

Ep #73: Why Your Enthusiasm Fades



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast, episode 73. Welcome to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart. If you are 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 guys, welcome back. So this is part two of a two-part episode. Last week I was talking all about why you delay taking action, why you keep thinking thoughts like, "I'll start Monday, I'll start tomorrow, next week, next month, next year." So if you haven't taken a listen to that episode yet, I want you to go back and check that out.

Because today, what we are going to dig into is what happens when you do take action, what happens when you set a goal, you sign up for a new program, you invest in coaching, you buy the self-help book, whatever it is. You take action, you make the commitment, but then you slowly start to see your enthusiasm fade. What do you do then?

I see this happen with so many people over and over again. But here's the thing: I watched it happen with myself for the longest time. I would have all these big plans to change my drinking, to change my eating, my spending, my body, and I would dive in with all this enthusiasm after I got over those initial thoughts of, "Now's not a good time, I'll just wait until next month."

But once I finally took action I would dive in and I would feel really positive and then slowly - it wouldn't take that much time before I felt like, "Ugh, I don't know, I'm just not that into it anymore." It was like all my enthusiasm had just drained out of me.

And for the longest time, I thought that it meant something was wrong with me. I looked at other people who seemed to be setting goals and accomplishing them and I thought, "Why can't I do that? What's wrong with me? Why does my enthusiasm always slip away?" It felt like there was something broken inside of me.

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #73: Why Your Enthusiasm Fades

And if you felt like that - and I know a lot of you have, I want to help you understand what's happening here. So we're going to talk about what enthusiasm is and what creates it, the real reason your enthusiasm is slipping away, and I promise it has nothing to do with who you are or something inside of you, and how to counteract what is unfolding right now, how to counteract the loss of enthusiasm with the think-feel-act cycle.

So let's start first by just talking about what enthusiasm is. Enthusiasm is a strong feeling or emotion in favor of something. It's an excitedness or eagerness. And now a lot of you may think, "Okay, so when I feel that kind of excitement, that eagerness, that enthusiasm, that strong feeling in favor, well, what's the opposite of it, right? Where am I ending up when my enthusiasm just seems to slip away?"

And I want to tell you this: it's not apathy or indifference. The opposite of enthusiasm is not being indifferent to something. It's defeat. It's that feeling of frustration that success has been prevented again, that you have been defeated and often, we think we've been defeated by ourselves.

So enthusiasm is a feeling. That's the first thing you need to understand. And this is always good news because if it is a feeling, then guess what creates it? Your thoughts. Thoughts like, "This is going to be great, I think this is going to work. I'm finally going to make some change here, I can't wait to get started. This time's going to be different, I can do this."

Thoughts like these will create your enthusiasm. Now, most of you are not yet recognizing the thought piece. Most of you are attributing your enthusiasm to the circumstance, to the goal, the program, the book, the course, the investment that you made. You think that that is why you feel enthusiastic, but that is never the case. It is always because of what you are thinking about the goal or the program or the book or the course.

And this is a really important piece that I don't want you to just brush past because it really helps explain why your enthusiasm starts to fade and also how to counteract it.

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #73: Why Your Enthusiasm Fades

So remember, this is good news because if your thoughts create the feeling of enthusiasm, then if you start to notice your enthusiasm slipping away, you have a place to look. Now, for the longest time, I didn't know about the think-feel-act cycle, but I would recognize that my enthusiasm that would start of strong would slip away.

And I didn't understand that my thoughts created how I was feeling and so where did I go? I looked to myself, I blamed myself. And I bet that you are doing the same thing. You are not looking at your thoughts. In fact, a lot of you will say, "When my enthusiasm starts to wane, it feels like there's something wrong with me. It feels like I'm doing something wrong. I'm failing again, that there's some sort of flaw in how I was built or some sort of flaw in how my brain works."

We start looking for all these reasons about why we don't feel enthusiastic anymore. What happened? We decided we were going to embark on change, we signed up for the program, we got the book, we had all this enthusiasm, and then where did it go?

And without understanding how the think-feel-act cycle works, what do we do? We blame ourselves. Something must be wrong with me, or something's wrong with the program, right? This program, it's impossible, or these tools are too hard, they won't work, they're not realistic.

What we do is we turn our attention to the circumstances with ourselves, the program, the tools, the book, and we use that to try to explain why our enthusiasm seem to evaporate.

