

Ep #209: Why You Struggle to Moderate



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 209.

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 want to tell you something funny, because I always record that little opening telling you that you're listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart and what episode number it is. And I have to tell you the strangest thing is happening with my son. He's started referring to himself as Rachel Hart. He just started doing it out of the blue. It's so weird. And my husband and I cannot figure it out. We can't even figure out how he knows my name is Rachel Hart. Hart is not his last name.

And I think that he must hear me sometimes recording the podcast and recording that opening because I do it every week, but it really is a mystery in my family because suddenly there are two Rachel Harts. Anyway, I just had to share that with all of you. But we are talking today about why you struggle to moderate your drinking. Now, I have a unique perspective on moderation. If you listen to the podcast you know this, you've heard me talk about it.

If you are brand new I encourage you if you want to go back to episode 182 where I talk about abstinence versus moderation and my perspective. Now, the long and short of it is really simple, moderation focuses on a number, one glass, two glasses, three glasses. It focuses on how much. And the problem with that is that a number always disconnects you from how you actually feel and how alcohol feels in your body.

And you know what? The same amount of alcohol does not always feel the same. Two glasses tonight might feel different tomorrow and feel different

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the day after that, based on your stress levels, your mood, how much you slept last night, what you had to eat, how your immune system is doing, where you are in your cycle. Moderation just focuses on a number instead of your body and how you feel. It disconnects you because it's all about following a rule rather than listening to cues, rather than responding to how you actually are in the present moment.

I will tell you and I know this because I did this myself, most people try to take their cues when it comes to moderating from everyone else other than themselves. They try to take their cues from, well, I don't know how much does my partner drink, or my friend, or my sister, or this family member, or my colleague. What does this organization say is the right amount to have? What does this person, what does this doctor, what does this authority tell me is the correct amount?

When we're focused on a number we take our cues from everyone else out in the world. But of course no one can know except for you how alcohol is going to feel on a given day. I want you to take your cues from you. I know that's kind of mind blowing. I want you to decide, hey, what feels good for me not just in the moment but in the long term? What's going to feel good tomorrow? Because if you're struggling to moderate your drinking you're not doing what feels good for you in the long term. You're doing what feels good for you only in the moment.

Doing what feels good for you in the long term, it's about changing your relationship with alcohol and that does not come from fixating on a number. You can drink and you can have a great relationship with alcohol. You can drink and you can have a pretty bad relationship with alcohol but guess what? You cannot drink and you can have a pretty bad relationship with alcohol and you cannot drink and have a great relationship with alcohol.

The relationship that you have with the substance has nothing to do with the quantity and has everything to do with your ability to take cues from yourself. So, listen, I don't really like the concept of moderating. I prefer the

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concept of stopping when it's right for you and deciding what's right for you and following that decision.

Now, this may look different on different nights. That may be a decision to have a drink to celebrate but knowing that you don't ever have a drink to commiserate. That may be drinking to really savor what's happening rather than drinking to escape or numb. You have to decide what feels good, and what is right for you, and what you like, and what gives you the results that you want. But the question remains regardless of how I feel about the term 'moderation', why do you struggle to say no? Why do you drink more than is good for you?

Now, maybe it feels good for you in the moment to say yes but it doesn't feel good later in the evening, or later in the day, or the next day, otherwise you wouldn't be here. Now, I just want to add this before we really dive into why it is you're struggling to say no.

I work with a lot of people in the 30 Day Challenge who end up staying beyond the 30 days. So they take a break and they decide you know what? There's more for me to explore. Or they really struggle taking a break. So they actually go through a couple go rounds before they get the full 30 days under their belt, which, by the way is totally normal.

But some of the people who decide to stay beyond and do some of the advanced work, they do at some point decide, you know what? I want to reintroduce alcohol but I want to do it differently than how I've done it in the past which is I just don't drink for a certain number of days and then I decide it's the first of the month so now I'm allowed to. So I help them figure out how to do that. How do we start to introduce alcohol mindfully?

