

## Ep #190: What It Takes to Say No



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With Your Host

**Rachel Hart**

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

## Ep #190: What It Takes to Say No

You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 190.

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 about commitment today. We're talking about what it takes to say no. Not just to a drink, but what it takes to say no to anything. Because most people want to be better at committing. They want to be better at committing not to drink or not to eat or not to spend or not to spend so much time on screens.

And so many people wonder, why is this such a struggle for me? Why do I have such a hard time committing? And when you think about it, there's a huge incentive to be better at committing because it feels amazing. It feels amazing when you can trust yourself to make a promise and know that you're going to keep it no matter what.

So we have this huge incentive to be better at committing, so then why is it so hard to do? That's what I really want to help you guys understand today. Because most people really misunderstand making commitments and how to be good at following through, especially when it comes to drinking.

Commitment is actually one of the four pillars of habit change. So it is a big part of the work that I teach both in the 30-day challenge and as part of the year-long journey. Learning how to commit. That's one of those really important pieces that you have to master. It's a skill. You have to learn the skill of committing.

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Unfortunately, no one ever teaches us how to do it, so many people when they start working with me, this is the first time that they're really ever studying and learning how to be someone who can commit.

I want you to think for a second, what do you think it takes to say no to a drink? A lot of people, especially a lot of people who have struggled with this will say, "I just think I have to try harder. I think I have to put in more effort. I think I have to be more disciplined." And I want you to know that all of these are wrong.

Trying harder, putting in more effort, that is not the key to habit change. This is really a big problem when it comes to changing your relationship with alcohol because people will tell themselves, "Okay, if I want to change the habit, if I want to say no, I have to be more committed, which means I have to try harder," but they're not really understanding what they're saying when they tell themselves I just have to try harder, I just have to put in more effort.

Because exertion, the act of trying, that is not how you change a habit. You don't change habits through hard work. You change habits through smart work. Force cannot undo a habit. I want you to think about that. Force is not the way to undo a habit. You can lock somebody up for 30 days with no access to alcohol, the habit isn't changing. It's just lying dormant.

In fact, a lot of people would end lockup having even more desire. How is that possible? Because a habit doesn't have to do with drinking. It has to do with what's happening in your mind. But when you force yourself, when you're trying to exert a lot of effort, you are really taking a misguided approach.

Because all it's teaching you is to restrain yourself. It's not actually getting to the root cause. It's not actually helping you change your desire, which listen, if you have less desire to drink, it's going to be a lot easier to say no.

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What people think is hard work is often just failing over and over again without taking the time to understand why they're saying yes to a drink.

That's what I thought was hard work for a long time. That's what I thought I was supposed to be doing. I had no idea that what I actually needed to be doing was understanding the habit. I thought I was trying to wrestle it into submission. I really want you to think about this. This will shift everything not just in this realm, not just with drinking, but it will shift the way you perceive all of your commitments and all of your struggle to commit in life.

Think about the idea of trying. It's so engrained in how so many of us were raised. If you don't succeed, try, try again. How many times did you hear that growing up? How many times do you still hear that sentiment? Trying is just about making an effort.

And listen, effort is important. You can't sit around and do nothing and expect change. But effort is not the be all and end all of habit change and people rely on effort and think they need effort way too much. What you really need is understanding because effort without understanding, it is not going to get you very far.

This is 100% true when it comes to the habit of drinking. Only making the effort to say no without understanding why you're saying yes, without understanding why you have all this desire or where your urges are coming from, it will feel like you're hitting your head against a brick wall when you just are using effort to try to change.

I know this because it felt that way for me for so long. I kept trying and then I kept failing, I didn't feel like I was making any progress. It felt like Groundhog Day for me. I had no shortage of effort for over a decade trying to change the habit, but I wasn't making progress, I wasn't moving forward because I wasn't doing the smart work. I wasn't doing the work of understanding what was happening in my mind.

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I needed to learn why I was saying yes. I needed to learn what route the habit was taking in my brain. And I think of this a little bit like rock climbing. Listen, I am not a rock climber, I've gone a couple times to an indoor rock-climbing gym with my husband. It is a very good activity to do I think with your partner if you're at very different athletic levels, which both of us are.

He's much more athletic than I am. But I do think of it in my little tiny experience that I've had, I do think of this concept like rock climbing because you're going to be a lot better off climbing if you spend some time studying the route, rather than just blindly flinging yourself up the wall or up the mountain.

