

Ep #189: Everyone Drinks



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Rachel Hart

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You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 189.

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 talking today about a thought that I know is such a stumbling block for so many of you. So many of you who want to change the habit of drinking, this thought is getting in the way. And it's the thought, everyone drinks. All my friends drink, all my colleagues drink, all my neighbors drink, everyone in my book group drinks, everyone in my family drinks. In fact, I'm from a family of big drinkers.

I know what it sounds like because I hear it over and over and over again from the people I work with. And it will always get in the way of changing the habit. And it's not even that everyone drinks. I'll also hear, people will tell me, "Well, drinking's just a real big deal where I live. I live in a city where it's just part of everything, or drinking is just part of the culture. It's really ingrained."

And the reason why I understand this so well is because I used to believe this thought too. I totally subscribed to all of this. Now here's the thing, non-drinkers make up nearly half of the world's adult population. And that percentage of people who don't drink, it gets even higher, it climbs to 60% when you factor in how many people haven't had a drink in the past 12 months.

That's a lot of people who aren't drinking. But here's what I know; data is not persuasive. In fact, if you tell yourself, "Well, everyone drinks or everyone I know drinks or all my friends drink or I live in a really big

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drinking town,” your brain, when you heard me share that data with you probably started making excuses.

“Rachel doesn’t know what it’s like to live where I live, what it’s like to be with my friends or to hang out with my family.” All those excuses started pouring in. Data isn’t persuasive. These numbers might be true but they’re not going to help you change the habit.

And the reason I know this is because I had to do this own work with this thought, everyone drinks, on my own. It wasn’t enough to look at data. I had to actually start working with this thought in a different way. Everyone drinks was the lens through which my brain interpreted the world. And so I had to start working at dismantling it.

And I understand what a stumbling block this can be when it comes to change because it feels like, okay, so do I have to move? Do I need new friends? Do I need to avoid my family? You don’t have to do any of those things to be successful at changing your relationship with alcohol or the habit of drinking.

So if we know that the data isn’t what you need to convince you and we know that your brain is primed when it has practiced this thought a lot, it’s primed to interpret the world through the lens of everyone drinks and it’s normal to drink, if we know that’s all true, you have to start examining the thought in a new way.

Instead of trying to convince yourself otherwise, what I want you to do for today’s episode is let’s just assume that it’s true. Let’s just assume that it’s true that everyone drinks in your specific instance, whatever your brain is coming up with right now.

Let’s not even fight that thought because fighting it isn’t going to be helpful. We’re not even going to try to disprove it. Even though I promise there is evidence out there to the contrary, we’re just going to start examining the

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thought from a different angle instead of trying to disprove it, so you get to hold on to it for as long as you want to, the entire episode, longer if you want to.

You get to keep telling yourself everyone drinks, all my friends drink, I live in a place where it's really ingrained in the culture, whatever you've been saying. You get to hold on to that. Just go with me on this exploration of starting to examine the thought in a different way.

So when you notice your brain telling you, well, everyone drinks, I want you instead to start questioning well, what does that mean? What does that mean if other people are drinking and I'm not? Then what? I do not want you to spend time counting up who is drinking and who is not in the room. That is really a very useless exercise.

I want you to focus on the meaning that your brain is making of drinking and not drinking. And there really are two areas that you can explore. First, what are you making it mean if you're the one not drinking when other people are, and second, how are you showing up if you're not drinking and other people are?

Stop tallying up the room. Start focusing on these two areas. That's what I'm going to dive in with you. And we're going to start with what you're making it mean if you're not drinking and other people are.

Now, I'll just tell you what I made it mean. I had a whole laundry list, but it included people will think I'm boring, that I'm not any fun, that I'm a stick in the mud, that I'm a buzzkill, they'll think that I'm weird or that something is wrong with me, or that I can't drink, or heaven forbid, that I have a problem.

I was so worried about being perceived in any and all of these ways. I didn't want to be boring, I didn't want to be a buzzkill, I didn't want to be someone with a problem. I wanted to be a fun-loving normal person, and I believed

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for a very long time and very mistakenly that what I was drinking, the contents of my glass determined whether or not that was true.

So I was always trying to drink in order to prove that I wasn't boring, that I wasn't a buzzkill, that I wasn't abnormal and that I didn't have a problem. Now listen, this wasn't in the forefront of my mind every time, but it was there once I started examining the habit.

I was trying to use alcohol to prove something about who I was. And if that didn't work, if sometimes I would get to the point where I was just like, I just don't want to drink, I'm sick of it, I'm sick of the false connections, I'm sick of the hangovers, I'm sick of the regrets, if I sometimes got to that point, then what I would do is either hide what was in my cup, or I would just try to hide out altogether.

I would just not go. I would avoid situations where I knew there would be drinking. I would isolate, which wasn't a whole lot of fun. And I felt so helpless to change the situation because to me, the worries that I had about what people would think of me, it was all just true. That's why I felt so helpless.

I really believed it was true that people who didn't drink were buzzkills, and it was true that sober people had a problem. I had heard this messaging all my life. I had heard it from people that I knew, I saw it on TV and movies, I had even uttered some of these beliefs myself.

