

Ep #187: Change vs Control



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Rachel Hart

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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 talk about change versus control today, and we're going to talk about it in the realm of the habit of drinking, but we're also going to talk about it in life because of course, this is a tug of war that a lot of people experience not just with their drinking, but with everything in life.

I was coaching a woman on this recently and she said to me, "You know Rachel, I just don't like change. I just want things to stay the same." And I could really relate to her because for a very long time, you would have heard me say the exact same thing.

I just don't like change. I'm not comfortable with it. It's just who I am. That's what I believed. I really believed that it was written in my DNA, that I came out of the womb this way, as someone who didn't like change. And so of course, it set me up for a lot of struggle in life because I was always trying to control everything and I always wanted to know what was coming around the corner, and I could never feel secure otherwise.

And I have seen how transforming my relationship with alcohol has actually allowed me to really embrace change and how that has benefited so many areas of my life. I was actually talking with my husband last night. We are about to move, and we've been in our home for about five years now.

We have a toddler, we're both working from home, our family is kind of on top of each other and a couple weeks ago, we just on a whim decided that

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we would look around and see what else was out there. And we found a place.

And the whole process, I will tell you, it's gone so quickly. Way faster than any other time that I have moved in the past. And on Friday we are moving. We're going to have more space, we're going to have a yard, which of course is amazing because we don't have one right now.

And the weird thing is that I feel so calm about it. And I actually feel a little bit in disbelief about how peaceful I am right now, knowing that the move is only a couple days away. It almost feels unreal. Because every time I've ever moved in my life, and trust me, I have moved quite a bit, it's always been this really big, huge, stressful, overwhelming thing.

And now, we have had to do a lot of work to prepare and we've got a toddler and we're trying to baby-proof things and it's a pandemic and so hiring people's been a little bit more complicated. But I'm here and I feel totally calm. I'm sleeping well, my mind isn't racing as soon as I wake up in the morning with my to-do list. I'm not fighting with my husband.

This is a huge, huge, huge change for me because as long as I can remember, I would say I don't like change, I want things to be the same. And when all of a sudden I was confronted with change, I would really freak out. It's a thought that I have practiced over and over again since I was a little kid.

Now, even though I am right now feeling really calm, I did have to coach myself around it. I think that piece is really important. I've told you guys how much I invest in my own coaching. I think it is incredibly, incredibly powerful to work with someone who can just give you a little distance. More distance than you can give yourself from all of your thoughts and your feelings.

And shortly after we signed the lease and the move became official, I was talking with my coach and my brain wanted to just go right into that freakout

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mode. And it kept saying, “Oh my god, there’s so much to do and how am I going to get it done and we have so much stuff, and how did we even end up with all this stuff? It’s happening too fast and I have a business and I have to serve my clients,” and I just wanted to go into kind of, I can’t handle it mode.

And I remember she said to me, she said, “Rachel, you know, you’re moving things from one place to another. That’s it.” And it’s kind of funny when you think about it, but in that moment, I was like, I guess that is all we’re doing, I guess that’s all that’s happening here. I have stuff here in my current apartment and we’re moving stuff there, to our new place.

Everything else is just drama. Everything else, all that initial stress and anxiety and worry and overwhelm, it’s all just created by those thoughts. Everything that my brain wanted to revert back to.

And I’m telling you all of this because I think this tug of war that we all experience between wanting things to be in control and then freaking out that things are going to change, it really is what unwinding the habit of drinking is all about.

So think about it in the context of drinking. Now, once you develop a habit, your brain decides, oh, this is what we do. This is what I know. This is how I take the edge off. This is how I have fun. This is how I loosen up. This is how I connect. This is how I unwind. It’s how I feel less awkward, it’s how I be more assertive, whatever it looks like for you.

Your brain feels like all of a sudden it’s found a solution and that it has gained some semblance of control over how you feel. I remember for me, when I started drinking in college, it felt a little bit like I had found the secret to the universe, and the secret was you don’t have to be steeped in all your anxiety and all your awkwardness if you can get a buzz.

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And so it felt like I had kind of gotten control in an area that I had never really felt in control in. Now of course, we know it's not the secret and we know that you're not actually really in control. You're walking this very precarious tightrope.

This idea that you have found the secret, that you've solved your problem, that you can control how you're feeling by pouring a drink, this is the lie of the habit. The lie is that you can drink enough to no longer have to feel stressed or awkward or bored or whatever. And it seems like it's so true in the moment.

It seems like it's true because once you start drinking, once you get that buzz going, maybe your body does relax. Maybe you do become a little bit more outgoing. Maybe doing nothing starts to seem a little bit more enjoyable. But of course, here's what we know. It doesn't last. That's why you keep going back for more, because it never lasts. That feeling that you get from drinking, it's always fleeting.

The buzz is always going to wear off and what is going to happen? You're going to want to have another. You're going to be chasing after this feeling that doesn't hang around. I really think about this a lot in terms of how I developed a habit around drinking.

I think about how every additional glass or every round that I ordered, it wasn't about the taste. It was about trying to sustain a feeling. It was about trying to keep the fun going. It was about trying to really get rid of my jitters because sometimes they were still there after a couple of glasses.

And all of that made it so I was on this very precarious tightrope. I was always trying to search for the sweet spot when I was relaxed, but not so relaxed that I was slurring, or I had let my inhibitions down, but not so much that I was embarrassing myself, or that I was having fun but not so much so that I was waking up the next day feeling awful.

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That chase was the problem, and I was chasing because I literally did not know another way to create the feelings. But that sense of I found the secret, this is how you do it, this is how you relax, this is how you unwind, this is how you open up, which so often are the thoughts that people have around alcohol, it makes you feel like you have a little bit of control over dealing with your emotions.

