

Ep #199: I Feel Fine Saying No



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With Your Host

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. I'm going to tell you something. Today's episode is coming out on my birthday and I am turning 40. I have talked about this on the podcast before, but when I was struggling in my 20s with my drinking, and really struggling with a lot of things in life, let's be honest, my friend Susie and I, we would joke that when it came to life, surely we would have things figured out by the time we were 30.

I can't even tell you how many times I remember the two of us talking about this. Like things will just be better when we're 30, right? We'll have it all figured out. And then of course, you can guess what happened. That did not happen. That was not the case.

I remember when I was 29 and my 30th birthday was looming, I thought to myself, "Oh my god, I don't have anything figured out and I'm about to turn 30. I'm still a mess, I'm still drinking too much, I'm still in this love-hate relationship with alcohol, I'm still chasing approval and I never feel like I measure up. What the heck?"

Now here I am about to turn 40 and I really realized the error of my thinking back then. Because the error in my thinking was that time was the solution. We are led to believe this. Just think about how many times you hear someone say, "Oh, just give it time. Time heals all wounds. Things will get better with time."

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We're constantly fed this idea that time is the solution. So I was, rightfully so, believing that I just had to rely on the passage of time and then I would finally figure things out. And I see this with people in my 30-day challenge. I see this with people who are fixated on getting to day 30.

They get really hung up on counting days and their focus is solely on not drinking for 30 days. Now, that's not just what I teach. Yes, you're taking a break, yes, you can do a ton of good for your mind and your body when you take a 30-day break from drinking. It can reveal alcohol's true impact on your health, it can reveal the relationship that you developed with alcohol, but guess what?

Time is not the solution. The solution is for you to take action and to learn new skills and to start being curious about how did I develop this habit in the first place? And how are my thoughts leading to me drinking? What is going on there? That's really the most important piece.

And so focusing on time, it really has so many people looking at the wrong target. And that's what I realize now. Time is not the secret ingredient to change. You are. You are the secret ingredient when it comes to change. Any problem that I encounter now, I'm not waiting it out. I'm not hoping that it's going to pass with time. I know that I have to take action and that action always starts with being curious.

And I say all of this because it so relates to today's topic. I will get this question a lot and I will tell you, I remember having this question myself. People will say, okay, I'm not drinking, I feel really good, it's a lot easier than I expected, so why do I still want a drink?

It's so perplexing. It was so perplexing for me, especially if you're in the camp of thinking that taking a break is going to be miserable. A lot of people go into this work, go into this challenge thinking this is going to be miserable, I'm going to have to grit my teeth, I'm going to have to grin and bear it.

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And then all of a sudden, they're like, wait a minute, this is a lot easier than I thought. And actually sometimes, surprise surprise, it's even enjoyable. So I was coaching someone on this recently and she was two months into her break, and she was telling me that she really loved how she was feeling.

And everything that she thought was going to be challenging was way easier than she expected. So she was actually really enjoying herself in a way that surprised her. Yet she couldn't shake this feeling that she really wanted a glass of red wine.

And this is where so many people get tripped up. So they're enjoying their break, they're feeling good, they're having all of these positive outcomes in terms of their health and their relationships, but this little pesky desire, what is it there? If things are so good, why are they still desiring a drink?

And I know how frustrating this can be, and I also know how so many people can head down the wrong path with this. I watch so many people, and I did this myself too, wanting to turn this into a conversation of okay, so the desire reappeared, I feel really good, but I still want the glass of wine so what should I do? Should I drink again?

And it becomes a conversation of should I or shouldn't I drink. Now listen, you can always assess this question, but too often, fixating on should I or shouldn't I drink is only going to send you down the wrong path. Because the real question, the question that has so much opportunity for self-discovery is why am I desiring it? What's behind the desire?

And so that's exactly what I did. I asked her, I said, okay, so you've had all this success, you feel really good, but how do you feel in that moment when you turn down a drink? In that moment, when your partner is drinking and you're not, how do you feel?