And I was reminded of this amazing documentary that my husband and I watched a while back called Free Solo. It's about a rock climber called Alex Honnold and his quest to climb El Capitan in Yosemite free solo, which means no ropes, no safety equipment, nothing to keep you from falling off the mountain.

And I'm going to tell you this, if you have not seen or heard of El Capitan, it's basically this granite monolith. It is like a slab of sheer solid rock that just explodes out of the landscape. It dominates everything else around it. It's 3000 feet from the base to the summit. It's two and a half times taller than the Empire State building. I mean, this thing is huge.

And so we're watching this documentary about his quest to climb El Capitan free solo. Just him and the rock, nothing else. And I love this movie for so many reasons. First, I just love it because it's amazing to watch what the human mind and the human body is capable of, and it's amazing to watch what humans can dream up and then go accomplish. It's really mind-boggling.

But I also love this movie because I'm totally afraid of heights. And as I was watching it, my brain was freaking out. So here I am, sitting in the safety of my home, I'm on my couch, I'm under the covers, I'm nice and cozy, and at

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certain points, there were certain camera shots when you would see how high up he was and my palms are sweating and I feel butterflies in my stomach and I'm just so nervous.

And I love watching my brain in action in moments like this because it's such a good reminder that my primitive brain doesn't always have all the information. It doesn't always know what's actually going on because my primitive brain was there watching this movie as I'm sitting on the couch yelling danger, danger, danger, and my body was having a reaction because of that, but in fact, I was totally safe.

And I think that the same thing is often really true with the urge to drink. Your primitive brain doesn't have all the information. Your primitive brain, where the reward system is, it is urging you to have the drink because it thinks that the drink is really important. That primitive part of you believes that anything, any substance that produces a big reward is important for survival, so you should go get it and go have more of it.

But it just doesn't have all the information. That's the beauty of really understanding that your brain is a tool that you can harness because we aren't just our primitive brain. We also have a higher brain. So we can examine what is going on.

We can get off autopilot and take a step back and quickly see, oh, this urge is really not a big deal. It's not necessary, I don't need it to survive. You don't need alcohol at all. It's never necessary in the moment. But if you're just listening to your primitive brain, you would be getting a totally different story.

And this is what I did for so long. I was just obeying my urges, obeying my primitive brain that was like, more is better, more is better, this is important, you need this, it will help things. I was assuming that I was getting all the facts of the situation when really, I didn't have all the facts. I just didn't know any other way because no one ever showed me, hey, you know

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what, you can actually learn how to manage your own mind, you can use the power of this brain that you've been given to not be at the mercy of your urges.

So I love the movie for that reason because I love anything that reinforces for me, hey you know what, your brain doesn't always know what's going on here. That primitive part of you doesn't have all the information. But the other reason I love it is because of what it is like to watch this guy Alex planning to climb.

He studies that rock face like he is getting a PhD in it. He does not just decide one day that he's going to free solo 3000 feet and just start climbing. He puts in hours and hours and hours of planning and understanding and examining and looking at the rock and looking at different routes and thinking about what happens when he climbs.

Understanding is as important as effort, if not more so. Yes of course, there was a ton of hard work that he puts into it, but it's not hard work alone that gets him up the mountain. It's smart work. And that is what most people are missing when it comes to commitment, simply because we just are told, just try, try again.

We don't understand, no one tells us, hey, you know what, step back, spend some time paying attention to what's actually unfolding. We all want to focus on just trying harder. And if you don't succeed, try, try again. That's where I focused for so long because I had bought into this idea that hard work was the solution. More effort was the solution. Being more disciplined was the solution.

But it wasn't. The solution was getting smart. It was understanding the route that the habit was taking in my brain. And I don't mean the exact neural pathway it's following. You don't need to have a brain scanner in order to do this. I mean the thought and the feeling and the action, the

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combination of those three that would lead to drinking and lead to me saying yes and lead to wanting more.

If you want to know what it takes to say no, you really have to go beyond just trying and discipline and effort because that is really going to get you so far. You have to start understanding what's happening and it starts with the think-feel-act cycle. It starts with paying attention to your thoughts and your feelings. Not just picking up the drink. What led to it.

I like to think of it this way. The decision to say no, it really is easy to make. Anyone can decide at any point, any time of day, wherever you are, I'm not going to drink. Those words, saying I'm not going to drink tonight, it takes very little effort. The decision isn't the hard part. Uttering the words isn't the hard part.

