

Ep #157: Using Curiosity to Change the Habit



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Rachel Hart

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You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 157.

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.

Well hello everybody. We are going to talk about one of the biggest stumbling blocks when it comes to trying to change your relationship with alcohol, and that is a lack of curiosity. That really is a huge barrier for so many of the women that I work with, that they are simply lacking curiosity.

Now, curiosity is not some sort of exotic thing. It's just a desire to learn and investigate what's going on. So I want to talk to you guys today about why you need it and what the roadblocks look like because if you can really overcome this lack of curiosity, you will discover not only will it have a tremendous impact on your ability to change the habit of drinking, it's a tremendous skill to bring with you and to cultivate with everything that you do in life.

I decided I wanted to talk to you guys about this lack of curiosity today because I was reading through a survey that I sent out to some of the women who are doing the Take A Break program for the first time in January. So I sent them out a questionnaire, just to check in, see how they're doing, and one of the questions that I wanted to know about was how much are they making use of the coaching that's available in the program.

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So in the Take A Break program, there's two places where you can get coaching. One is on live coaching calls where you can be coached live by me directly, and the other is an area of the website where anyone in the program can post a question and get an answer. It's called Ask A Coach. And it's totally anonymous, and the beauty of that is that people really feel free to just post whatever is going on. They don't hold back.

But also, it acts as this amazing database for everyone in the program. So we're actually getting close to having 1000 questions that have answers in this database. And I will tell you that over and over, I've heard from so many women in the program what an incredible database and what an incredible resource it has been for them to not only read all the areas where other women are struggling, but to actually have an opportunity to listen to me go into much more detail about the habit and how it works and all the intricacies that I don't really have time to do on the podcast.

But anyway, I wanted to hear from some of the women who are currently in the program why they might not be making use of either the live coaching or the Ask A Coach section, what was preventing them. And I was so fascinated by what I found because the most common answer to why someone wasn't using the coaching or asking for coaching was, "I don't have any questions."

I read that over and over again. So many people typed that in. Now, here's the really interesting piece about it. That wasn't an option that I provided. People actually got to type in in their own words why it was that they weren't asking or posting questions. And over and over again, people posted some version of I just don't have any questions.

And it really did stop me in my tracks because I will tell you this; if you are drinking more than you want, if you are struggling to change the habit, if you're struggling to change your relationship with alcohol, if you have tried more times than you can count to try to change this habit, try to change

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your drinking and you haven't been successful, then you should have a boatload of questions.

You should have questions coming out the wazoo. And I think about this a lot with my own success. I don't believe that my ability to rewire my brain or change my relationship to alcohol or lose my desire to drink, I don't believe that any of that had something to do with the fact that, "Oh well, Rachel's unique and I'm special and there's something different about me." No, not at all.

I think that I was able to do that because of the tools that I teach you guys, because of the think-feel-act cycle, because of the ability to understand that drinking just wasn't this automatic reflexive thing. It was a decision that I was making, even if I couldn't always see that there was a decision in the moment.

But I do believe that I was served immensely on my journey by a deep, deep curiosity for what was going on. I was always asking questions. I was always trying to figure out, why am I drinking so much? Why is my drinking so unpredictable? Why does it seem that I have this kind of pull or there's this hook in me that alcohol has that I don't really notice with some of my friends? Why do I drink so fast?

Why does it seem that not only do I overdrink, but I also overeat? And you know what, why was it that I was overdoing so many things in my life? I had so many questions. I was asking why all the time. And I will tell you this; asking those questions really served me.

Now, here's the crazy thing that I was thinking about as I was preparing this episode. My brain did try to come up with answers that would put an end to all this questioning, that would put an end to all the why, why, why that I was constantly asking about drinking. And the answers that my brain gave me sometimes sounded like, "Well, you just have an addictive personality.

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You're just missing an off switch. You are just doomed because of your family history. Your brain is just kind of broken. You lost the brain lottery."