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And she said I feel fine. And so I said to her, well, maybe that's the problem. Maybe the problem is that you only feel fine. And she was really quick to say no, I think you misunderstood me. It's not that I'm unhappy, I just mean that it hasn't been very difficult. It's been fine to say no.

And so I asked her again, okay, so you've been finding that it's not very challenging for you to say no and you've been enjoying a lot of the results of not drinking. And you aren't finding it very difficult in situations that you thought that you would, but in the moment, in the moment when you say no to a drink, how are you feeling?

Are you feeling more connected? Are you having more fun? Do you feel more pleasure? Do you have more joy? Do you feel more carefree? And that's when she said, "Oh no, that is not what is happening." And that's the point. That's what I wanted her to uncover.

Because you cannot expect to change your relationship with alcohol if every time you say no, you just feel fine. Getting a good night's rest, waking up without a hangover, all of that is well and good. But it is not going to sustain real lasting change. It's not enough.

Because you know what, we don't want to feel just fine. No one wants to feel just fine. We want to feel alive. We want to feel connected and carefree and playful, and we want pleasure. And you know what, pleasure's not a bad thing.

It's not something that you need to limit. It's not something that you need to prove that you deserve it or that you need to earn. Pleasure is a needed part of the human experience. The problem with pleasure is when we don't know how to create pleasure in our lives, and so we start chasing after false pleasures. We start chasing after these highly concentrated rewards like alcohol and sugar.

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And these things that make us feel like we're enjoying ourselves in the moment, but then they create all of these negative repercussions. Listen, when you're engaged in true pleasure, there's no negative repercussion.

But this is why people get tripped up when it comes to changing their relationship with alcohol. Because if you're like me and you relied on a drink to quiet your anxiety, or quiet your self-critic, or quiet all your thoughts about the day, or if you relied on a drink to open up or connect or be silly or let your guard down, or if you used a drink as your go-to way to find pleasure, then what on earth are you going to do if you decide to say no, if you decide to take a break, and then you don't find ways to fill these holes?

That's why this question comes up so much. That's why people feel so confused. I'm really enjoying myself, I feel better, I feel healthier, but I still really want a drink. This is why.

The conversation isn't should I drink again or shouldn't I. It's how do I fill the void left behind. The void left behind by not drinking. How can I uncover what is blocking me, what is preventing me from feeling less anxious, what is preventing me from shifting what my self-critic says all the time, what is preventing me from switching off all of my thoughts about what happened today or what's going to happen tomorrow.

You have to figure out how to uncover these blocks and learn a new way of thinking and new way of being. You have to learn a new skillset. Something that no one ever teaches us.

Now, the good news is that you have the think-feel-act cycle. This is what I teach. That your thoughts create your feelings and your feelings drive your actions. And this isn't just limited to the desire to drink. It's not just about wait, why did I pick up that wine glass? You can use this cycle and apply it to everything. It really is a tool that you can use with everything in your life.

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It's how you create a more vibrant and alive and pleasurable life. And when you do that, when you start working on quieting your self-critic and learning how to shut down your thoughts at the end of the day and learning how not to catastrophize, and learning how to be more carefree and more compassionate and more open, when you learn how to do this first, then guess what?

Then the conversation that you have about whether or not to drink, it totally changes. Because then you're making the decision without feeling like I don't know, if I continue on this path, if I continue saying no, am I just going to be missing out forever? No one wants that.

Then it really can become a decision about alcohol and just do I want to drink, and not do I want what alcohol gives me, what I have taught my brain to use alcohol for. These are two totally different conversations.

And you know, through coaching this woman, this is what she realized. She said yeah you know what, I guess my life has kind of felt flat the last couple years. And I can't tell you how powerful it is to realize this. It truly, truly is monumental to be able to say that out loud because so often people don't want to admit that. They don't even want to look at a thought like that.

They don't want to say that life has been flat or things are just fine, because then we fear oh my god, what does that mean about me? What does that mean about my relationship? What does that mean about my job? What does that mean about everything in my life?

