

Ep #186: Editing Your Drinking Mindset



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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

Ep #186: Editing Your Drinking Mindset

You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 186.

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 everyone. We are going to be talking about your thoughts today, which of course we always talk about on this podcast. But today, I really want to help you guys understand why it is you might be struggling to change your thinking or shift your mindset around alcohol because that's what's so important if you're going to be able to change the habit.

I was talking about this in last week's episode. I was talking about how important it is to uncover the story, the beliefs, the thoughts that you have about drinking. Because if you can't see them, you can't change them. And when I'm talking about the thoughts you have about drinking, I'm talking about thoughts like, "It's fun, it's fancy, it's sophisticated, I'm better with a buzz, it helps me relax, it helps the real me shine, I'm funnier," whatever it is for you.

You have to really start to see what this story is that you have around alcohol. Because if you can't see the story, you can't change the story. You can think of it kind of like your drinking mindset. It's your outlook, that way that you have learned to think about alcohol. Now, that piece is really important.

Learned. It's not something that was innate inside of you. It's something that you learn to think, albeit unconsciously. Now, what I teach all of you

Ep #186: Editing Your Drinking Mindset

and what I want you to understand when it comes to habit change is not just how do I say no, but why am I saying yes? Why am I finding it hard to say no?

And a lot of times, people will chalk that up to well, that's just who I am. It's just how I was born. I just don't have a lot of willpower or I don't have a lot of discipline. It has nothing to do with that. What I want you to understand is something called the think-feel-act cycle. This is the most important thing for you to really wrap your mind around if you're going to change the habit.

And the think-feel-act cycle is so simple. It's just that your thoughts create your feelings, so what you're thinking about impacts how you feel, and then how you feel, your emotional state is the driver for what you do or don't do in life. So you have to really understand how those three things work together.

If you want to change the habit of drinking, then what you really are trying to do is changing what you're doing, right? You're trying to change that you're picking up the glass in the first place, or that you keep picking it up. So how much you're drinking, how often you're drinking, that's what you're trying to change. You're trying to change the action, but you can't do it in a vacuum.

You can't just focus on the action. You have to focus on the entire cycle, which means you have to pay attention to your thoughts and your feelings. And that is what most people overlook, simply because no one ever taught us that this cycle even existed, that we can harness it and that we can actually use it to our advantage.

So I'll tell you, when people join my 30-day Take a Break challenge, what they discover, it's not just a challenge about taking a break from drinking. It's a challenge about learning how to manage your mind. It's a challenge about really uncovering this mindset that you have and starting to discover

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

Ep #186: Editing Your Drinking Mindset

how it is that you are automatically and unconsciously thinking about alcohol and thinking about drinking and to turn that from something that's automatic and on default, and instead to make a conscious choice.

And this is where a lot of people who when they're new, they really run into trouble. And they come to me and they say, "Rachel, okay fine, this is what I think, but I can't change the way I think. I can't change these thoughts." And I always ask them, well, why not? Why are you telling yourself that you can't change the way you think about drinking or think about yourself or think about the world? It's not just limited to this realm of alcohol.

And I usually hear one of three reasons. People will say, "Well, I've just always believed this. I've always thought this way." That's the first excuse. The second one is, "This is just how my mind works. This is just how my brain works." And the third excuse is, "Well, it just feels so true and I have a lot of evidence backing up my thoughts and this mindset that I have."

So now, if you are willing to be curious with me, you are going to see that all of these reasons are really just excuses, and they're actually not obstacles at all once you take time to examine them and look at them a little bit more closely and understand why it is that these three excuses seem so true.

So that's what I want to show all of you today. Because as long as you hold on to the thoughts that you currently have about drinking, about alcohol, about yourself, about your life, about your ability to change, as long as you hold on to your current thoughts, you're never going to be able to change the habit. Changing the habit comes from showing up differently, taking a different action. And you cannot do that if you don't also change your thoughts and your feelings.

You have to work on the entire cycle. That is what most people don't know. That's what I didn't know, and that's why I was stuck in this place for such a

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

Ep #186: Editing Your Drinking Mindset

long time, feeling like I was really at the mercy of my habits because simply no one had explained the think-feel-act cycle to me. So that's what we're going to talk about.

These three excuses, "Because I've always believed this," "This is just how my mind works," and, "It feels really true and I have a lot of evidence backing up my thoughts." So let's start with the first one. I've always believed this or I've always thought this way.

