

Ep #158: Different this Time



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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

Ep #158: Different this Time

You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 158.

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.

Hello everybody, how are you doing? I'm doing really well. I was thinking about you guys and I was thinking about this podcast and I was answering a question recently in my 30-day program, and the question was about what made the last time you took a break from drinking, what made things different?

So if you guys listen to this podcast, you know that I took a lot of breaks from drinking in my 20s. I would start and I would stop and I would start and I would stop, and I just kept flip-flopping. It was really miserable, and I was always really frustrated about why it wouldn't stick. I didn't understand why it was that every time I took a break, it seemed like it lasted for a while but I never actually changed my relationship with alcohol. I just went right back to where things had started.

And I was thinking about this and I realized that my thought for almost all of those breaks, all of those times when I was like, okay, I got to just cut alcohol out for a while, I was always thinking to myself, "I hope this time will be different." That was kind of my overarching thought about taking a break from drinking. I hope this time will be different.

Guess what? It wasn't different. That's what was so frustrating for me. I didn't know anything about the think-feel-act cycle back then, I didn't

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

Ep #158: Different this Time

understand how my thoughts create my feelings. I didn't understand how the language that I was using, my thought about hoping that this time would be different, how that was actually the source of so many of my problems.

I thought I was the problem. I thought my brain was the problem. I thought my addictive personality was the problem. I didn't know that it was just the phrasing of a sentence that was keeping me stuck, which is why I want to talk to you guys about this today because it really is such an amazing example of how not just learning but applying the think-feel-act cycle can be so transformative in your life.

So I want to talk to you about that, but then I also do want to share about what I was doing in the first couple months when I took a break that actually helped me transform my relationship with alcohol, it helped me transform my desire, it helped me transform my relationship with myself.

Because you probably already know this, crossing days off a calendar doesn't work. You can get a lot of X's, you can make a lot of marks on the calendar. I did that a lot, but I wasn't changing my relationship with alcohol and that's what was so frustrating.

So when I was thinking to myself, "I hope this time will be different," it sounds kind of like a good thought, right? There's hope in it. You're hoping that this time will be different. Now, that hope was always I hope I have more resolve, I hope I have more willpower, I hope that someone comes down and sprinkles magic fairy dust on me and my brain just changes. Because that's what I thought needed to happen. I really thought that my brain was the obstacle.

It was the reason why I was drinking too much and eating too much and just always had this urge for more of everything in my life. And I hope this time will be different, that thought also was really fueled by this kind of underlying sense that I had that I had to make up for being really bad. That

Ep #158: Different this Time

I had to be good for a while to make up for how bad I was, how selfish, how ridiculous, how hurtful I was when I was drinking, that I had to make up for that by being really good.

And I would do this over and over and over again. This is why I was flip-flopping so much with my drinking. And I will tell you, at some point it finally clicked. I finally got it that this was not working. This plan of mine to hope that things will be different and to have more resolve and to make up for my bad behavior and cross my fingers and just pray that I was going to wake up with a new brain. It just wasn't working for me.

And I'll tell you, it took maybe, I don't know, 10 or 15, maybe more tries for this to really sink in. But finally, it did sink in. Finally, I realized, you know what, you have to actually do something different. And that can't just be the act of saying no to a drink because you've done that and it hasn't given you the result that you wanted.

And that's what I did. I went from hoping and wishing that this time would be different to actually deciding, making a decision that I would make this time different. You guys hear me talk all about how words really matter. When you are learning and using and applying the think-feel-act cycle, when you are observing the thoughts that you think and how they make you feel and how you behave and show up as a result of those thoughts, sometimes all it takes is one change, one shift in a word to make a big difference.

It's what I'm always working with my clients on. What if we take the thought, "I need to be alcohol-free," and change it to, "I'm choosing to be alcohol-free." I was helping someone with that thought today. Just from need to choose can make such a big difference.

And this was also one of those times where I had to actually recognize, you know what, hope is not working for me because every time I would think

Ep #158: Different this Time

the thought, “I hope that this time will be different,” at first I’d feel kind of hopeful, but that hope wasn’t actually translating into action. It wasn’t actually translating into me showing up differently. It wasn’t actually translating into me learning about the habit or taking the steps to create new neural pathways in my brain.

I was just crossing days off the calendar with my fingers, hoping that things would be different. So the more that I hoped that this time would be different, the more that I was left hoping. And that’s why I was going back and forth all the time. That’s why I was flip-flopping. So I had to switch my language, and the switch I made sounds kind of subtle but it was really important.