We're so afraid what it would mean to admit these thoughts to ourselves, even though the brain is thinking them, even if we don't have conscious awareness. The good news is that it means nothing. It means absolutely nothing.

If you look around and you say, yeah, things just kind of feel fine or okay or flat, it doesn't mean anything about you. It just means that you're having

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kind of fine or okay or flat thoughts. That's it. And guess what? You can learn how to change that and it doesn't mean you have to upend your whole life. It doesn't mean that you need to do a complete makeover on yourself.

It means you have to start getting curious about hey, what's happening in my mind? But listen, as intimidating as it might be to acknowledge that yeah, life is not exactly where you want it to be right now, or that when you don't have a drink in your hand you're not exactly the person you want to be, as intimidating as that can be, it is the most important step to change the habit. It is the most important step to change your relationship your alcohol.

I say those things because they are not one and the same. Changing the habit of drinking and changing your relationship with alcohol, that's not the same thing. You can change the frequency by which you pick up a drink. You can change how quickly you drink. You can change so much about your drinking.

And you can also change your relationship with alcohol. You can change what you think it means about you and what you think it means about a fun time, what you think it means about other people to drink or not to drink or to struggle with your drinking.

Both of these pieces are important. You know, when I teach this, a lot of times people say, "You know Rachel, can a drink just be a drink? Does it always have to have some sort of bigger meaning behind it?" And my answer is of course.

A drink is always just a drink. Saying yes is not a big deal. It's not a sign that there's something deeply wrong. It's not even a sign that you're unhappy. Saying yes is just going to mirror back what you're already thinking. And if you're thinking I deserve it, it's going to show up in how

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you're drinking. And if you're thinking my life is missing something, it's going to show up in your drinking.

And if you think to yourself, I just need to zone out, guess what? It's going to show up in your drinking. Your thoughts are going to be mirrored back in your relationship with alcohol. They are going to be reflected back at you in the intensity with which you drink, the speed at which you drink, the quantity of what you drink, and the frequency of how much you drink.

And so if you've been taking a break and you've been feeling really good, and you found it easier than you expected but you can't really shake that the desire is still there, I want you to consider that the question is not okay, so should I or shouldn't I drink? The question is what is this desire really about?

Can you bring curiosity to it? Because if you can bring curiosity to why is that desire there? Why am I feeling good? Why do I see all these benefits and still have this desire? Then it's going to take you down a totally different avenue of exploration than if you stay in this place of well, should I or shouldn't I?

Then when you explore that, you start to uncover, hey, what do I need to do to have a life that is more vibrant, to feel more alive, to feel more open, to feel more carefree? And these are things that I promise you, impact everything in your life.

Not just the moment in which you pour a drink. All of that. We want to feel alive. We want to be connected. We want to experience pleasure and all of those things are good. And if it feels like a struggle to do any of that, guess what, you're not alone.

It was a huge struggle for me. I didn't know how to access any of those things. I knew how to pour a drink. I knew how to get drunk. I knew how to

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disconnect from myself and give myself the idea of pleasure, but not actually true pleasure.

Because then I was always waking up the next day feeling more miserable. Not just physically but also emotionally. This is what I want to offer to you. If you can just be curious about why the desire is there, if you can start exploring that question and set aside should I drink, should I not drink, should I go back to it, if you can set all of that aside, then you have so much more opportunity to actually create the lasting change that you want to have.

Because that's what you want. That's what I wanted is to create lasting change, to not be on this kind of seesaw going back and forth. I spent lots of time doing that in my 20s. I didn't want to be on that seesaw anymore. I wanted to understand why I had the relationship that I had and understand how to have a different relationship with alcohol.

And when you just get curious, I promise you, it doesn't have to be this big heavy question, or this big all-important line of questioning for yourself. It can just mean that you are starting to understand how do I create the thing that I want, how do I create what I think alcohol is giving me, how do I have more pleasure and more connection and more enjoyment?

Because I promise you, those are the only ingredients to lasting change. Alright, that's it for today, my friends. 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.