So one area where I see this come up a lot is people will say, "It's just normal to drink and normal people drink and I've just always thought this, I've always believed this." This was also a thought that I had to do a lot of work on by the way. I'm going to tell you right now, you have not always believed that it was normal to drink and that normal people drink. You have not.

This was not a thought that was programmed in your brain at birth. You did not come out of the womb thinking this thought. It's a thought that you learned. You learned to think it's normal to drink, or you learned to think normal people drink or normal people can handle their liquor.

This thought did not just spontaneously appear. You adopted it through exposure. So you learned to think this through exposure, and I think this piece is really, really important. Because we don't really understand or give credit to the fact that we're being exposed to thoughts all of the time.

And unless we are consciously choosing what to think, our brain is going to unconsciously adopt thoughts that may not help us, may not be serving us. This is true for everything. It's true for alcohol. I really love looking at this through the lens of body shame as well because I think a lot of people can really identify with this.

Ep #186: Editing Your Drinking Mindset

So having thoughts like, I'm too fat or I'm too lumpy or I'm too wrinkled or I'm too gray or I'm too dark or I'm too light, whatever it is, none of those thoughts just appeared one day in your head. You absorbed them through the culture that you live in.

And one of the areas where I do some of the deeper level work with my clients is about understanding the connection between the relationship you have with your body and how that impacts your drinking. Now, a lot of people don't talk about this. A lot of people don't make any connection to how you feel about your body and your desire to drink.

But guess what, it is 100% connected. Because if you don't feel comfortable in the container that you are in, in the body that you live in day in and day out, then I promise you, you are going to reach for something that will help you disconnect from it. You will.

It may be alcohol, it may be food, it may be something else. But if you don't feel comfortable in the container that you are in, you will look for ways to not be in this container. I think about this for me, back when I started drinking, I was in college. I definitely was very uncomfortable with my body, very uncomfortable with the container that I was living in.

And I remember getting ready for parties and just in the process of getting ready for the party, I hadn't even gotten there, but in the process of getting ready, I was having such a negative emotional experience because I was looking in the mirror and thinking, "God, I look terrible, I don't like the way I look and my clothes are all wrong and I don't have anything to wear and I look weird."

I was wanting to go to a party to have fun. That was my goal. But I was not having fun as I was getting ready for it. And I learned very quickly, oh, the way to solve this is to pre-game. The way to solve this is to start drinking before I even get there. Because if I start drinking before I even get there,

Ep #186: Editing Your Drinking Mindset

then all of the negativity that I am feeling as I am getting ready because of everything that I'm thinking about myself and thinking about my appearance, that will start to be drowned out.

And so that connection, that's just one way that it can appear. But listen, all of the thoughts that my brain used to unconsciously practice about my body, when I would say, "God Rachel, your hair is too frizzy and your stomach is too flat and your pores are too big and you have too much body hair and your stretch marks that you have are ugly," these thoughts were not innate to me. I learned to think this way. I learned to think this way through exposure to beliefs about how the body should look and how your hair should look.

Had I grown up on a desert island, I wouldn't have had any of these thoughts because no one would be teaching me that your hair is supposed to be shiny and smooth and that bodies are supposed to be hairless and smooth and unblemished. I learned to think that way. I learned to think that way because I was growing up reading Seventeen magazine and watching movies and being exposed to advertising that were showing a very unrealistic and idealized, unattainable version of what a woman was supposed to look like.

Now, I didn't consciously choose any of these thoughts, but they were in there and they definitely would surface for me when I was getting ready for something. If I had grown up on a desert island, I would have thoughts about my body, but it wouldn't be about my pore size or my stretch marks. It would have been about, hey, what can my body do? Can it help me run? Can it help me climb? Can it help me hunt? Can it help me stay safe?

I'd be thinking about my body, but not in that way. And the reason why I like that example is because I think so many people can identify with having these thoughts about their body and their appearance and how they're supposed to look and what their body is supposed to look like, and

Ep #186: Editing Your Drinking Mindset

recognize, oh right, that's because I've been fed this unrealistic, idealized image of what is beauty.

But the same is true with alcohol. The same is true with drinking. You have also been exposed to thoughts that your brain has unconsciously adopted about what it means to drink or not drink. So just like you learned to hate your appearance and you learn it through exposure to thoughts, you don't learn it through exposure to your body. You learn it through exposure to thoughts and beliefs about what a body should look like and shouldn't look like, you also learn how to think about alcohol and what to think about drinking and what's normal and what's not normal.