So you know, I know for the longest time what I told myself, I said, "I don't know, I think that it might be genetic. I think that I may have genetically been born with subpar motivation." I thought it was really an intrinsic flaw in myself.

And so I would just say, "I don't know, I think I just wasn't built that way, I wasn't built the way other people are built." And you know, that is such an impossible place to get out of because if you believe the reason why you

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #73: Why Your Enthusiasm Fades

are lacking enthusiasm is because you're just genetically born that way, that's just how you were built, well then how are you ever going to fix that? And I thought that for years and years. For such a long time I was caught up in this really faulty belief of I don't know, I think that's just who I am. I'm just not a very enthusiastic or committed person.

You know, I had a client say to me recently when she was working on a program with me and she was noticing her enthusiasm that she really had at the outset had kind of slipped away. She said, "You know, it's like I'm grasping for something that's not there. I'm grasping at this thing that I'm trying to find to help get me through the moment but I have no idea where it went or how to get it back."

And every time it happens - because she, like me, would notice it - it wouldn't just happen in this one area. Every time her enthusiasm went away, she would just ditch whatever she was working on and start another project. And so all these things in her life were left undone or they weren't dealt with because she kept telling herself, "I just lost my drive and enthusiasm so I better see if this other thing, this other project, this other program would bring it back."

And this is so common, especially when you are trying to change a habit like overdrinking. When you're trying to change a habit where you may already feel like, "I don't understand why is it, why do I seem to drink more than I want? Why does it feel so challenging to change?"

And so you start out and you feel enthusiastic and you take action and the moment you run into difficulty, the moment that things get hard, that is when your enthusiasm changes, but for good reason. Because your thinking starts to change.

So you know, I remember doing this to myself right before I turned 30. Of course, I didn't know anything about the think-feel-act cycle, I didn't understand why my enthusiasm just evaporated when I embarked on this kind of quest for change. But I was about to turn 30, it felt like a really big

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #73: Why Your Enthusiasm Fades

milestone, and in part because I always used to joke with one of my friends like, "Oh yeah, I'm going to figure this all out by the time I'm 30."

And when I was feeling frustrated about my career, my relationships, or my drinking, or my smoking, or my spending, my body, there's a lot that I was frustrated about, I would just tell myself, "It's okay, when I'm 30 I'll have it all figured out." Which was fine to tell myself when I was 23, or 25, or 27, but suddenly I was 29 years old and my 30th birthday was right around the corner and I had this thought that I had been thinking for so long, "I'll have it all figured out when I'm 30."

And I realized, "Oh my gosh, I'm not even close to having any of this figured out. I got to do something. I got to do something right away." And I remember a couple months before my 30th birthday, I created this Word document, I actually still have it. I dug it out of the recesses of my computer the other day, and I named it three months to 30.

Now remember, at the time I was working in communications so I really liked clever titles, and that's where I would spend a lot of time when I was trying to get myself to change. Like, maybe if I can just figure out this kind of clever title or this clever idea, that will be what will help me.

So anyway, it was a couple months before my birthday, I think it was in August and my birthday's in November. And I wrote out this two-page document about all the changes I was going to make. We were going to drink all this water and eat all these nourishing foods and exercise every day and meditate and stop drinking and stop smoking and redecorate my apartment. I mean, it was really like a revamp of my entire life because I thought, "I'm about to turn 30, I got to get this figured out."

And what happened to me is exactly what happens to so many of you. I had all this enthusiasm at the outset. I was thinking all these thoughts, "You know what, this is going to be it. It's going to be great. I'm finally going to make this change, I can't wait to get started. I can do this, this is going to work."

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #73: Why Your Enthusiasm Fades

And that's exactly what happened with this plan. So I had all these thoughts that created enthusiasm that I was really believing this time would be different. But guess what happened? I started out strong, and then it really took almost no time before that enthusiasm just dissipated. I fell behind on this crazy list of to-dos that I had, and I fell behind on my daily goals.

And my enthusiasm seemed to go right with it. And what did I do? I saw it as an inherent defect in myself, right? "I don't know, Rachel, I think you just weren't built to accomplish things." But here's what really happened. It wasn't that I wasn't doing those daily to-dos. It wasn't that I wasn't meeting these goals that I had set for myself. It was that my thoughts had started to change. All the thoughts that I had at the outset. "This is going to be great, this time will be different. I'm going to be able to create change."