I went from, “I hope this time will be different,” to, “I’m going to make this time different.” Listen to how those sentences sound. I hope this time will be different. I’m going to make this time different. There’s only a slight change in there, but that’s all that needed because when I told myself I’m going to make this time be different, then I felt determined.

I mean, let’s be honest here. I also felt a little bit like throwing up. I also felt scared. But I wasn’t sitting around waiting for something to happen. I wasn’t twiddling my thumbs. I wasn’t just staring at a calendar and waiting until I could cross off another day. I was the agent of change in that think-feel-act cycle. When I told myself I’m going to make things different, I’m going to make this time different, it got me to take action.

It got me to show up in a different way. I started doing new things and trying new things, and I’ll tell you, some of them worked, but some of them didn’t. But I just kept telling myself, “Rachel, you are going to make this time different,” and sure enough, it was. That is how powerful the think-feel-act cycle is. It takes you out of hoping and wishing and praying and into a place of action.

Ep #158: Different this Time

And that's where you need to be. You have to be in a place of action, of being willing not just to say, "Well, the thing that I'm going to do is just say no to a drink." I know that for a lot of you right now that that's a big deal. That is an action that really matters, and I'm not trying to downplay that. What I want you to understand is if you want to change your relationship with alcohol, if you want to change your desire, you have to be willing to do more than just say no to a drink.

That just is the case. I tried and tried and tried to change my relationship with alcohol and to change my desire by just saying no, and it never got me where I wanted to go. It wasn't until I was willing to do more than just say no. I had to actually show up differently. I had to be someone different. And that's what created long-term sustainable change, and that's what you can do too.

Going from, "I hope this time will be different," or even a thought like, "This time has to be different," I remember thinking that to myself a lot, this time has to be different, but there was no kind of change agent in there. I was just kind of hoping again that it has to be different because I was telling myself that it had to be. It sounded stronger, but I didn't have any ownership over those words. I wasn't actually showing up differently when I thought those words.

Now, you know if you listen to this podcast that I have never sworn off alcohol. Look, actually that's not true. That's funny when I think about it. The last time I took a break from drinking, I made a point of not swearing off alcohol because so many times in the past I had said, "Oh my god, never again, I'm never drinking again." I mean, you remember this, right?

You probably have your own memory of this, of waking up in the morning and thinking to yourself, "Oh my god, I'm never going to drink again." Then of course, what happens? You drink again. I knew that swearing off alcohol

Ep #158: Different this Time

wouldn't work because I had done it before and it didn't work, and also frankly, it really scared me.

I was not ready at all to say, "Hey, I'm never going to drink a drop of liquor again in my entire life," and in fact, I still don't talk in that way. I still don't use those terms. I still don't say, "Oh, I'm just never drinking again." I say, "You know what, now I don't have desire." But at that moment when I was taking a break and I was deciding that I had to make this time be different, I knew that I couldn't swear it off because it hadn't worked in the past.

When I had tried to swear off alcohol in the past, I was just gritting my teeth. And so instead, what I said is, "I'm going to commit to learning how to show up differently, and I'm not going to drink again until I can do that." I'm not going to drink again until I can learn how to give everything that I was in search of, everything that I was in need of that I kept turning to alcohol to give to me.

And for me - and this looks different for all of you, but for me, that meant feeling like I needed a drink in certain situations, to open up to people, to network, to socialize, to feel confident, to get rid of that little nagging insecurity that I had in my head, feeling like I had this kind of insatiable hunger for reward when I came home from a long day at work, and learning how not to answer that hunger with alcohol or with food because that's what I also did, how to feel confident and at ease and friendly and sexy without a drink in my hand. That was my goal.

That's what I was committing to learn how to do and I told myself, "Rachel, you're going to learn how to do this and that's what you're going to focus on, and only then, when you have learned how to do this, when you have learned to solve the problems that alcohol has been solving for you, only then will you talk about drinking again."

Ep #158: Different this Time

So I want to talk to you guys about what exactly I did differently during those first couple months that worked for me. Now, everything that I did differently is not necessarily going to work for you. You have to go into it with a spirit of experimentation. You have to be willing to try things that may not work for you. Something that works great for me may not be your cup of tea. It may not be the thing that clicks and vice versa. But you have to be willing to show up differently if you want to really change the habit.

Number one, I wrote a ton. I was living on my own back then in New York, had my own studio apartment. I had a lot of evenings to myself when I was no longer filling it with cocktails and wine. And I spent a lot of that time writing.

You know, previously I would go home, I'd get home after work and I would order food and open up a bottle of wine or make myself a cocktail and flop on the couch and just zone out while I was watching TV and eating and drinking and just to numb myself. And instead, I decided that I was going to fill some of that time with writing.

I tried to use my mind instead, and I tried to use it in a way that was helpful. So not to write a lot about woe is me. I have many, many journals filled with that. But I wrote a lot about trying to understand why am I here? How did I get to this place? Why do I feel like I need a drink? Why do I have this kind of hunger? Why is it hard for me to say no to my urges? Why am I so afraid what people are going to think about me? And I was curious with myself.

I wrote and I wrote and I wrote. And you know what, sometimes I felt sad and sometimes I felt lonely and sometimes I felt pissed off at the world, and I wrote about it. I didn't try to cover it up with a drink, I didn't try to cover it up with food, I didn't try to cover it up with cigarettes, I just wrote. And honestly, especially those first couple months, writing was my solace but because I was doing it in a different way.

Ep #158: Different this Time

It wasn't just my life is so hard, I feel so bad, why do I have to deal with this and nobody else does. It was writing with curiosity. Writing with a real desire to understand and to try to put the pieces together. Because I really believed that this was a puzzle that I needed to solve.

I didn't hide out at home. Now, you're going to have to decide what is right for you, but I knew from all my experience that hiding out didn't work. I went to every party and every happy hour I was invited to, even though I did not want to go. I did not want to go at all. I wanted to hide out. I wanted to stay at home. But I knew that hiding and isolating didn't work because I had done it before.

And I just remember thinking, "You need the practice. You need to figure this out. That's what you promised how you were going to make this time different. You're going to show up differently." And so I accepted all the invites begrudgingly. And I remember the first party that I actually went to, I remember going to that party with my friend Susie, and I think I was two days into the decision to take a break and have this time be different.

And I don't remember who's party it was, I don't think I knew the people at all, but I showed up with a six-pack of beer because I wanted to blend in and I wanted to pretend that I was here to party too and pretend that I was drinking. And I remember spending that entire party so on edge the entire time because I was really afraid of being found out. I was really afraid of someone being like, "Wait, what exactly is in your cup?"

Which is funny because of course, everyone around me I remember was just getting more and more intoxicated. Their reasoning skills were not so sharp at that point, but I was terrified of being found out. And I remember, after that party I decided okay, we've done enough hiding and lying and pretending. You're just going to have to tell people that you're not drinking.

Ep #158: Different this Time

And that was not something that I wanted to do, but that's something I knew I needed to do because I was always hiding, I was always avoiding, I was always pretending. And so from that point on, I decided when people would ask me if I was drinking, I would just say not tonight and try to leave it there. And try to practice saying it like it wasn't a big deal, and trust me, this was something I had to practice because it felt like a huge deal for me.

At the time I remember feeling kind of almost angry about it when people would ask me. I don't advocate this. I do not recommend this. I think it had me feel really defensive when inside I was thinking like, "It's none of your business."

But that's where I was at that point early on, and I would just say, "Not tonight. No, I'm not drinking tonight," and I would practice leaving it at that and I would practice saying it like it wasn't a big deal. I was committed to being honest, even though honesty made me want to run and hide. But I knew that hiding and lying and pretending had not worked, so I knew I needed to do something different.

I also asked for support. Now, back then, two of my closest friends were actually not living in New York City anymore. They had moved away and I knew even though they weren't in the same place with me, I knew that they would have my back and that they would be someone that I could rely on.

And I remember sending these emails saying like, "Okay, it's me, Rachel, once again, deciding that I have to do something different with my drinking." I remember that was really hard for me to send those emails because I, in my mind, had failed so many times before. And it felt so vulnerable, but I knew that I had to do it.

I knew that I had to know that I had people on my side, people that I could reach out to. I still have those emails and I sometimes go back and look at them and think like, so proud of you. That's how I feel when I read those

Ep #158: Different this Time

emails and think about myself like, I'm so proud of you that you did that, Rachel.

Because they were. They were real sources of support for me, especially in those moments when I felt really low. I knew that I could always text them, I could call them, they had my back even though they weren't even living in the same city as me at that point.

You guys also know from listening to the podcast that early on, I decided that I would go to SMART Recovery once a week. So SMART is a program that actually uses everything that I talk about here. It's where I learned about the think-feel-act cycle. It's taking cognitive behavioral therapy and the idea that our thoughts create our feelings, which drive our actions, and actually using it to help people learn how to change habits.

It's not about labels, it's not about declaring yourself powerless, it's not about saying you'll never have any substance again, because it's used for much more than just alcohol. It's used with drugs as well, and really, you can use it with any kind of addictive behavior habit. But I decided that I would go. And I really did not want to do that.

But I decided that I would go once a week for six months. That was my commitment at first. I traveled a lot back then so it probably actually didn't work out to once a week, but I made a commitment that when I was in New York City, that I would go. And I'll tell you, I never wanted to go. Never.

I mean, I especially did not want to go that first time, but even after that. Even after I didn't die and I decided that it was okay and that I didn't just turn into a puddle when I got in there, even when I found it helpful, I still didn't want to go. I remember it was always like I was kicking and screaming with myself because I was so vulnerable.

Ep #158: Different this Time

It felt so vulnerable for me, but I just told myself, “Listen Rachel, this is what you committed to doing, so you’re doing it.” And it was incredibly helpful. I think that there is huge power in hearing from other people who are in your shoes, especially when you think that you are all alone, that you are struggling by yourself. I will tell you, woman after woman after woman will say this on the live coaching calls that I do for the Take A Break program.

We don’t see everyone at the same time. People come on one at a time, so it’s just me and whoever I bring onto the screen, but other people are watching. And when I finish up coaching someone and I bring someone new on, nine times out of 10, I will hear that person say, “Oh my god, what that woman was just saying, I can totally identify with that, I can totally relate. I thought I was the only one that thought that way. I thought I was the only one that felt that way.”

There’s huge benefit of seeing that you’re not alone in this, and that’s what going to SMART really helped me to do. Because I was so sure that I was 100% alone, and I realized, actually, I wasn’t. I realized that there were other people who had many of the same thoughts and beliefs and stories and judgments around alcohol and what it meant to drink and not to drink and what people would think and why you needed it and why it was hard to say no and what life would be like without it, all of that. That was very helpful.

It’s also where I learned about permission-giving thoughts. That was huge for me. That was a really big turning point when I started to understand that drinking didn’t just happen. There was always a thought. Even if that thought was so fast and so automatic that it wasn’t really in my conscious awareness, if I looked for it, I could find it.

That’s what was so powerful because so often I felt like my drinking just happened, and it seemed like it wasn’t really in my control many times. And understanding that, that there was always a thought that, there I just

Ep #158: Different this Time

couldn't see it, I didn't yet have awareness of it, that really helped me step back into my own power and made me feel like I was steering the ship again.

So aside from that kind of support, not only did I practice going to parties and happy hours, I would practice going to my favorite bars and my favorite restaurants and not drink. There was a little wine bar right at the end of my block that I would go to a lot and I would sit at the counter and I would order my meal and I would get a glass of wine, and it was one of my favorite places to go.

And I would go there and I would order dinner and I would get sparkling water. And I wanted to crawl into a hole. I really remember feeling like, oh my god, I felt like the entire restaurant was staring at me and that the waiters hated me for being a cheap customer. But I did it anyway, and I did it with restaurants and I did it with bars, and I also did it with travel.

So I used to travel a lot in my old profession when I was working in human rights, and I also used to travel much more on my own before I had a family and I had a baby. And I remember in the first two months of that break, I had three trips. And I hadn't planned it that way. It just so happened that my break started in the summer and two of those were vacations and I had already booked them, and I just said, "Well, I guess this is happening. I guess we're going to do these vacations. I guess we're going to go on these trips and not drink."

So one was a solo trip to Puerto Rico that I had booked for myself. One was a wedding in California. I've talked to you guys about that on the podcast before. It was the first wedding I went to where I didn't drink. I didn't have a date, I went by myself. And I had a trip to Paris that I went on, not by myself, I went with two very close friends of mine who are husband and wife.

Ep #158: Different this Time

And those trips were hard. Those trips were not easy, but oh my god, they were so transformative. I actually remember right before I went to Paris, one of the friends I was going with said, "Okay, I know you're not drinking, but you're going to make an exception, right? Because it's Paris." And I remember telling her, "You know what, I'm not. I'm not going to be drinking in Paris."

And man, I thought that was going to be impossible. And I just remember feeling like, you know what, you have to actually show yourself that you can be in the world and travel and go to amazing places and go to weddings and do all these things and that your life will not be lacking. You will not be staying home. You will not be hiding out. Your life will not turn into this sober black and white greyscale situation.

It was really important to me that I go and have a good time and practice enjoying myself. And I look back on these three trips now and I think about how amazing and transformative they were for me and I would not trade them for anything in the world. But listen, I cried a lot. I cried a lot on all three of those trips.

I remember particularly being in Paris and being out with my friends and we were at a tiny little Parisian restaurant and I was the only one not drinking, and I remember smelling the red wine and thinking like, "I want some too, it's Paris, how can I not be drinking in Paris?" But I remember, even though I had that really intense urge, I remember telling myself, "Listen, all you have to do is make it through dinner. Just watch your brain, pay attention to what's happening in your body, but all you have to do is get through this dinner."

And I remember I decided that and it felt like that dinner went on forever. It felt like, oh my god, this is not an American dinner where you eat really fast and then you dash out the door. It was this long-involved dinner and we

Ep #158: Different this Time

started talking to the people next to us and it just - oh my lord, it felt like it went on for an eternity.

But I will tell you this; I remember so vividly when we got up and we left that restaurant and we were walking back to our hotel, I was so proud of myself. I felt so good in that moment that I was like, yeah, you did it. That was such a big deal for me to feel like I could be in that situation and I wasn't yet where I wanted to be.

I wasn't fully enjoying myself at all, but just feeling like yeah, you did it. You sat in a tiny little restaurant in Paris and you had the urges and you had all the thoughts and you had all the beliefs and your lower brain telling you, "Oh, just make an exception," and I said no, and I was so proud of myself.

Those trips were incredible for me. They really were something now I look back on and I'm so thankful that I challenged myself to go on all three of those trips. And I'll tell you the other thing that was really transformative for me. I went on a first date during this first period, this first couple months, and I didn't drink. And it was terrible.

But I'm going to tell you why it was terrible. It wasn't terrible because I wasn't drinking, it was terrible because the date was terrible. He was not the right fit for me. He actually drank too much on the date and he was giving me a hard time and he was kind of rude and impolite, just in general. Just take alcohol aside. And we just didn't click.

And I remember thinking, if I had been drinking, I probably would have glossed over all of it. I probably would have given him a second date because I would have had a buzz going. I would have had the kind of beer goggles situation going on. And I remember in that moment being really disappointed that the date wasn't working out, but also feeling like this kind of clarity of oh, I know so much more quickly that he's not the right guy for

Ep #158: Different this Time

me. He's not a bad guy, there's nothing wrong with him, but we're not the right fit.

And I also remember deciding then and there, you know what, if someone is going to make a big deal about the fact that I'm not drinking, and if someone doesn't really like that version of me, then we're probably not a good match and that's okay. Probably is something out there who likes this version of me, who doesn't think it's a big deal if they're going to be drinking and I'm going to say no.

But that was a really profound thing for me to understand of like, oh, I get to decide so much more quickly when I'm not drinking if this person actually works. I would have probably gone on many more dates with that guy because alcohol would have lubricated the entire experience.

So that was what I was doing to make this time different. I wasn't just saying no. I was showing up differently. And I was determined to do it, but it felt very uncomfortable for me. I was really stepping outside of my comfort zone. There were many times that I wanted to run and hide but I had that commitment, no, you're going to show up differently.

And so I wasn't just focused on crossing days off a calendar, I wasn't just focusing on hey, I hope this time is different, I hope that if I can not drink for a while, I'll make up for all my bad behavior and that will somehow change me. That never worked. But that's what I realized was so powerful is that all it took was going from I hope this time is different, to I'm going to make this time different.

That's when I truly saw the power of the think-feel-act cycle because just that subtle change had me showing up differently. And that's what I want to offer to all of you. If you have been in the place before where you have hoped that this time will be different and it didn't turn out that way, there's no need to beat yourself up. Just be curious.

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

Ep #158: Different this Time

What were you focused on? What were you paying attention to? Where were you using all your mental energy? Was it just towards hiding and isolating and pretending and crossing days off a calendar and avoiding people? Were you using your mental energy for that or were you using your mental energy to actually show up differently?

Because that's what you need to do if you want to sustainably change your relationship with alcohol, if you want to change your desire, if you don't want to feel like you're the person that's always like, more, more, more. That's what's needed. And all it really takes is a commitment for you to show up differently and a commitment to be curious with yourself.

Alright, that is it for today, my friends. Don't hope. Decide that it will be different. 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. Together, we're going to blow your mind.