Now, the good news is that you can change this. Once you realize this is not something innate, it's something learned and learned through exposure, you can start to change it. But I think it's also really powerful to think about examples where societal norms have changed very, very quickly.

So if you just think about it with smoking, I used to be a smoker. In my lifetime, smoking went from something that you could do everywhere. You could smoke on a plane. Just sit in the back. To something that is really highly restricted.

Smoking went from something that was celebrated as kind of cool and sophisticated and sexy to something that a lot of people are like, that's disgusting and gross and also, I don't want to be around it. Cigarettes are the same. Smoking is the same. Nothing has changed about that, but the messages that we have been surrounded with in terms of smoking and what it means and what it does for our health, that has drastically changed, which is why so many people's beliefs about smoking have changed.

But we don't need to wait for society to decide to have a new norm about what to think about something. You get to decide. You get to choose, hey,

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

Ep #186: Editing Your Drinking Mindset

what do I want to think about alcohol? What do I want to think about drinking?

Doesn't mean you have to think that it's gross and terrible and harmful and wrong, but you can decide to think differently about it. You have not always believed what you currently believe about drinking and alcohol. That is so important. It is not innate.

You learned to believe it through exposure and that's where I would start to get really curious. What are those thoughts? Get them on paper. When did you learn them? Why do you think you learned them? But remember, you did learn them. You haven't always thought this way.

The second excuse for why people will say I can't change my mind, I can't change my thoughts, they'll say, "Well, this is just how my mind works. My mind just works this way. This is just how I think." Now, it's true that your mind does work in a certain way, but not in the way you think.

Your mind works in a certain way in the sense that you think a thought and what you think makes you feel a certain way, and then based on how you feel, you take an action. Now, unless you decide to consciously intervene with this cycle, it's going to play out over and over and over again and it's going to start to become habitual and your brain likes to do what's easy and efficient.

Drinking because you think to yourself, "I deserve it," and then you feel kind of entitled, and then you open up that bottle of wine, that's not how your mind works. That's how the think-feel-act cycle works. Do you see the difference there?

Having another drink because you think to yourself, "One more won't hurt," and then acquiescing to that thought and then drinking is not how your

Ep #186: Editing Your Drinking Mindset

mind works. It's how the think-feel-act cycle works. This is true with everything.

If you think to yourself, "I can't figure this out," and you feel defeated and then you don't take action, that's not your mind at work. That's the think-feel-act cycle at work. If you think to yourself, "Oh god, what if something goes wrong," and you feel anxious and then you start fantasizing worst-case scenarios, again, that is not your mind at work. That is the think-feel-act cycle at work.

This distinction is everything. When you say, "My mind just works this way," you're acting as if these thoughts are inherent to your mind. They are not. They are just thoughts that you have practiced over and over and over again in this think-feel-act cycle. Not only have you practiced them, you've probably rewarded them.

So you think I deserve it and then you eat something or you drink something, or you think I can't figure this out and you quit. Now, quitting in many ways is also a reward because when you quit, you're no longer expending energy to do something.

So it may not be the reward that you ultimately want in life. Stopping going after your goals is probably not the reward that you're really after. But it is in that moment kind of a reward for your brain. So I want you to really separate out these two things. You can think about, okay, here's my mind and here's the think-feel-act cycle, and guess what, they're not one and the same.

Now, I have understood them as one and the same up until this point because nobody showed me that the think-feel-act cycle existed, and so it was playing out all the while but I didn't even know it was there. But I have a mind and then there's the think-feel-act cycle.

Ep #186: Editing Your Drinking Mindset

Now, the good news and the reason why we separate them is because your mind, your consciousness, your ability to have free will, your ability to dream and set goals, all of that is how you change what is running on default in the think-feel-act cycle. So you have to start seeing them as separate.

Don't tell yourself the lie, "Oh, this is just how my mind works." Acknowledge this is how the think-feel-act cycle works, so what is the thought? What is the feeling that's leading to this action? And then acknowledge that you can change it because these two things are separate.

Now, if you don't work to change it, if you don't try to intervene, your brain is going to practice what you've always thought, what you've always believed, what you've always done before because that is easy. So what you practice thinking, either consciously or unconsciously is always going to show up in your life.

If you are unconsciously practicing the thought I deserve it, one more won't hurt, that's how you're going to show up. You're going to show up by drinking. You're going to show up by going for the easy instant gratification. If you practice the thought I can't figure it out, what if something goes wrong, that's how you're going to show up. You're going to show up by quitting. You're going to show up by catastrophizing and worrying and looking in that crystal ball to see worst-case scenario.

Now, the good news is that once you see your mind and the think-feel-act cycle as separate, you start to see how you can change it. You start to see how you can decide to practice something different to think. Most people don't ever realize this because they just tell themselves, "Well, this is just how my mind works. This is just how my brain works. This is just how I think. I drew a crappy lot when they were handing out the brains."

Ep #186: Editing Your Drinking Mindset

That's what I used to think. I used to think that I just had lost the brain lottery. I didn't understand that I had won the brain lottery and so have you. All of us have. Because we have this incredibly powerful tool at our disposal. All we need is someone to show us how to use it.

The belief I can't change, I can't change how I think, that's such a lie. But not only that, it really is the most poisonous thought that you can have when it comes to habit change because changing a habit depends on believing that change is possible and that you can intervene with your unconscious, you can intervene with the default setting, which of course you can.

You alone have that ability. So when you notice yourself thinking, "This is just how my mind works," I want you to remind yourself, oh right, that's just an excuse. That's just me not recognizing that there's my mind and then there's the think-feel-act cycle and they are not one and the same. My mind always has the power to intervene with my thoughts and my feelings and my actions and my habits. It always has the power to set goals and go after them and keep going after them and not quit, not give up.

So the final excuse that I hear a lot when people are starting to initially try to do the work of changing how they think is they'll say to me, "Well Rachel, my thoughts just feel really true. It feels really true that I can't figure out my drinking because guess what, I've never figured it out before. And it feels really true that life is more fun when I drink because that's my experience of drinking. And it feels true that everybody drinks because that's what I see around me."

Now, what happens when you are stuck in this excuse, it feels really true. I just genuinely believe this. What you're not realizing is that this is confirmation bias at work. This is not you looking at the capital T truth of the world. This is you mired in confirmation bias.

Ep #186: Editing Your Drinking Mindset

Confirmation bias, I've talked about on the podcast before. It's really a reflex of the brain. It is your brain's reflex to constantly search for evidence in support of the beliefs that you already have. Because if your brain can find evidence that your current set of beliefs are true, then you don't have to change them. And if you don't have to change them, then guess what, it's going to save a lot of energy and if you save a lot of energy, your brain thinks, oh, that's really helpful for survival.

But guess what, it's okay to expend energy to change your thoughts and to question your beliefs. It is not going to get in the way of survival. It may have thousands of years ago, but that's not where we are today. It does take energy to try to disprove what you think. It's like it takes energy to get stronger. It takes energy to get faster. It takes energy to work out.

Sure, that's true. That's not a bad thing. In fact, we look at that and we think that's a good thing. It's good for me to expend energy to lift weights and get stronger. It's good for me to expend energy to do cardio and get faster.

You have to start to understand, yeah, it's good for you to expend energy to intervene with your default thinking. But if left to your own devices, your brain is like, no thank you. I would rather not. This is what I believe. I found all this evidence to support it, let's keep believing it.

Now, I had no idea that my brain was always searching for proof to support my beliefs. I didn't know that this reflex was at work. I had never heard of confirmation bias before. I just thought that everything I believed was true. Period. End of story.

So I really deeply used to think that everyone drinks and everyone loves to drink. Everyone. Now, that doesn't mean that I wouldn't sometimes in life encounter people who didn't drink, but my brain immediately wrote them off because it didn't fit into the belief system that I had that everyone drinks and everyone loves to drink.

Ep #186: Editing Your Drinking Mindset

So my brain would be like, okay yeah, fine, this person doesn't drink but they don't count. I always would immediately come up with an excuse for anyone who didn't fit into my current belief system or the belief system that I had back then.

Instead of what I could have done, had I known that confirmation bias was at work here, I could have started to see, that might actually be proof that the opposite thought is true, that not everyone drinks and not everyone who drinks loves to drink. That one really blew my mind when I started looking for evidence of that and discovering so many people were like, I don't really like to drink that much but it's just easier, it's just easier if I don't have to answer people's questions.