And I have an exercise inside for people doing the advanced work called The Mindful Drink. And it takes a very conscious, very slow and deliberate approach to consuming alcohol. I will say that it really is such an eye opener for the people who do it, not everyone does it because not

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everyone actually is in that place where they want to reintroduce it. It was very eye opening for me.

I will have so many people and I can really relate to this, I have so many people say, "You know what? Once I started paying attention the pleasure of the first sip, it's not the same as the pleasure as the eighth sip. Or the third glass, it really doesn't feel anywhere as good as the first glass did." They really didn't realize this before doing the exercise. Their mind was in a place of no, it's all great, I just love to drink and the first sip is as good until the last drop.

It really does not apply to drinking but you know what? It really doesn't apply to anything, you get diminishing returns. But until you actually start consuming in a mindful way, it's really hard to notice that. So I remember for me, I remember being like who wants to go slow? I don't want to drink slowly. I don't want to do this mindfully, more is better, I want to have fun. I want to get a buzz faster. I had a destination in mind and I was in a hurry to get there. I had to really discover for myself, a sip is not a sip, is not a sip, it's different, it's a different experience.

And that can be really helpful in understanding, okay, so why is it a struggle to say no when you have that kind of baseline? You can start to ask yourself, okay, so if it's not all the same why am I struggling? If it's diminishing returns, why do I want to keep going?

Why am I struggling to moderate? It's not because you just love the taste so much. It's not because you're an all or nothing person or because everyone else around you decided to have another round. It's not because the drink in front of you is too tempting. And it's not because you have an addictive or a compulsive personality. It's because in that moment you don't want to stop, that's the reason. The reason why you struggle to moderate is because you don't want to stop.

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I know that some of you are listening to this right now and thinking, wait a minute, Rachel, I do want to stop. I don't want to polish off a bottle, I hate how I feel. I hate the regret. I hate how it's affecting my life and my relationships. And I know you will say, "Listen, if you really knew me you would know that with all of my heart I want to moderate. I want to be someone who can have a glass or two and take it or leave it." But the real truth, and I know this truth can be painful to fully absorb, is that you don't want to stop.

In the moment you don't want to stop that's why you keep going. No one pours it down your throat. No one makes you drink, no one forces you. You want to. And by the way, this is true of any habit that feels compulsive, if you find yourself overeating or overspending, or compulsively checking your phone, in that moment you want to keep going otherwise you wouldn't be doing it. Now, that doesn't mean that there isn't a part of you that isn't calling out for change. Of course there is.

But pretending that all of you is calling out for change, that's not going to do you any good because not all of you is calling out for change. Part of you, especially in the moment is sitting there like hey, let's keep going, this is a good thing, why would we stop? Now, please hear me, for everyone listening this is not the moment for you to start beating yourself up. This is not me saying, "Okay, and now we start blaming ourselves, see. See, you're the problem, you're the one at fault." That's not what I'm talking about here.

This is not a moment for you to go into shame and blame. It's not a moment for you to start judging yourself because you recognize that part of you wants to keep going. This is a moment for you to just stop and ask, "Okay, so if I don't actually want to moderate then why is that?"

Once you actually accept that in the moment you don't want to stop then you can just be curious about why that is. What would stopping mean right then? Would you be distracted by what was in everyone else's glass?

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Would the socializing end? Would you have to acknowledge that it was getting late and go home or go to bed? Would you feel deprived, or anxious, or bored, or lonely?

Why don't you want to? There is so much good information for you about how the habit is working in that question but you have to accept first, you have to accept the premise that you don't want to stop so that you can ask yourself, "Why is that the case?" It might seem really obvious but a lot of people don't accept that they actually don't want to moderate. They don't accept the fact that they want to keep going, that they want to be able to drink as much as they want. I know this because I had trouble accepting this.

If someone had told me 10 years ago, "Hey, listen, Rachel, I think the truth is you really don't want to moderate." I would have been like, "Lady, you don't have a clue about me. You don't know what you're talking about. You don't know my life. I am desperate to moderate. I am desperate to be someone who stops, who calls it quit. I hate drinking too much, I hate the repercussions. I hate being the person who can't control herself. I hate how I feel the next day. I hate what it's doing to my life, and my relationships, and my friendships.