I remember I would think that all the time, that I lost the brain lottery. And so my brain would sometimes give me these answers but you know what, I realize now that there was a part of me that simply wasn't satisfied by them, which is why I kept asking these questions. There was a part of me that thought maybe it's true, maybe there is something wrong with me, maybe there's something wrong with my brain.

But there was a part of me that thought I'm not entirely sure that's the case. Because if I had been satisfied by the answer, I would have stopped asking the question. But I didn't do that. Part of me was like, I'm not entirely sure that this is right. I'm not entirely sure that the reason why I drink too much is because of my personality or my DNA or the fact that I lost the brain lottery.

It's so crazy hearing me say that, that last part, by the way, just out loud. Because now I'm just like, oh no, I did not lose the brain lottery. It's so funny that I thought that. I know a lot of you guys out there blame your brain a lot and think like, "Something's wrong with it." You have not lost the lottery either. You just haven't figured out how to harness your brain. That's really the tool at the heart of everything that I teach is the tool of learning how to harness the brain.

There's so much there to learn and something that we're never shown how to do. We're not given this information in school. But anyway, I wasn't satisfied by these answers because just some part of me thought, "I don't know, it doesn't seem to make total sense." And so I kept asking, and that curiosity, it really truly did serve me because the fact that I remained curious meant that I wasn't letting up on my quest to figure this out.

Now, curiosity is simply an emotion. It's the feeling in the think-feel-act cycle, which is fantastic news because once you understand how to use

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the think-feel-act cycle, you understand that you can cultivate curiosity yourself. You don't have to just be born a curious person. You don't have to wait for curiosity to strike. It's something that you can actually cultivate.

And I like thinking about how as children, we're all so inherently curious. If you've ever been around a four-year-old, you know what it's like. They are always asking questions. I was reading something that said four-year-olds ask between 200 and 300 questions a day. It's crazy. I am not at that place quite yet with my little boy, but I will be. I'm sure it won't be long until I'm there.

But here's the other fascinating thing; the amount of questions that kids ask, it dramatically drops off by the time that they reach middle school. And as I was researching this and reading about it, one hypothesis as to why this happens is that many times, especially in the US, students are rewarded for correct answers rather than asking a good question.

And I will say, as someone who really used to love - and I'll tell you, I'm working on this quite a bit in my own self-coaching - loving giving the correct answer, this really resonated with me. Because that's what I was very focused on in school, even though I had all this curiosity, I was in a system, an educational system that rewarded you for correct answers. And so I always wanted to answer everything correctly.

I wasn't so focused on asking good questions. Now fortunately, I was asking good questions in other parts of my life. But when it came to school. I was kind of focused on that correct answer. But the problem with this of course is that regurgitating the correct answer is only going to get you so far.

Think about it. You can listen to everything that I say on this podcast, you can work with me in my programs, you can take notes on everything, you can write it all down, you can regurgitate all the so-called correct answers,

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but if it's not applying to your unique situation, what good is it going to do for you?

If you don't actually understand how to implement it, what good is it going to do for you? How is it actually going to help you change the habit? Because knowledge can only take you so far. Yes, we need knowledge. We need to understand how the brain works and how habits work and what urges are. You need all that information.

But then you have to bring curiosity to help you understand how to implement that in your life and what is and isn't working, and why something might be working really well and why something might not be working so well. But if you're really wedded to just being able to correctly recite somebody else's knowledge, what somebody else has discovered and answered for themselves, you're going to be really limited in what you can do.

This is what I tell my clients all the time and what I want you to know is that how the habit of drinking works in your situation is going to be unique to you. It's like a fingerprint. No two are the same. Now listen, there are some basic fundamentals that I teach that apply across the board. But how your habit manifests, how and what you're drinking looks like, what thoughts, feelings are connected to the habit, what triggers and cues are connected to the habit, it's always going to be unique to you, which means that you better get really good at asking questions.