That really blew my mind when I opened up my eyes to that. So whenever I notice myself insisting for any thought, oh, it just feels so true, I always remind myself, yeah, of course it feels true because your brain has practiced thinking this thought over and over and over again. And every time your brain would think this thought, it's looking for evidence. That's confirmation bias at work.

Because of course, it's still at work in my own brain. It's just now I'm onto it. Now I know it's there, I can remind myself what's going on. I love doing this. I do this especially with thoughts like, "Things are not going to work out, this is going to be a disaster." The number of times that my brain likes to tell me that something is going to be a disaster is really incredible, given the fact that I really have not gone through that many disasters in my life. But my brain is sure that it's going to be one.

My brain is sure when it looks in the crystal ball, it sees a world where everything has gone wrong. It was a disaster, nothing worked out. Now, I could just as easily think, you know what, it's possible that nothing's going to go wrong. It's possible that things are going to go right, that everything's

Ep #186: Editing Your Drinking Mindset

going to work itself out, that I'm going to be totally fine and everything's going to be totally fine.

Now, if I'm not aware how confirmation bias works, I'll just say, well, those thoughts don't feel true. It feels true that everything is going to be a disaster. That's why you need to understand this reflex and how it works. Because you start to see, oh right, I just have so much more practice thinking that everything is going to be wrong and everything is going to be a disaster and my brain has so much more practice scanning for evidence that that is the truth.

That is the only reason why something feels true. Just because you've practiced it a lot. Just because your brain has used confirmation bias to collect a lot of evidence. Now, the good news is your brain is a very powerful tool. You can direct it to collect evidence for the opposite belief.

So whenever something just feels true, it's just a sign that your brain is very comfortable with the thought. It's like a well-worn pathway in your brain. The good news is you can create new trails. That's what thought work is all about. It is 100% possible for you to change not just your thoughts about alcohol and your thoughts about drinking, but your thoughts about anything and everything in life.

That really is the power. Understanding that you can do that. You don't have to sit here with your default thinking. You can start going to the gym. That's what I see thought work is. You can start going to the gym for your mind.

You don't have to just fall back into the excuses, "Well, I've always believed this, this is just how my mind works, it just feels so true. I have a lot of evidence to back it up." You don't have to fall into these excuses. You can start creating a new way to think.

Ep #186: Editing Your Drinking Mindset

And let me tell you, I know I'm a little bit of a broken record on this but it's because I can't stress it enough. This is why it's so important to write down your thoughts and get them on paper. I want you to think about it this way. Think about how free you feel when you're writing or typing a sentence. How free you feel to change it, to rework it, to reword it, to move it around, to delete it.

You can delete the entire sentence when you're writing it out, when you're typing on a screen and start over. We give ourselves so much freedom to do that when the sentence is in front of us, when it's on the page or it's on the screen.

But most people, unless they are taught thought work, give themselves zero freedom to bring this same kind of change and editing to the sentences in your mind. Because that's all they are. Thoughts are just sentences in your mind. They're sentences that you can tinker with and you can rewrite and you can come up with alternatives. And you can delete them.

The thoughts in your mind are not chiseled in stone for eternity. They are editable. They are changeable. Just as much as the way you are constantly editing and changing the sentences in front of you, the ones that you see in a screen or you write on a piece of paper.

You just haven't given yourself the freedom to apply this editing power, this editing skill that you have and you already use. You haven't given yourself the freedom to apply this power to the sentences that you think. You've reserved that editing power for the sentence that you see in front of you. That's why it's so important to get your thoughts out of your mind and on to paper or on to a screen so you can start to change your relationship with them because trust me, you can.

Ep #186: Editing Your Drinking Mindset

This really is the power that nobody ever teaches us that we have. You do not have to stay stuck on default thinking. You do not have to just think what you were taught to think. What you unconsciously picked up in your environment around you. You can start to change and shift your thoughts to anything that you want.

Anything you want to think about drinking, about alcohol, about yourself, about this world. And why not? Because if our thoughts create our feelings and our feelings drive our actions, we might as well choose ones that serve us. We might as well choose ones that feel good and feel better. So start editing yourself.

See it as just a skill that you already practice all the time on paper and on a screen and you're just bringing it to your mind. You do it all the time anyway, so you might as well use it to change the habit. Alright, that's it for today. I will see you 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.