I never stopped and asked myself, "Hey Rachel, why do you believe this? Where did these messages come from?" Because I didn't even recognize them as messages that were optional. I just thought it was the truth of the world.

Because our belief systems, they are created by the human mind. So think about it. Humans were created and then human beings created beliefs and belief systems. But when you think something is just so true, you don't think

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about the fact that it was made up by the human mind. You think that's just the way the world works.

So why is it that so many people have this connection between whether or not someone drinks and what it means about the person? Where did this come from? Because it came from somewhere. So what I want to offer to you is that the reason we are taught to ascribe meaning to alcohol is because drinking has been caught up in this tug of war between good and evil, right and wrong for thousands and thousands of years.

So pretty much as long as humans have been drinking, there have been people judging drinking as good or bad. And it's totally fascinating when you start to really look at it. So from the viewpoint of Christianity, you'll see that alcohol is either deemed to be this blessing from god, it's one of Jesus's miracles and part of the holy sacrament, or it's this potential danger that can corrupt the body and lead to sin.

And of course, Christianity is just one perspective. There are some religions that forbid consumption of alcohol, there are others that use alcohol as part of worship and part of holidays. The point is just to really start to see and embrace that humans have been labeling alcohol as good or bad for a very, very, very long time. And these belief systems have been passed down unquestioningly.

I've talked about this on the podcast before. When you think about it, when you think about why these belief systems were created, it really is no surprise that ancient people viewed alcohol as either otherworldly or sacred. And not just because alcohol is something that can intoxicate the mind, but because people literally did not understand how or what created it.

Humans did not understand the process of fermentation. We did not understand how wheat and grapes were made into beer and wine. Now listen, we figured out a long time ago how to harness the power of

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fermentation. We figured out the conditions that were needed to promote fermentation, but we had very little understanding of the actual process taking place on a microscopic level.

There was this deep mystery around fermentation and how things were transformed into alcohol, into this substance that intoxicates you. So it really is only very recently that humans truly understood what was happening on a microscopic level with fermentation and how exactly it works and the science of it.

So I just want you to consider that. Consider that for most of our existence, of human existence, there has been this deep mystery about alcohol and what creates it. So there's the mystery of that, but then there's also this deep mystery about alcohol and how it impacts people.

So why could some people drink more than others and why do some people seem to have more desire than other people? Why does alcohol lower inhibitions? Why does it make some people more prone to laugh and other people more prone to sex and other people more prone to violence?

We had no idea. Humans did not know. And what happens when the human brain doesn't understand something? It starts coming up with explanations. We don't like not knowing. And so some people would say it's because alcohol is bad, and others would say no, alcohol is good, it's the person that's bad, it's the person that's weak.

So humans focused on labeling the substance. It's either this holy thing or this evil thing or both, we don't know. And then also labeling the person drinking the substance. Well, they're really disciplined or they're really weak. In reality, it was all just made up.

People don't drink a lot because they're weak or because alcohol is evil. People drink because of what is happening in the reward system of their

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brain and what's happening with the think-feel-act cycle. That's the understanding that was missing.

And without that understanding, what happens is just a lot of made-up explanations about good and bad and right and wrong and disciplined and weak. All of this really is to say that humans have a long history of making drinking or not drinking mean something about the person.

And this happened because humans were confused. How was alcohol created? I don't really know. Why do some people drink more than others? I don't really know. I guess we should just come up with explanations. So what do we do? Humans labeled alcohol. We labeled what it meant to drink or not drink. And you, my friend, all of us are still swimming in these messages today.

This is what is so easily forgotten. Drinking, not drinking, drinking a lot, drinking a little, it isn't about the what. It's not about the drink itself. And it isn't about the who. It's not about the person doing or not doing the drinking. It's about the why. Why are you drinking? Why are you reaching for another? Why are you saying yes? Why are you saying no?

And once you understand the think-feel-act cycle and how all of your actions, everything you do or don't do has an explanation, and that explanation can be found in what you are thinking and what you are feeling, all of a sudden, the why is no longer a mystery.

Whatever you are doing with regards to alcohol, whatever habit you have created, it's no longer a mystery and it has nothing to do with alcohol being good or bad, and it has nothing to do with you being good or bad. It's about a thought that is very likely right now unconscious that is leading to a feeling that is driving how you show up. It's driving what you do. It's driving whether or not you say yes or no to a drink. That's it.

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So what you make drinking or not drinking mean, just remember, consider that it is part of a long history of human beings simply being confused and making up explanations for that which they don't understand. It's a history of humans not understanding why people do the things they do or what motivates our actions.

And in the face of all of that mystery, it's human beings deciding that something must be good or bad. Instead of looking or understanding that there is a logical explanation for why people do the things they do. Instead of understanding how the reward system in the brain works.

So really, that's the first thing that I want you to pay attention to. If you struggle with this thought, everyone drinks, all my friends, everyone in my family, whatever it is, I want you to just first ask yourself, well, what am I making it mean? And really get clear on that and then start to understand that you didn't just come up with these messages on your own. You're swimming in them.