But of course, you know it's not this magic elixir. It ends up being a crutch because you don't ever get to the root cause of why you feel the way you do. You don't ever uncover how the think-feel-act cycle is working for you in your mind, so you're not finding the cause of your stress or your anxiety or your boredom, which by the way, is always just a sentence in your mind.

You're not looking for it. You're just repeatedly drinking over it. And guess what, every time you drink over it, you know what happens? You don't learn how to address those feelings on your own the next time they come up because they will come up again.

That's the skill you need to develop. Instead, what do we do? We just try to drink or eat or spend your way out of a feeling. And we're surprised why it doesn't work. We're surprised why we keep going back for more. Because of course it doesn't work because that little bit of dopamine that we get, it doesn't last. It goes away.

We're not learning how to sustain actual emotional wellbeing on our own. And then what happens? We always feel like we're starting back at square one. We feel like, oh god, here I am, another day, totally stressed. What am I going to do? I guess I'm going to open up a bottle of wine. Here I am, another social situation feeling totally out of place, what am I going to do? I guess I'm going to head to the bar.

That's what ends up happening. So you kind of search for this thing, this relief that you believe is outside of you, never once realizing that you have the power all along. You have the power to feel better within yourself if you

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learn how to manage your mind, if you learn what actually creates your feelings.

It's a little bit like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz. It's a little bit like you always had the power to get home, but home in this case is knowing how to produce this deep sense of comfort with yourself and comfort with any emotion that comes up.

I was just on a coaching call talking about this. So often, there is this sense of yeah, I want to be comfortable with myself but also not have any of these icky emotions over here. But as far as I know, we're not able to delete emotions from the human experience. We've got the whole spectrum.

Having a deep sense of comfort with yourself is a deep sense of comfort with any emotion that comes up for you because you know why it's been created, you can go find the root cause of it in your mind, but you also know that it's just a harmless vibration in your body.

Now listen, the process of learning how to manage your mind and learning how to change how you relate to your emotions, it is going to require change. This is where we get into this tug of war a little but because we feel like no, I know what it's like to drink, I know what it's like to be someone who does drink.

You feel like you have this control. It's like I'll just pour the glass of wine and feel better, I'll just have the beer and take the edge off. But if you want to start to unwind the habit, you have to start moving towards change. You have to change how you relate to your urges. You have to change how you relate to your thoughts and your feelings. You have to change the sentences that you're practicing. You have to change how you show up.

And it's so easy to say, well, I just hate change, I don't do change, change is terrible. Just better if things will stay the same. Change feels scary, change feels out of control. But guess what, change is how the world

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works. We're always changing. From the day we are born until the moment that we die, we are changing and our world is changing and everything around us is always changing.

Change is the law of the universe, and yet we kick and scream and say it's terrible. But only because we think that change is the problem. The problem isn't what's happening. The problem is exactly what happened with my move, where my brain wanted to go, "It's too much, it's too daunting, I can't do it, I'm never going to be able to figure it out." That's the problem.

You're just moving stuff from here to there. The problem is what my brain was making it mean. And the reason I was able to intervene with it is because I do this work, because I used the habit of drinking as a stepping stone to understand myself. That's what I think is really important actually.

So often, it seems like we've been saddled with this big problem. Why can't I drink like everyone else? Why is this my problem? Why do I have to struggle with this? You don't realize, oh my gosh, this is an amazing stepping stone, an amazing stepping stone to evolving to your next level, to learning how to manage your mind, to learning how to have a different response and reaction to your emotions and not have any of them be something that you need to hide from or escape or distract or eat or drink over.

So unwinding the habit, shifting your relationship with alcohol is about embracing change. Because change is here to help you. It's here to show you that you have so much more power in every area of your life than you can imagine. Not the power to control what's happening outside of you, not the power to control other people. We don't have that.

So much power though inside of ourselves to change how we show up, to change our default thought patterns, to change our automatic responses. And when you realize that, then you can stop chasing after the perfect

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buzz, the perfect amount to drink so that you'll get the feeling that you want with no repercussions.

Because you know what, there's always going to be repercussions. And I'm not necessarily talking about physical repercussions. Sure, you might have that, but I'm not just talking about hangovers. I'm talking about the repercussion of what your brain learns when it believes that alcohol is the solution. The solution to feeling anxiety or stress, the solution to feeling awkward or not at ease. There's a repercussion there.

Because your brain starts to think that you're not as capable as you are. Your brain starts to believe that you can't handle how you feel when you can. Your brain starts to tell you that negative emotions are a problem when they're not.

In truth, you are so much more capable than you recognize or that you give yourself credit for. And that's what doing this work can teach you. And PS, who doesn't want to learn that? It's an amazing thing to learn, but it only happens through change.

So here's the thing; the next time I talk to you, maybe I'll be in my new office, but maybe I won't. Maybe the movers won't show, maybe the internet won't be ready, maybe something totally unexpected will happen. But you know what, I'm going to talk to you. I feel totally confident that I will figure out a way, and that really is the power of this work.

It's the belief that you can figure anything out. Anything. It's the power of understanding that you don't need to control what's happening in the world because you have so much authority over yourself. The way to feel good and at ease is knowing that change is a part of life. You don't need to control the world to feel better. You don't need to control others. You don't need to get rid of all your negative emotions.

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It's all perfect. You can handle all of it because you have the most powerful tool at your disposal. You have the think-feel-act cycle. You have the framework that explains why you feel the way you do, why you show up the way you're showing up, why you reached for that drink or why you said no. You have the framework that explains everything and with that, you're really unstoppable.

You have everything you need inside of you. Learning how to change the habit is learning how to change yourself. And why not do that? It's amazing. 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.