I wake-up in the morning and I have a plan, today is going to be different. You should see how determined I am in the morning. You should see all the commitments I write down." But then it goes all out the window, this is what I would have just believed so deeply. And I know looking back that I would have been a little ticked off if someone had said, "You know what? I think you don't actually want to moderate." But that's what was happening.

I didn't want to stop in the moment because if I had really wanted to, if all of me had really wanted to I would have stopped, I would have said no. But I didn't say no, I kept saying yes, I kept having more, I kept pouring another glass. And I kept telling myself, "Well, I'm just someone who really loves to drink, or I just really like to have a good time, or I deserve it after this crazy

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week that I had.” But really I kept saying yes because I didn’t want to have to feel how I was going to feel when I stopped.

The point of drinking was to feel good and stopping felt bad. I didn’t want to feel bad. I wanted to feel good. So what did I do? I drank more. But that’s the illusion. The illusion is that the more you drink the better you feel. The more I drink the worse I felt. Feeling better, true wellbeing, truly feeling satisfied, it comes from learning how to tolerate momentary discomfort for long term wellbeing, long term satisfaction.

I was doing it the wrong way around. And this is what I see my clients doing all the time. They’re trying to do it the wrong way around too. They’re chasing momentary comfort, the momentary comfort of saying yes and not having to stop for long term discomfort. The discomfort of how they feel about themselves the next day, the toll that it takes on their body, the toll that it takes on their life and their relationships, the worry that they have the next day, the wondering am I ever going to figure this out.

Learning how to tolerate momentary discomfort, because that’s what an urge is, it’s momentary discomfort. It will not last forever. It simply will not because your brain was not designed that way. It was not designed to endlessly call out for something that you’re not going to give it. Learning how to tolerate momentary discomfort, that is the key. That’s the key to creating truly feeling good. You can’t truly feel good until you learn how to tolerate feeling bad. Isn’t that wild?

But that’s what I’m offering to all of you, how to truly create wellbeing and satisfaction inside of yourself with nothing needed. You don’t need to consume anything. You don’t need to put anything in your body. You don’t need to change anything about your life. You don’t need to purchase anything. You can create that but at first it will be challenging, it will be uncomfortable. It’s a skill to learn how to manage your urges. We’re not used to managing them. We’re not used to allowing the urge to be there.

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We're used to either immediately saying yes or putting up a fight and gritting our teeth, and using all this resistance. So it's a skill that you're going to learn but it's just so much easier when you can drop off the judgment. Most people don't know how to drop the judgment of it, that's why it's so difficult.

I talk about this all the time about the analogy with riding a bike. If you were learning to ride a bike and every time you got on that bike and you were wobbly, and you made it mean something terrible about your ability to learn, or your ability to be someone who could ride a bike in the future you'd never learn. You'd get so discouraged, but that's what most people do when they start doing the work of learning how to manage their mind and allow their urges.

It feels kind of wobbly and they let the wobble freak them out, instead of acknowledging, of course I feel wobbly, I'm learning something new, my brain is laying down new neural pathways. This is going to be challenging at first but you know what? It's temporary.

You can teach your brain that urges aren't a big deal, that excuses don't have to be listened to, that your desire is actually being created by what you are thinking in the moment. I want it. I need it. Why can't I? Everyone else can. That's how you start to shift into this place of having a skill, not just a skill to say no, a skill that creates lasting wellbeing in your life. But you do have to figure out how to navigate that discomfort at first, which is not something that most of us are taught how to do. I know I certainly wasn't taught how to do it.

And it's a skill that we need more and more especially as the world becomes more about instant gratification. There's just zero delay. Look at the world around you, how you can get things so quickly, immediately, in our phone, on our screen, on our tablet.