And they aren't just the truth. In fact, they're not the truth at all. It's what human beings made up. Alcohol being good or bad is made up by the human brain. Drinking a lot being a sign of strength or weakness is made up by the human brain.

It's all made up by humans trying to explain something that they didn't have an explanation for, which is why do people pick up a drink? Why do people act the way they do when they're drinking? Why do some people drink more than others?

It's all of this. All of these messages just totally made up. But there is a second piece of the puzzle that I want you to focus on when it comes to this thought, everyone drinks. And it is not totally up the number of drinkers or non-drinkers in the room.

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It's to ask yourself, well, how am I showing up when I'm not drinking and other people are? What am I doing in that moment? How am I holding myself? How am I holding my body? How much or how little am I engaging with others? Am I talkative or am I kind of off in the corner? Are you part of the conversation? Are you engaging people? Or are you sitting on the sidelines? Are you focused on other people or are you totally in your own head, worried about what other people think? Are you laughing? Are you smiling? Are you relaxed? Or are you serious, quiet, and tense?

How you are showing up is everything. Focusing on that matters so, so much. And the important piece is to understand how do you show up when you're not drinking and why are you showing up that way because the answer is not well, because I'm not drinking, because I don't have a beer in my hand or I don't have a glass of wine.

The answer of course to how you're showing up is well, what's happening in your mind? What are you thinking about? This is what I didn't understand for the longest time. I just thought how I was showing up was directly connected to what I was drinking. And I would tell myself, well, I'm just more relaxed, I'm just more talkative, I'm just sillier if I'm drinking.

So then the solution, if I want to feel these things is to drink. But of course, it's not the solution. It's the problem. When you rely on alcohol to show up the way you want to or create the feelings that you want to have, it becomes a crutch. You don't learn that the experience you are seeking out, how you want to feel, whatever it is, it's available for you.

It's available for you if you start paying attention to what's happening in your mind because the only thing blocking you if you want to feel relaxed or you want to be more talkative or you want to be more inhibited, the only thing blocking you is a thought. When you're thinking something like, "This is no fun. I'm totally the odd man out. I feel so awkward. I don't know what to do. I don't know what to say. Everyone is judging me. This is boring," yeah, of course you're not going to have an enjoyable experience.

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Because what you are thinking, what's going through your mind, that's what creates your experience. And the solution is not to drink over your thoughts. The solution is not the buzz because the buzz is always temporary. It always wears off. And if you don't know how to actually start to create how you want to feel on your own, what are you going to do? You're just going to keep going back for another. You're going to have more desire because without that drink, you're going to be at a loss.

And then what happens is that it leaves you dependent on it. Then all of a sudden, you start to feel like you need it to have a good time or to enjoy yourself because you haven't taught yourself another way. So the next time that you're bored or anxious or feeling like the odd man out, what are you going to do? Your brain's just going to want to drink because you haven't taught your brain how to think differently.

All you've taught your brain to do is desire alcohol and attempt to drink over how you're feeling. But all those thoughts that were creating the awkwardness or the insecurity or the boredom or the annoyance, they're all still there. They're still unchanged. You haven't done any work on them. You just temporarily quieted them.

This is what you have to bring your attention to. How are you showing up when you're not drinking? Instead of tallying up the room, instead of just fixating on everyone drinks, all my friends drink, you have to start asking, what am I doing? Because if you don't change that, you can't change the habit. You can't change your relationship with alcohol. That truly is the key.

When you are fixated on a thought that everyone drinks, all of my friends drink, my entire family drinks, I live in a big drinking town, when you're fixated on this thought, it prevents you from actually doing the work that you need to do. It prevents you from exploring what am I making it mean if I'm not drinking and how am I showing up when I'm not drinking.

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Because if you don't go down those two areas of understanding, you will always be blocked from change. The point is really everyone drinks, who cares? It's irrelevant. That thought is really just masking this deep-seated belief that you have that you can't change how you feel, that you can't feel uninhibited or silly or spontaneous or relaxed on your own, that you need some sort of outside substance to do it for you.

And that's the lie. That's what the think-feel-act cycle teaches you isn't true. You have so much more power than you realize to change how you are feeling. So much more. If you start paying attention to how your thoughts and your feelings and your actions are all connected, you don't need to drink over how you feel, you don't need to eat over how you feel. You just need to pay attention to what's happening in your mind and learn how to start shifting that, learn how to exercise that muscle that no one has ever shown you how to exercise.

So this is what I want to leave you with. For all of you who really believe everybody drinks, stop counting the people in the room. Stop putting people in buckets of drinkers and non-drinkers. Start focusing on what am I making it mean and perhaps that's not the truth. Perhaps that's just a message that humans came up with a long, long time ago to explain something they did not understand and start focusing on how you're showing up when you're not drinking.

Pay attention to that. Pay attention to how much power you believe you have to show up differently without a drink. If you think that you can't, of course you're always going to reach for the drink. Focusing on these two areas is the only way to ever change the habit.

Otherwise, you're going to stay stuck in a belief system about alcohol that listen, our ancestors came up with a long, long time ago. I think it's time for a new one. Alright, that's it for today. See you 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.