All of a sudden, those thoughts shifted. But I had no awareness that that's what was happening. And you have probably also had a similar experience where you embarked on some sort of change in your life that you were excited about, you felt enthusiastic about or eager about, and then you started doing the work. And once you started doing the work, without you realizing it, your thoughts started to shift. "This is hard. I'm not doing it right. Oh god, I missed another day, what's wrong with me? Everybody else is picking this up so much faster than I am. This isn't practical, I'm not sure it's working." Right?

All of these thoughts start to creep in. And for most of us, we just have no awareness. We have no awareness that our thinking has so drastically changed but not only that, that when our thoughts change, how we feel also changes.

So thoughts like, "I'm not doing it right, this is hard, this is too difficult, other people are getting it faster than I am, it's not practical, I don't think it's going to work," thoughts like this are going to create feelings like doubt, uncertainty, and defeat. None of these feelings sound like enthusiasm. None of them sound like excitement or eagerness.

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #73: Why Your Enthusiasm Fades

But because most of you aren't tuned into how the think-feel-act cycle is working or that it even exists, all we notice is at the beginning, we felt enthusiasm. We were excited, and then as time started to pass, that enthusiasm started to wane. It started to slip away. And we wonder, why does this always happen?

What no one is showing you is that how your thoughts are changing as you start to interact with the material, as you start to do the work, and if your thoughts change, your feelings will change. And if your feelings change, if all of a sudden you are mired in doubt, uncertainty, and defeat, then guess what's going to happen? You're going to stop taking action. And when you stop taking action, you just proved those thoughts true.

It is too hard. You can't figure it out. It won't work for you. I just - for me, it was such a revelation to finally understand this, that this is why I would embark on so many things and my enthusiasm would slip away. It was not because there was some sort of inherent defect in me, it's not because there was something wrong with me or something wrong with my brain or I was missing a piece of genetic code. It was just because my thinking had started to change.

And once my thinking started to change, what went with it were new feelings and new actions that were not serving me. Understanding this made all the difference. You know, I had this happen recently with a client who we were working together and she was starting to really take the think-feel-act cycle from an intellectual concept to a tool that you could really apply in her own life.

This is a really big part of what I do with people is showing you that it's one thing to understand these concepts on an intellectual level, and to understand the idea that your thoughts create your feelings and your feelings drive your actions. It's another thing to start using it as a tool, to have it as something in your toolbox that you can actually take out and use to start to shift your thinking and shift how you feel.

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #73: Why Your Enthusiasm Fades

And a lot of people are surprised at the challenge that it is to shift from an intellectual concept to an actual tool. I always tell people, you know, it's a lot like learning any other skill. You can read every book in the library about how to ride a bike, and you can intellectually understand how to ride a bike, two wheels, a seat, two pedals, a handlebar. It makes perfect sense intellectually. But once you get on a bike for the very first time, it doesn't matter that it makes intellectual sense. Your brain still has to figure out, your brain still has to understand how to get the bike to work.

And that shift from intellectually understanding something to knowing how to apply something, knowing how to develop a skill, that can be a really big shift. And for a lot of people, they listen to the podcast, it makes a lot of sense, and then they try to apply it and they're like, "Hey, why is this so hard? Why is this challenging?"

So I was working with this client, she was trying to apply the think-feel-act cycle in her own life, she was trying to learn how to use it as a tool rather than just staying in like, an interesting, intellectual concept, and immediately she said, "You know, I don't know if this is practical. Like, I don't know that I can actually apply this tool in real life. It seems really hard."

Now, remember, I talk about how the cycle itself is reinforcing. The results that you create always support the original thought. And so what I did is I showed her what her thoughts were creating in the cycle. So when she was thinking a thought like, "I don't know that this is so practical. I don't know that I can really apply this in real life," she felt doubtful.

Now, that was the opposite of how she felt when she signed up. She felt really enthusiastic. When she felt doubtful, she took actions based on that doubt. So what she would do, she would think of all the ways that this wasn't working, all the ways that this took too much time, it was too hard, instead of trying to use it. She got really stuck in that spin of like, it's too hard, I won't be able to apply it in my daily life, I don't have time for this, and then guess what?