The hard part is what happens when it comes time to follow through on the decision because in that moment, what most people find is they start to feel a little uncomfortable and this is where commitment comes in. And you're not going to be able to overcome that discomfort simply through hard work.

Because think about it this way, you make the decision not to drink and then suddenly it's five o'clock and you're stressed out and you really want the wine, or you make the decision not to drink and then you're out and all your friends are drinking and you really want to join in and you're feeling left out.

That's where commitment comes in. In the moment where you have to follow through. That's the moment when things actually start to get hard because suddenly you're feeling deprived or judged or like you're missing out and then if you believe the solution is I just got to try harder, I just got to grit my teeth, I just got to white-knuckle it, maybe even I got to hide out, you will keep repeating this pattern over and over again because none of those things are actually going to change the route that the habit is taking.

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You have to understand why is the urge there? Why is the desire there? What route was your brain taking right before that desire appeared, right before you had the desire to pick up the glass? What was going on? Because what's actually difficult for most people is just simply allowing how they feel when they say no.

That's the real challenge. And no amount of effort is going to make that process easier. You can make that process easier, but through understanding. The only reason it's hard to deal with how you feel when you say no is simply because you are so practiced at drinking over these feelings.

I feel deprived, I'll have a drink. I feel stressed out, I'll have a drink. I'm feeling left out, I'll have a drink. That's what the habit is all about. That's what the habit has really been practicing. There's a feeling that you don't like experiencing so just have a drink.

Now, the good news is that however you feel when you say no, it didn't just appear because you said no to a drink. So people will also think that. I feel deprived because I said no to the drink, or I'm feeling stressed out because I said no to the drink, or I'm feeling left out because I don't have a wine glass in my hand. That's not what's going on.

How you feel in that moment isn't created by what you're doing. It's created by what you're thinking, and that's where the work of understanding comes in. You have to start studying your mind. You have to start studying what's happening in there. You have to study the think-feel-act cycle. The thing that no one ever taught us in school.

And I promise you this; it will be the most rewarding thing of your life to study. Learning how your mind works, learning why you do or don't do everything in this world, learning why you're struggling with commitment, it is so rewarding. Because finally, there starts to be this logic. It's this

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equation that you can start to follow and understand about why it is you are saying yes or saying no.

It doesn't have anything to do with who you are as a person. Doesn't have anything to do with your character. We just have to look at think, feel, act. Instead of trying harder, you have to get curious because curiosity is the birthplace of starting to understand. You can start asking yourself, okay, so what route was my brain following right before my desire appeared?

Most people never know to ask this question. I didn't know to ask this question because I was taught that alcohol created my desire. So there was no need to ask the question because I was sure I knew it was alcohol. But if alcohol creates your desire and you have a lot of desire right now, well, we can't wave a magic wand and get rid of alcohol. We can't just erase it from the planet.

But the good news is we don't need to because it's not alcohol. It's what you're thinking. It's the thoughts that you have unconsciously associated with alcohol and drinking. That's what you need to pay attention to. This is what most everyone skips over because we don't even realize that it's a step in the process of habit change. The thinking part.

We don't even know to look for it because no one teaches us how to look for it. But if you can map out the route that the habit is following, I promise you this, you can start mapping out a new one to take.

Now, just as a little warning, I watch this happen over and over and over again and it happened with me at first too. When people first start doing the work of the think-feel-act cycle and really understanding the habit and seeing how it's the thought and the feeling that's leading to the decision to drink, and it's your thinking, it's your mindset that you have to pay attention to, when people start out, I will hear a lot of people say and I said myself, "Well, I don't know what I'm thinking, I don't know how I was feeling. I just drank, it just happened."

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Because that's what I had told myself for so long. I don't know, it just happened, I wasn't even planning on it, it just happened. That is a reflex of the primitive brain and you have to learn how to override it.

Now, the good news is that the way to override it is simply by asking questions. That's it. I have just given you the key to override this reflex. Just keep asking questions. I don't know, ask a question. I don't know, ask a question. What if you did know?

Because remember, your primitive brain doesn't want you to know the route that it is taking. It doesn't want you to understand the habit. It just wants to keep the habit and keep it unconscious because that is very easy. And it takes very little effort. And the brain gets a big reward.

Habits are easy. Habits are automatic. They require zero effort. So your primitive brain mistakenly believes, hey, this habit is really important, we should keep it. It's helping us. It's giving me this big reward and rewards are important for survival, aren't they?