But more importantly, you better get really good at just being curious and cultivating curiosity in your life. That's what served me so well. I'll tell you just as a little aside, growing up I spent my summers at sleep-away camp. I loved Girl Scout camp. I loved going every summer. I would beg my parents to send me for longer and longer stays at Girl Scout camp.

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And I remember being - maybe I was eight or nine years old, and we were doing this silly camp initiation ceremony where we were all given kind of unique camp names. And one of the counsellors said to me, "Your name is inquisitive racoon." And I remember thinking, oh my gosh, I love the name, that's amazing. But what does inquisitive mean?

It was so perfect because of course, I was being curious about what inquisitive means. I didn't know what that word meant when I was eight or nine years old. And my sister still teases me sometimes and calls me inquisitive racoon, and I kind of secretly love it because I really never tire of being curious. And the reason why is because I have really worked through the blocks that get in the way, so that's what I want to talk to you about is what these kind of three stumbling blocks are for curiosity.

Because if you are doing this work, if you are serious about changing the habit and serious about changing your relationship with alcohol and you don't have any questions, you've got to find out why. You've got to find out what's standing in the way. What aren't you being curious about? What do you think you already have figured out about yourself that maybe you could be wrong about?

So let's just walk through what these three stumbling blocks are. The first stumbling block is my question is stupid. Now, even though I really love being curious, I remember really wrestling with this a lot in my life. My question is stupid. Not wanting to raise my hand in certain situations or ask questions in certain situations because I was so sure that everybody else knew the answer.

Here's the thing; and it is kind of trite, but it's so true that no question is stupid. Because if you don't understand something, then you can't implement it. If you don't understand the difference between resisting and urge or allowing an urge, then how can you possibly implement that skill? If you don't understand why it is that you don't notice a thought or a feeling

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before you reach for a drink, then you're never going to find the think-feel-act cycle that's leading to drinking.

My question is stupid, it will always block you from that knowledge. I will tell you, I had this a lot actually come up for me, not so much in school, but in one of my jobs before I became a coach. I worked at a human rights organization and when I first got there, everyone was so worldly and they had traveled so much and they spoke so many languages, and they knew so much about world politics and the capital of Kyrgyzstan and the president of Nigeria.

I mean, all this information that I didn't know anything about at the time, and I remember sitting in meetings for so long, too long frankly, when I worked at that job, thinking, "Oh god, my question is so stupid. I shouldn't ask." And I tried to make up for it by doing a lot of research after the fact, but you know what, when I finally gave that up, when I finally decided, "You know what, if you don't understand Rachel, just say so," I was always amazed how many other people in the room were like, "Oh god, thank god she asked that question. I had no idea what we were talking about."

We're so sure that everybody else knows the answer and that we're the only one who doesn't know, and of course, that makes our question stupid. But this is what I say to all the women that I work with. When you ask a question, yes, first and foremost, it's going to benefit you, but you are always offering such a gift to all the other women who are in your exact same situation thinking, "Oh, thank god she asked that because I wasn't feeling brave enough to." So that's block number one.

Stumbling block number two is I should know this by now. I run into this a lot. I hear a lot of you saying this. A lot of you saying, "I've listened to every podcast episode, I've read your book, I've been in the program, I should know this by now," or, "I'm 52 years old, or I'm 63 years old, or I'm 48 years old, whatever it is, and I should know this by now."

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Or people will say, “You know what, I’m a health and wellness coach, I should not be drinking too much. I should know how to not do this by now.” I should know this by now stops curiosity dead in its tracks. I was actually just teaching coaches who are going through master coach certification and I talked to them a lot about this. How they were telling themselves I’m a coach and I’m studying this, so I should know how to do this. I should know this by now.

And that thought is poison. It will always block curiosity. It will always block inquisitiveness and asking questions and trying to understand. The fact of the matter is if you don’t know it, you don’t know it. Who cares? It doesn’t matter your age, it doesn’t matter what you do, it doesn’t matter how many episodes you’ve listened to.