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #73: Why Your Enthusiasm Fades

The more that she was fixated on how this wasn't practical, it couldn't work in real life, the more doubt she felt, the less action she took so she wasn't actually practicing it every day. She was just thinking about how hard it was. And then guess what her result was? You know what? It wasn't practical because she wasn't learning how to use it.

It was as if she was staring at the bike from a distance. She got on it once and was like, "That's tough," and then she would just look at the bike from afar and think, "I don't know, not so sure I can ever master that."

So I really explained this to her to show her why the reasons she lost her enthusiasm is because she started having thoughts about how this isn't practical, it can't work in real life, it's too hard, and what these thoughts were creating for her.

Now, when she started out, she knew all about the think-feel-act cycle, but she had very different thoughts. She had thoughts like, "I'm going to figure this out once and for all. This is going to be the thing that makes a difference." So she felt enthusiastic, she took action, she signed up, and then guess what? She had the ability to start figuring it out.

But unless you have the awareness that your enthusiasm doesn't just slip away, it doesn't just fade away, it doesn't just go off into the ether, but that your thinking changes, well, then you're always going to be stuck in this place of feeling like I don't know what happened.

What happened for her, she ran into discomfort, she ran into hard work. She ran into things not unfolding as she expected. She ran into trying something and then failing or missing a day. And what she then did unconsciously without realizing is she made all of these things mean something negative.

And sure enough, her thoughts slowly shifted from ones that originally were creating enthusiasm, "I'm going to figure this out, I'm going to do this, this is going to make a difference," to thoughts that were creating defeat. "It's too hard, it's not practical. Can't work in real life."

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #73: Why Your Enthusiasm Fades

Meanwhile, she was left questioning, "What is wrong with me? Why do I always do this?" The way to counteract this, if you notice that you have fallen into the same trap, the way to counteract this is to notice what you make difficulty or an obstacle or a hurdle or an unintended outcome mean about you.

Listen, too many of us are stuck in this place of wanting to do everything perfectly and if we don't do it perfectly then we make it mean something negative about ourselves. But listen, perfect is not how the brain learns. You have to be willing to fall. You have to be willing to fail. You cannot hop on that bike and ride off into the sunset for the very first time.

You're going to be wobbly, you're going to be uncertain. You might fall down. That's okay, that's how you learn. But so many of you aren't willing to do that because you think that not doing something perfectly means something negative about you.

You see it as proof that you can't figure it out. That's what this client was doing, that's what I did with myself, with my three months to 30 plan. Any day that I didn't complete my list of to-dos was reason to beat myself up, reason to make it mean I couldn't or I wouldn't succeed instead of just seeing it as part of the learning process. And instead of understanding that the more important question to understand was why I wasn't following through.

And guess what? The answer was always my thinking. My thoughts that it was too hard, I don't have enough time, skipping one day won't hurt. My enthusiasm turned to defeat, and when I felt defeated, I threw in the towel. And that is what you're doing too.

This is why you need thought work. You have got to incorporate thought work into changing any habit, but especially a habit like overdrinking. You've got to really just understand not only intellectually the think-feel-act cycle, but how to use it as a tool. You can't just rely on a long list of actions and to-dos. You can't just make a plan not to drink. Because if no one is supervising your brain, then what will happen is you will take obstacles and

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #73: Why Your Enthusiasm Fades

difficulty and hurdles and you will make it mean something negative about you.

The think-feel-act cycle is like a roadmap to understand how everything in your life is unfolding. So the next time that you start a new project or you have a new goal, or you sign up for a new program, and you notice that you were so enthusiastic at the outset and then that enthusiasm starts to wane, what you have to do is start looking at what you're thinking. Looking at what you are making obstacles or difficulty or challenges mean about you.

And then look at those thoughts and put them in the cycle. How do they make you feel? What do you do when you feel that way? How are they self-reinforcing? Unless you see that cycle unfold and then on purpose work to slowly shift your thinking, you will always get caught in defeat. There's nothing wrong with you if your enthusiasm has started to fade. There's just something wrong with your thinking. And that my friends, is great news.

Alright everybody, as always, if you have questions or ideas, if you want to hear me talk about a topic on the podcast, you can just shoot me an email at podcast@rachelhart.com. Otherwise, I will see you next week. Bye, everybody.

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.

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.

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart