

## Ep #138: Obstacle Mirages



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Rachel Hart**

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You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 138.

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.

Well hello everybody. So listen, the last couple episodes, I have been talking to you guys about what is really necessary if you want to take a successful break from drinking. So we've been talking about fool-proof resolutions, we've also been talking about one of the worst pieces of advice that I got around changing my drinking.

I know a lot of you are using this month, you're using September as your new New Year, instead of waiting for months for January 1<sup>st</sup> to roll around and decide okay, now I'm ready to change my drinking. You're actually using September as a fresh start so that you can take a break and learn what's really behind the habit.

And because of that, because so many of you are using September in this way, I want to talk to you about a concept called obstacle mirages, which is really going to build on what I have been teaching you about how to set a goal and really help ensure that you meet it.

If you are not yet taking a break from drinking, there's still time. September is still new. You can still get on the September is the new January bandwagon. Don't ever tell yourself too late. And in fact, if you are telling yourself right now, I don't know, it's not the right time, already a week has passed in the month, today's episode is going to be especially important for you.

But listen, even if you're not setting your resolution around your drinking this month, you have got to understand the concept of obstacle mirages

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because they are going to appear with every single goal you have in your life. They don't just appear in the realm of drinking.

Obstacle mirages are simply an obstacle that your brain believes is standing in your way, it's blocking success, and you will swear up and down that the obstacle is real and it's holding you back. But in reality, that obstacle isn't there. It isn't blocking your way at all. It is simply a mirage.

Just think of mirages that you see out in nature. So everyone has seen a mirage before. Think of a time when you're maybe drinking down a road, it's really hot, and in the distance, you see a shimmering pool of water across the road. Now, you aren't hallucinating. Your brain really does see this image of a pool of water, but it's a mirage. There isn't any water spilling across the road.

It's simply the result of something called light refraction, which is just a fancy way of saying that the image that you see, the mirage is the product of rays of light that are bending. So normally, a ray of light travels through the air in a straight line, but sometimes when the conditions are right, that ray will bend and curve, and the result of that is a mirage will be produced. That's what your brain will see down the road.

So that pool of water, that lake of water that you see up ahead is actually a refracted image of the sky. So you see the sky above you, but you also see a refracted image of it on the ground, which is why it looks like you're going to drive your car into a pool of water. But you aren't going to get wet. You don't need to stop the car. It's just a mirage. The pool of water isn't there at all. Your car is not in danger of being submerged. You are totally safe from getting wet, even though your brain is telling you otherwise.

The exact same thing happens when you are trying to change anything in your life with obstacle mirages. Your brain sees something that it is sure is going to block your path. When really, it's not blocking you at all. And if you don't learn how to identify obstacle mirages, you can be stuck for years or decades, even your entire life thinking that change is impossible when in reality, your path is totally clear.

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Obstacle mirages, I like to think of them like they leave you like you're a thirsty traveler, walking towards this oasis that you see in the desert. And you keep walking and walking and walking, and you think you're making progress towards a water source but you never get there.

Even though you think the entire time as you're walking oh, all my problems are going to be solved. But in reality, all you're doing is expending all this energy headed in the wrong direction. That's what happens with obstacle mirages. You spend all your time and energy focused in the wrong place and you miss out on tackling the real obstacle and heading in the direction that will actually create change for you.

And the thing is that obstacle mirages don't just appear when you're trying to change your drinking. They appear in all areas of your life, whenever you're trying to create a new result, whenever you're trying to create change.

I was thinking about this recently because I was coaching a woman in my Take A Break program. And she was talking about how hard it is to stay committed to her break because her husband drinks and he doesn't want to stop. And she was telling me how frustrating it is that he doesn't support her goal and how much it upsets her, and how once he starts drinking, invariably, she caves and she joins him.

Now, she didn't know it at the time but her husband is her obstacle mirage. Her brain really believed that he was the problem standing in the way of her success. But the more she focused on him, the more she wasted valuable energy heading in the wrong direction.

And this is what I want to unpack for all of you guys today so I'm going to walk you through all the different parts. So we're going to talk about what the most common obstacle mirages are, why your brain interprets these mirages, because they are mirages, as obstacles, how to identify the real obstacle that is getting in your way when it comes to changing your drinking, but when it comes to changing anything in your life, and how to

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start heading in the right direction instead of getting sidetracked by the mirage.

This will change everything for you. So let's talk about the most common obstacle mirages. The two most common things that I hear from people when they want to change their drinking but they are so sure that something is standing in their way, the first is other people and the second is time.

Now listen, there are more than just these two, but these are the ones I hear most often. They show up with my clients over and over again. Other people are my obstacle and time is an obstacle. Your brain is constantly telling you that change isn't possible because of the people in your life and the hours in your day.

And it will sound like this. I really want to change my drinking but my husband won't take a break with me, or all my friends drink. My boss expects that I'm going to wine and dine clients and that I have to join in. My in-laws are impossible to be around without wine to smooth things over. I'm single and no one wants to date someone who doesn't drink. My best friend will be disappointed if I say no.

This is what it sounds like, and the list will go on and on and on. You are so convinced that people are standing in your way. So what do you do? Well, when we think that people are standing in our way, you will spend all your time and energy trying to control their behavior and change them in a way that you believe will help you be successful.

And when that doesn't work, when you are not successful at getting them to change, what happens? Then you end up blaming and complaining that they are the reason that you can't succeed when in reality, these people are just obstacle mirages. Trying to control them is so common.

I spent many, many, many years in my life trying to do exactly that. Just think about all you have to do is think about all the ways that your brain has

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told you it will be so much easier to say no to a drink if only someone behaved differently. Right?

The brain would have you believe oh, if only my husband wasn't drinking around me, if only he didn't bring home my favorite bottle of wine, if only other people didn't offer me drinks, if only people never asked why I wasn't drinking, if only this party or this restaurant had more non-alcoholic options, if only my friend stopped making comments about my decisions and they were instead totally supportive, if only my in-laws were easier to get along with so I didn't need wine to make the visit enjoyable.

This is what your brain wants you to believe but trying to change other people's behavior so that you can succeed is part of the mirage. First things first, you can't control other people. Trying to tell yourself that you can and expending all your energy to get them to behave differently has you always headed in the wrong direction.

You can't control them because you don't create their think-feel-act cycle. As much as we would like it to be the case, that's not how it works. Their behavior is a result of how they are feeling and their thoughts. Whatever is happening in their mind. You can try to make all the persuasive arguments you want but you cannot go in and swap out their thoughts.

But the second reason why changing or attempting to change other people's behavior as part of the mirage is because they simply are not responsible for the decisions that you make around drinking. The only person that is responsible for that is you and telling yourself that other people create your success is the opposite of what the think-feel-act cycle teaches you.

Whether or not you say yes to a drink, and by the way, saying yes is the action in think-feel-act. It has nothing to do with other people. It has to do with you and what thoughts you are thinking and how you are feeling when you think those thoughts. That's it. Unless someone is holding you down and pouring a drink down your throat, the decision, the action of saying yes rests squarely with you.

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Now, I know you want to say okay fine, but Rachel, it would be so much easier if they would change. But I want you to really question this. Would it? Because I want to tell you this; your brain would find some other excuse. It would find some other mirage to fixate on. Because remember, that lower brain of yours, that part of you that just cares about immediate gratification, it cares about being rewarded and continuing to get the reward, that part of you wants to keep the habit.

And that will remain true even if we could wave a magic wand and get everyone in our life to behave the way we wanted them to. Even if your husband agreed to take a break with you and no one ever offered you a drink, and no one ever asked you any questions, no one was ever disappointed when you weren't drinking, even if there were all the most amazing fancy fun adult non-alcoholic options at the restaurant or the party, even then, that lower brain of yours would find another excuse.

So when you are focused on other people as the reason that you aren't being successful right now, you are not taking responsibility for your thoughts and your feelings. You are just looking towards the mirage.

Now, I will tell you, the other most common obstacle mirage is time. So if you find that you're not blaming other people, you may be blaming the clock. And it sounds a lot like this; now just isn't a right time to take a break. I'm too busy. I've got too much on my plate. I'm taking care of an elderly parent. My husband lost his job. I'm looking for a job. I'm just starting a new job. We have a big project at work. My sister is going through a divorce. My mother just got diagnosed with cancer. My child was just diagnosed with ADHD. I just need to get through this period and then I'll take a break. Then I'll start practicing these skills. Then I will learn how to manage my mind.

Your brain wants you to believe that now isn't the right time. Because as long as you believe that, you will delay taking action and the habit will remain intact. Not only that, it wants you to believe in the mirage of the right time. That's the mirage. This future that you imagine with wide open spaces and everybody's healthy and work is quiet and your to-do list is empty and no one is making unreasonable requests of you.

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The mirage is that perfect future that your brain wants you to believe is out there. It's this beautiful oasis in the middle of the desert. And you're so sure that your thirst is going to be quenched if only you can get there. But what ends up happening? When you get there, you're just drinking sand. You're just surrounded by real life. There is no perfect future where everything is going the way that you imagine it should.

You have enough time right now today, whatever is happening in your life to learn how to change this habit. And in fact, right now is the perfect time. Right now is the key. Waiting for some mythical future where everything is rainbows and sunshine, that's what's going to keep you stuck. And the reason that I know this is really simple. Because learning how to change the habit of drinking depends on your ability to learn how to do it in real life.

And whatever is happening in your life right now, that is real life. If you only ever learn how to say no to a drink and no to your urges when everything in your life is perfect, and everybody's healthy and everything is going smoothly at work, and there are no hiccups, then you are going to be in for a rude awakening because that is not what life is like.

If you can only say no when you feel positive emotions, it's not going to work. You have to be able to say no regardless of how you are feeling, regardless of what is happening. And so I always tell people okay, so you have a lot going on right now. Great because when you have a lot going on, that's when your brain really wants to kick into overdrive and make a lot of excuses for why it's okay for you to have that drink and to have another glass.

That's when you are actually more likely to kick the habit of drinking into overdrive. And I want to show you how to use this time to teach your brain the opposite, that every excuse your lower brain is making that you need a drink and you need a break and you can't do it and you're too busy and things are too hard and you don't have time, it's all BS.

That's why this work is so powerful. When you tackle all the excuses that that lower brain wants you to believe about how now isn't the right time and

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how other people are getting in your way, you start to see oh wait, my brain makes these excuses in all areas of my life. It's doing the exact same thing.

And if you can disprove them in this area, with the habit of drinking, guess what, you can disprove them everywhere and that's why learning how to manage your mind, learning how to use the think-feel-act cycle as a tool is actually a meta skill. It's not just going to help you change your drinking. It's going to help you change your life.

So the two most common obstacle mirages are other people and time. And then the question is why is it? Why is it that so many of you believe that other people and time are standing in the way of your success? And the answer is always really simple. Because no one ever teaches you about the think-feel-act cycle.

Instead, we are surrounded by messages that other people create our feelings, and if they create your feelings, then they're responsible for your actions and then they're responsible for your results so it's not your fault. It's their fault.

And it really feels like this is true. It really feels like, I don't know, my husband's just driving me bonkers. He drives me bonkers and then I pour a drink so I can feel better because I just can't take it anymore. He's driving me to drink. How often have you heard that?

So and so is driving me to drive. You're going to drive me to drink. We get that message all the time when it is simply not true. Other people do not drive you to drink. Your thoughts are driving you to drink.

And there really is a very simple way to show yourself that this belief that other people create your feelings and other people are responsible for your actions simply isn't true. Because if other people create how you feel, which by the way, you want to tell yourself that is the case all of the time, any time you're feeling a negative emotion. Your brain is looking to find who's responsible for it.

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But if that were true, that other people create your feelings, then the same should be true not just with negative feelings but with positive ones. So people should have in their power, the ability to make you feel good all the time. But I want you to think about this and be really honest with yourself.

How often in your life, how many times has someone complimented you and you've immediately brushed it off? You've immediately said it's not a big deal, they don't mean it, they're just saying it, they have to say it. They gave you the compliment and it didn't feel good. It didn't make you feel loved or accepted or beautiful or amazing. You're like, that doesn't really count. It's not a big thing. They don't mean it.

How many times have you done this? Now, if people are responsible for how we feel, then how does that happen and why does this happen? Simply because how you feel isn't a matter of what other people are doing or saying. It's a matter of what you are thinking and what you are believing. Not other people.

You can't have it both ways. You can't say well, if someone says something really nice or does something really nice and it doesn't make me feel good, because I don't believe them or I have some reason that can explain their actions away, or I can tell myself it doesn't really count, you can't then also say well, but if someone does or says the mean things, well then I'm a goner. Then that definitely creates my feelings.

Because which is it? Do they create your feelings or not? I want you to see that they don't. Understanding this is what makes you so powerful. But I want you to see that it doesn't work like this because simply, that's not how the think-feel-act cycle works. How you feel doesn't depend on someone else. It depends on you and what you are thinking.

But you're not telling yourself that right now. You're telling yourself that other people are standing in your way. You're telling yourself that oh, I need more time if I want to change. I need more time if I want to be successful. Oh, but the problem is there's never enough time.

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This is how the majority of people think. We think in obstacle mirages. It's how we're taught to think, and in fact, this is how I used to think. I have to do the daily work of watching my brain wanting to slip back into these obstacle mirages. I have to watch and be on the lookout for my brain because it wants to start saying there's just too much to do, Rachel. You don't have enough time in your schedule. This person is really driving me nuts.

I watch my brain start to pretend that these obstacles are in my way and I have to redirect it. I have to manage it. I have to remind it what's what. Oh no brain, I see what you're trying to do. But other people and time, these are just obstacle mirages.

This is why you need to learn how to manage your mind and to coach yourself because otherwise, you can spend your entire life seeing obstacle mirages all around you and you will never get any closer to your goal. Because truly, the real obstacle is always you. You are the obstacle when it comes to changing your drinking.

You're the obstacle when it comes to changing any habit in your life. Literally nothing is in your way but yourself. That's it. Now, you might hear that and recoil a little bit, but I want you to hear that and realize you're unstoppable. All the obstacles that you think that you are seeing is just your brain projecting thoughts of fear and worry into the future.

It's always your thoughts. It's always your feelings, your actions that create your results. If you want to change the habit of drinking, that's where you need to focus. Your focus needs to be on you and your brain and your thoughts about yourself and the possibility of success and the likelihood of change.

Because when I start working with clients on this very thing, what we discover is that the thoughts they have running through their mind are pretty dismal when it comes to change. They'll be telling themselves all day long, I don't think I can do it. I don't think I have the willpower. I've never been able to do it before so why would this time be any different?

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Now listen, all of those thoughts are going to create the feeling of defeat. And when you feel defeated, what do you do? You are very unlikely to take action because you're predicting failure before you even get out of the gate.

So this is what I mean when I say you are the obstacle standing in your own way. It does mean that you have to take full responsibility for how you are showing up in your life and whatever you are doing and the results of your life. It does mean that you have to take full responsibility for your thoughts and your feelings.

But man, when you realize that it's just you standing in your way, it's amazing because you spent so long thinking that you have all of these obstacles when really, there's just one. Now listen, it's so much easier to blame the mirage. It's so much easier to blame other people, it's so much easier to blame everything that is happening in your life because when we blame the obstacle mirages, it requires nothing of you.

But in order to see them as mirages, you have to take 100% responsibility not only for your drinking, but more importantly, for your thinking. And most people are not used to doing that. I was telling this woman who I was coaching in the program, I was telling her you have to stop believing that you need your husband to change in order for you to be successful because that thought is a lie.

His drinking has no bearing on your success. It has no bearing in your results in this program. His drinking doesn't make you cave. And she wanted to say listen, but he's not supporting me. And I told her you're right, you do need support, but it's not from your husband. You need support from yourself.

You aren't the one supporting your own decision to be here and to follow this program and to take a break. You're the one that is not supporting yourself. You're the one that's beating yourself up every time you say yes. You need to learn how to start supporting yourself instead of trying to outsource that work to other people because they don't do a very good job of it.

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No fault of their own simply because they can't create our feelings. The magic of really understanding obstacle mirages is so simple but it's also so profound because when you can identify all of the things that your brain really wants to believe are standing in your way, but they're not at all, you will be able to see that truly everything your brain is saying, I can't do it because of this person, there's too much going on right now, I have to wait for the right time, you will start to see that all of this is just a mirage.

Because the very best news that I can share with you, even though there is a part of your brain that wants you to believe in the obstacle mirage, that's just your lower brain. It's the part of your brain that just cares about rewards. But you have a higher brain too. You have a part of your brain that can manage your lower brain. It can choose to think differently on purpose. It can choose to question and challenge all of the excuses. It can choose to practice new thoughts.

It's like choosing to go to the gym and practicing pushups. Your higher brain is what will allow you to change the habit, but you can't get stronger if you don't practice. This is how you head in the right direction. This is how you ensure that your energy isn't wasted headed towards a mirage, that your energy is actually directed towards the area that will truly create change for you.

And that is always directed back towards yourself. When you clear away all the obstacle mirages and you see them for what they really are, you will be unstoppable. That's how you can change any habit. Alright, that's it for today. I will see you guys next week.

Hey, if you're a woman who enjoys this podcast and wants to have me as your coach, you have to join the Take a Break program. It's a 30-day break from drinking that will teach you how to say no to your urges without deprivation, the secret to not needing a drink in any situation, including not needing a drink to take the edge off and never again feeling like you can't trust yourself around alcohol. Join me over at [rachelhart.com/join](http://rachelhart.com/join). Together, we're going to blow your mind.

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