And I think one of the reasons why so many people get stuck with this is because they assume well, I can just absorb all this information and then I’m going to know how to do it. But this is why I use the example of riding a bike so many times. You can listen to me talk over and over again about when I first learned how to dance publicly without a buzz, without drinking.

You can hear me tell that story. I’ve told it many times on this podcast. But you know what, if that’s one of your stumbling blocks, you’re not sure how you’re going to do it, it doesn’t matter how many times you listen to me talk about it. You have to get on the bike and start pedaling. You’re going to be pretty wobbly at first and that’s okay.

But usually, I should know by now, what it’s actually signaling is I want to just learn and consume this information and not actually practice it. So it’s an easy way to kind of blame yourself for not actually doing the work to actually practice. If you don’t know right now, then you don’t know. There’s no shame in that. Let’s just figure it out together.

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Now, the last stumbling block that I see get in the way of curiosity is I don't want to know. Now listen, what I'm teaching you guys when it comes to the think-feel-act cycle and learning how to manage your mind is learning how to have more awareness of what is in your brain. What are you thinking about all day long?

A lot of you guys don't want to look. A lot of you guys are like, I don't know, I don't think I want to know what's in there, I'm afraid of what I might find. There's this fear if I look too deep, if I question too much, I might find something really terrible. I might find something really unredeemable about myself.

That's the fear. Now, I have the very best news for you. The worst thing that you are ever going to find is a thought. That's it. The worst thing that you will ever find when you do this work, when you start building awareness, when you start using the think-feel-act cycle is a sentence. You'll find a sentence in your mind. It doesn't mean anything about you or who you are or whether or not you're a good person or a bad person.

It's just a sentence. We can plug it into the think-feel-act cycle, we can see what it's creating for you. We can see how it's connected to the habit of drinking. You can decide if you want to keep it or not. That's it. You don't have to be afraid that you might uncover something terrible about yourself because there's nothing terrible to find.

There's just a bunch of sentences that you've been thinking automatically, unconsciously, and haven't realized how they are impacting how you show up in the world and how you show up with alcohol. That's it. And I think that knowledge is so powerful. I'm never afraid to look in my brain. I'm never afraid to look and see what I'm thinking about because I know it's just a sentence. That's it. It's not a big deal.

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So if you are really committed to doing this work, you have to be committed to cultivating curiosity, so you have to get out of these traps. You have to get out of the trap of I don't know, I'm not sure. I hear this all the time. And you know what, sometimes my brain will come up with this thought too. It will try to tell me, I don't know, I can't figure this out, I'm not sure.

And I always just challenge it by saying, "Well, what if you did know, Rachel? What if you were sure? What if you did have it figured out? What would you be thinking or doing or feeling?" That little shift to what if you did know can be so tremendously powerful. It really can change everything.

What if you just brought a desire to learn, to investigate, to understand your unique relationship with alcohol, what if you just brought that curiosity with you day in, day out? How would that change everything? I'll tell you this; you'd have to let go of all your preconceived notions about yourself and who you are, your stories about the habit and your brain and your history. You'd have to let all of that go. There's so much freedom in that.

Someone said this to me recently. She said, "You know what, I've just decided I'm going to question everything in my life. I'm going to question all of it." And just hearing her say those words, you could just hear the power behind it because she was just willing to be curious about it all. And I thought, "God, that's amazing. It's so freeing. Where can I bring more of that into my own life?" Where can you bring more of that into your life? And what would happen? What would change for you if you brought that mindset to the habit of drinking?

If you just decided to question everything and be curious about everything and stop telling yourself, "My questions are stupid, I should know this by now, I don't want to know, or I just don't know," what if you let all of that go? I promise, it would change everything. Alright, that's it for today. Go out and be curious. I'll see you guys next week.

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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. Together, we're going to blow your mind.