Well guess what, they were thousands of years ago before humans learned how to manipulate the rewards in our environment. The reward of alcohol is not important for survival. So you have to work against your primitive brain's desire to keep you in the dark and keeping you in the dark always sounds the same. I don't know. I'm confused. I don't think there is anything there.

Listen to that and you will not figure out how to change the habit. But the good news is you have a human brain. You have ability to ask an unlimited number of questions. I want you to think about that. You can ask unlimited questions. There is no cap on this.

So you have the exact tool that you need to start shining a light on what is going on. You don't need to stay in the dark. Your brain isn't just a brain driven by instinct. You have a human brain. You have the ability to think

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and reason and watch your mind at work. And because you have that human brain, that's why you can change a habit.

Animals can't change their habits, not unless they're sitting in a lab and scientists are manipulating things. But humans can because of the brain we have. I want you to really think about this. What is hard about keeping your commitment not to drink? What is it? Do you feel deprived when you say no? Do you feel annoyed? What emotion comes up for you? Don't say there isn't one there. There always is.

And then instead of telling yourself, "Well, I feel this way because I had to say no to a drink," ask yourself, what thought is creating that feeling? Because if saying no to a drink is the cause of how you feel and when you say no you feel deprived or miserable or annoyed or whatever, you're not going to be able to change the habit.

Because if you're feeling deprived now when you say no, then you'll just always feel deprived. If you're feeling annoyed now when you say no, you'll just always feel annoyed. That's what I thought my lot in life was going to be. That sounds pretty miserable.

But the good news is that's not the case. You can change your habits, you can change your desire, you can change your relationship with alcohol because you can change your thinking. I really want you to write down, how do I feel when I say no to a drink? If you're not sure, take a guess.

And then write down, what do I think the thoughts are that are creating this feeling? What do you find? Go on a little expedition in your own mind and see what's there. Because once you start being willing to explore, you start creating the map for how you can change the habit because everyone's map is going to look a little different.

But it doesn't matter that they all look different because we all have the same tool that we can apply. Now, I will tell you the thoughts that I found

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when I started doing this work sounded a lot like it's not fair, why do I have to be the only one who says no? Why do I have to be the only one who deals with this? If I had a drink, it would just make things better and easier and more fun and help me relax. This sucks, I hate saying no, I hate not drinking.

I found a lot of that in there. A lot of thoughts that were creating a lot of self-pity and a lot of resentment. That's what had to be cleaned up. Because who wants to stay in resentment and self-pity forever? All of those thoughts were what was really getting in the way of my own commitment. It had nothing to do with me or who I was as a person.

It just had to do with these thoughts that for so long were so unconscious for me. But every time I said no, I just kept running straight into them head first, which is why for me, habit change for such a long time felt like I was just running into a brick wall. I couldn't figure out why I kept repeating the same thing over and over again, but it's because all of these thoughts that I couldn't see, I also wasn't changing.

The habit cannot change until you learn how to answer your thinking differently. Because right now, you've been answering those thoughts with a drink. That is the habit. That is what your brain is used to. Now you have to learn how to answer them differently, and that doesn't mean gritting your teeth. You actually have to come up with a different answer.

But this is the beauty of what you can learn. You can start to anticipate every excuse, every complaint, every gripe that your brain is going to come up with, and you're going to start planning responses. You can start understanding how all of these excuses are actually just feeding the habit.

I thought it was true. It's not fair, I really believed that that thought was true. And once I started to understand it in the think-feel-act cycle, I saw oh no, that thought, that's just fuel for the habit because every time I believe it's not fair and I feel resentful, I go have a drink.

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I started looking at these thoughts in a really different way. That's what it takes to say no. Hiding out isn't going to do it. Just say no isn't going to do it. You have to study the habit the way the rock climber studies a rock face. You have to study the route that the habit is taking. That's what I had to do. What was the route that my habit was taking me? What path was I headed down?

It was a path I knew I didn't want to go down, but I didn't know how to get off it because I didn't know how to create a new one. And that's what think-feel-act will show you how to do. What it takes to say no is not just try, try again. It's being willing to understand. It's being willing to get curious and ask questions and to start exploring.

It's understanding why you're on that route and not just sitting back and saying, "Well, I have all this desire because it's alcohol and it's too tempting and we all know that alcohol creates your desire." If you're not willing to do this, you'll just keep hurling yourself against a brick wall and then wonder why you're not making progress. And trust me, you don't need to be doing that.

Alright everyone, 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](https://RachelHart.com/join). Together, we're going to blow your mind.