself. I'm going to make sure my husband has all his needs met in the hopes that I can feel good about myself."

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But here's the thing, if you've unconsciously fallen into the habit of people pleasing in an attempt to feel good, what's happening is that the think-feel-act cycle is working at the expense of your own happiness and your own needs. People pleasing works against you.

So think about it this way; when you are people pleasing, you are making choices and making decisions based on whether or not you believe it will make someone else happy. But that attempt to make someone else happy is an attempt by your brain to erase the feelings of insecurity or lack of self-worth so that you can finally feel good.

That's why you become so desperate to meet other people's needs and to never say no and to make other people happy. It really is all about you and you finally feeling good. But, of course, it doesn't work.

Now, a lot of people will say, "Well I don't understand what's wrong with this. What's wrong with taking care of the people in my life? What's wrong with wanting the best for them and trying to make other people happy?" And I'm glad you asked because there are some big problems with it.

There are really five problems I see that stem from people pleasing. The first is that people pleasing often starts with the people that we love, right – our parents, our partners, our kids – but slowly you start to notice that it expands outward more and more and it starts to include a lot of people. And before you know it, people pleasing includes your boss, right, "I can't ask for more time off." Or your friends, "Oh I can't turn down that invitation." It might even extend to waiters, "I don't want to tell him that he got my order wrong," or your dog-walker, "She keeps showing up late but I don't want to say anything."

People pleasing becomes all encompassing. The more you do it, the more you find that it's not just the people that you love, it is so many people in your life. You become more and more practiced at not going for your needs, saying what you really want but always focused on doing things because you're afraid of disappointing others or you're afraid other people will be upset with you.

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So that's the first problem. The second – you are not in control of how other people feel; not ever. I don't care what example you're going to bring to me, that is not how the think-feel-act cycle works, period. People will say, "Well what if I do something really, really nice?" I'm going to tell you this; it still doesn't matter because you doing something nice is a circumstance for another person. They can have any number of thoughts about this. And you know what, this happens all the time in my own life, right.

My husband will do something really, really thoughtful and I'll completely overlook it just because I'm so lost in my own head, I'm so lost in my own thoughts. and you may have seen this if you've tried so hard to cheer someone up, it's like they don't want to be, right. You can do everything you can think of to try to make them happier, but how they feel depends on what they are thinking, now what you are doing.

Third – people pleasing is always at the expense of your own happiness and your own needs, because here's the thing, invariably you are choosing against yourself. You are saying yes when you want to say no. you are keeping quiet when you want to complain. You are telling people that everything's fine, "Oh don't worry about it, it's not a big deal." When really, that's not true and so, people pleasing works at the expense of your own happiness and your own needs.

Fourth – people pleasers are often really resentful, and it makes sense because when you are in that habit of people pleasing, you give and you give and you give and you give and it's exhausting. And then kind of in the back of your mind there's that thought of, "Hey, did you notice? Did you notice how I'm sacrificing myself? I'm sacrificing all these things, all my needs, all my wants, I'm doing all these things that I don't want to do but I'm doing it anyway. Have you noticed everything that I'm doing for you? Where is my credit?"

This is often the silent chatter in a people pleaser's mind, right. Have you noticed how much I'm doing that I don't want to do? These thoughts will build resentment, they will build up bitterness – and listen, resentment and bitterness, they do not lead anywhere positive in the think-feel-act cycle.

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And then finally, the habit of people pleasing disconnects you from your true self. Time and time again, you end up denying your truth and choosing something that you don't want. You end up lying about your wants and your needs. And it seems so honorable. It seems like, "Well, but I'm just saying that I'll do this thing that I don't really want to do because I'm trying to be this compassionate person." But listen, it's not, because you are lying. It is a recipe for feeling terrible. And so for those of you out there who are like, "What's wrong with people pleasing?" This is what's wrong with it. It does not lead anywhere good.

Now, I want you to consider that people pleasing is a learned habit and not a personality trait – and this is a really important distinction because if you can learn a habit then you can also unlearn it. But if people pleasing is just how you were born, right, then you're stuck.

And I hear people say this all the time. They say, like, oh I've just always been this way. I've always been a people pleaser. And you know what? It's not true. You did not come out of the womb a people pleaser. You learned to do it and the fact of the matter is that many of us are socialized at a very early age to accommodate other people and to defer to other people.

Now, this can happen for either sex, right. People pleasers can be male or female, but I do believe that it disproportionately affects women because women are socialized to be caretakers. We're socialized to put other people's needs before our own and to be passive rather than to say, "Hey, this is what I need. This is what I want," and to make a lot of waves.

And what we learn when we are socialized this way is that this is how you feel good. If other people like you, if other people are happy with what you're doing, then you can feel good about yourself and it sets you up on this terrible cycle. Not only that, it's not how the think-feel-act cycle works, but nobody explains this to us, right.

If you feel good about yourself, it has to do with what you are thinking about yourself and if you have only learned to feel good about yourself by what

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other people are telling you, then let me tell you, you are in a whole host of trouble. So listen, people pleasing is a habit.

It's something you learned. It's not a personality trait and that is a good thing; this is good news because it means that you can start to change it. So then the big question is, okay, so how does people pleasing connect to drinking? How does this sense of, I don't to disappoint anybody, connect to the habit of drinking?

Okay, so let's just look at how people pleasing works in the think-feel-act cycle. So let's say that you decided to take a break from drinking. So during that break, you meet up with your best friend after work and she says, "Oh you're not drinking tonight?" And your brain springs into action. You think, "Oh, I don't want to disappoint her." So you feel obligated. And when you feel obligated, you have that drink even though you decided that you were taking a break.

You act against your own best interest and the result is that you are the one who has to deal with the consequences. You're the one that has to deal with the fact that you said you were going to do something and then didn't do it. You're the one that has to deal with the fact that you then strengthened the habit in your brain and any potential negative consequences from drinking. But worst of all, you teach your brain that not making someone uncomfortable is more important than your own discomfort.

So I think about this happening for me with a friend's bachelorette party that I went to many years ago. And I remember flying out and deciding ahead of time that I just wasn't going to drink this weekend. I was sick of not knowing how the night was going to go. I was sick of waking up and immediately feeling regretful. I just wanted to come away from the weekend feeling good and not like a screw-up.

And I remember on the flight over, I was so determined. I'm not going to drink. I'm not going to drink at this bachelorette party. So I showed up at the hotel and everybody was down by the pool. So I went down by the pool

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and a bunch of other women were there and the waiter came by and I ordered something non-alcoholic to drink. And I remember my friend being like, “Oh, Rachel, don’t tell me you’re not drinking this weekend. It’s my bachelorette party. Come on, it won’t be any fun.”

Because, of course, my friends at this point were used to me being on this constant flip-flop between drinking and not drinking, so what did I do? I immediately went into people pleasing mode. I couldn’t handle the thoughts about letting her down. So the next time the waiter came back, I ordered a drink. And guess what – the rest of the weekend was a blur and I walked away feeling like, “There, you did it again, Rachel. You’re such a screw-up. You never do what you say you’re going to do. It always ends up a disaster.”

Now, I want to be really clear. I was entirely responsible for the choice that I made that weekend to drink. And I think what happens when we start examining the ways in which we are people pleasing, we start to think, “You know, it would just be so much easier if no one made any requests of me. If people just left me alone – if people didn’t ever mention anything about my drinking.”

But you know what, it’s not how the world works. People in your life can make all the requests that they want; it is your responsibility to decide what is right for you and then stick with that decision. But here’s the thing, in that moment, it felt too excruciating to choose what I really wanted to do, which was to not drink that weekend, because I had so much practice trying to do things to make other people happy. And so I chose instead what she wanted me to do even though all the negative results, all the guilt, all the regret, all the physical discomfort, all the hangovers, all those were mine to deal with. But I chose them because I was so afraid of disappointing her.

I chose to do something I didn’t actually want to do because I was trying to make her happy, which, of course, was not in my control. And then, on top of it, I had to deal with all the negative consequences. And guess what happened – afterwards, I felt a little resentful. It’s so unfair to ask me to drink and tell me it won’t be any fun if I’m not drinking.

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But here's what happened – I, in that moment, abdicated all my own responsibility in this situation because it was easier to blame my friend. It was easier to say she was the problem rather than look at the fact that I was choosing something I didn't want to do. Whether or not she had a good time was not going to be decided by whether or not I was drinking.

Her enjoyment, her fun, her excitement, that was her think-feel-act cycle. But in that moment when I said yes, I tried to put myself in charge of her feelings. I decided that if I drank, she'll be happy and if she's happy then I can feel good. But, of course, guess what – the opposite happened.

And the problem is that we do this with everything. Everything we say yes to that we don't want to do when it comes to our partner, our kids, our boss, our family, and then our resentment just grows and grows. And guess what, when we feel a lot of negative emotion, what happens? We start looking for relief. And so all that resentment from people pleasing all day long turns into, "I need some wine time at the end of the day. I need some me time."

And suddenly, having a drink to deal with that resentment seems like you're doing something for yourself. "I did so much for everybody else today. Now it's time for my reward." But the reason you feel resentful, the reason you're looking for relief from that resentment is because you are so fixated on not disappointing others that you are disappointing yourself over and over again.

Now, here's the crazy thing; sometimes our people pleasing is so ingrained that it happens even when people are not making requests of us. So, for example, we decide to drink because we perceive that not drinking will make other people uncomfortable, when in reality, nobody's said anything.

You know, I remember doing this on dates a lot. So before I even got there, before the guy that I was on a date with could even say anything about my drinking or not drinking, I had already decided that it would make him feel awkward, so I should just drink even though I knew that, you know what, a first date might be better in the end if I wasn't drinking. Like, maybe I could

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actually assess with a clear head if this was a guy that wanted to invest time and energy in; if my brain wasn't clouded by alcohol.

So notice that it will happen even when people aren't making requests of us, but it feels almost like they are because we are so sure that we will disappoint them if we don't do something. So listen, if you want to change your drinking, if you want to take a break, you must start practicing putting your needs first and letting go of this idea that you have to keep everybody happy.

You have to be willing to allow other people to feel whatever they are going to feel about your drinking so that you don't disappoint yourself because people pleasing, drinking, to make other people happy, will always happen at your own expense.

Now, it's crazy because I'll hear people say, you know, "What about when I'm at a party that I don't even want to be at? It's so boring. What then? Having a drink is my only way to get through it." Right, there's this sense of like, well there better be something for me to drink because I don't even want to be here in the first place.

I think about this a lot with weddings. I hear so many people complain about going to weddings as if they don't have a choice, when, of course, you do. Listen, unless you are a minor – unless your parents are dragging you there – then you have a choice. You are an adult. But people complain about weddings as if they don't have a choice, as if they have no free will. And then, oh my god, have you ever heard someone talk who has gone to a dry wedding where there's no booze?

It is like the end of the world. People talk about it like, "Here I was, at this wedding I didn't want to be at, begrudgingly celebrating the union of two people, and then you know what, they didn't even have a reward. They didn't even have alcohol to make the entire thing bearable." I always say, listen, either go to the wedding and find a way to enjoy yourself, or don't go to the wedding. But don't be a people pleaser and go when you don't really want to.

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If you're going to attend something, take responsibility for being there and don't use alcohol as your excuse. You're an adult. People will say to me, "But, Rachel, I don't want to deal with the blowback from my friends or my family. If I don't go I'll never hear the end of it." But then, you know what – take responsibility for that. understand that if you are going because you don't want to hear other people's opinion about the fact that you didn't go, then just recognize that you are choosing to be there. It is your choice. You are not there against your will.

So here's what I want you guys to do today, because I think it is so important to dig in to the own areas own parts of your life where you are stuck in the habit of people pleasing. I want you to really uncover where are all the little concessions that you're making. Sure, I'll have a drink. What are all the little lies that you're telling? "Yeah, I'll go to this party. I don't mind making cupcakes for school, it's fine."

Where are all the places that you feel like you are making choices because you are so afraid of disappointing someone else? So these are the questions I want you to answer today. And you know what? Write them down. You always hear me say this; write them down.

Where in your life are you saying yes when you really want to say no? Why are you choosing against yourself? What are you afraid will happen if you choose what you really want to do? How do you feel when you do things that you don't want to do? What are those thoughts in your head? "I hate this, I wish I wasn't here. Why do I have to be doing this?"

How do you feel when you're doing things you don't want to do? Who do you blame when you find yourself doing things against your will, including drinking when you don't want to? Are you taking responsibility or are you putting the blame on your partner, your kids, your boss, your mother, your best friend? And finally, what would you have to be willing to feel if you were committed to honoring what your true self really wanted to do in all situations.

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Alright, guys, listen, people pleasing, it is a habit that you have got to address if you are going to change your drinking; trust me. This idea that we cannot disappoint people, that by not drinking we are letting people down, it will keep you stuck in the habit forever. So make sure you answer these questions. Make sure you really examine where in your life you are doing things, you are saying yes when really you want to say no.

Alright, everybody, any questions, if you want to hear me talk about anything on the podcast, you know how to reach out to me; it's podcast@rachelhart.com. Otherwise, I will see you next week.

Hey guys, if you want to go over to iTunes and leave a review about the podcast if you're enjoying it, I would love it. But not only that; I am giving everyone who does a free urge meditation. I will tell you, this meditation, it is super simple. All it takes is five minutes and a pair of headphones. If you are having an urge and you want a different way to handle it, just pop those headphones in, find a place where you can sit down undisturbed and teach your brain, retrain your brain a very simple method to make urges more tolerable. All you need to do is head on over to rachelhart.com/urge and input your information there.

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