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I was joking about this with my husband the other day and I said, “It’s so weird, remember when we had to listen to the radio and hope that a song was going to come on that we liked?” It’s so weird to think about that now because now I just pop in Spotify and put exactly the songs that I want to listen to. But I remember that, I remember growing up and thinking gosh, I hope one of the songs that I like comes on the radio. We’re losing the skill of learning how to pause. We’re losing the skill of feeling a little uncomfortable because it’s so much instant gratification around us.

But listen, telling yourself, “No, no, no, listen, I really do want to moderate. I really do want to stop.” It’s not how you learn the skill. You have to acknowledge first that you don’t want to moderate. You don’t want to stop. You can’t skip this step. This is what so many people try to skip over, because by answering this question, okay, why don’t I want to stop, why don’t I want to moderate? That’s how you actually create change.

That to me is the power of taking a break. It doesn’t matter what your goal is. It doesn’t matter if you want to drink less in a sitting, or you want to drink less frequently, or you want to take actually an extended time off, or you’re just done with alcohol forever. It doesn’t matter what your goal is when it comes to taking a break because again we’re not focused on quantity here. What matters is, okay, can we figure out why alcohol has been so appealing?

That’s the purpose; yeah of course, taking a break from drinking it is a blessing to your body. And depending on how much you have been drinking, you may discover that you didn’t even realize the toll that alcohol was taking until you removed it for 30 days or more. But the real purpose of the break, it’s to clear the fog. It’s to figure out why, why don’t I want to stop? If you give up all your knee jerk answers that you love to drink and you’re just an addictive personality, or an all or nothing person.

If you give that all up then you can just start to ask yourself the questions that truly are powerful and will help you with this habit. Questions like why

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am I really drinking? What am I really desiring? What don't I want to feel? What am I trying to avoid right now? I know some of you will hear me talk about this idea that you have to start digging for these answers and you think, oh God, if I'm digging for something there must be something big and scary that I'm going to uncover. But you know what? That's not usually the case.

What happens for most of my clients is they discover I just don't want to feel annoyed at the end of a long day. I don't know how to get through the evening with my family, who by the way is just driving me nuts without opening up a bottle. Or I want to have permission to stay and to have fun, but I've always given myself permission by having another round. And if I don't have another round I don't really know how to do it.

If you open yourself up to these questions you will start to figure out the real reason why you struggle to moderate. It's not about you, it's not about alcohol. It's about your perception of what alcohol is doing for you. But of course it's just a perception. And all of that choosing of short term comfort, the short term comfort of saying yes, it's leading to all this long term discomfort. You have to turn that equation around.

You have to learn how to choose the short term discomfort that creates the long term wellbeing and satisfaction in your life. And you can learn how to do this. You can learn how to feel however you want without a drink. That is the magic in what this podcast teaches. It's not, no, you say no to a drink and then you just pat yourself on the back because you made a healthy decision.

No, as far as I'm concerned if you're saying no and you're unhappy, and you're resentful, and you're miserable, and you feel like you're missing out. Or you feel like life just doesn't have the same sparkle, that's not healthy. That's not what I want for you. That's not what I'm offering to you.

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What I want for you is to have more fun, and more pleasure, and more connection, and more ease, and more joy, and more wonder, and more magic. And you know what? You get to learn how to create that. That's the magic in taking a break the right way, not where you stare at a calendar and count down the days until you can drink again.

But taking a break where you can start to really ask yourself these questions, where you learn, hey, how do I take the edge off at the end of a long day without a glass of wine? How do I deal with these people that are driving me nuts without a glass of wine? How do I feel at ease, and confident, and able to connect without a buzz? How do I give myself permission to say no, or to leave, or to go to bed, or to stay up without using alcohol as an excuse to do any of these things? That's where the think, feel, act cycle comes in.

That's when you use the break to start focusing on what's happening in your mind rather than what you poured in your glass, who cares about what you poured in your glass? It's never going to reveal to you the contents of your mind. So that's what I want each and every one of you who has wondered why do I struggle to moderate. That's what I want you to focus on instead, these questions. If you accept the premise that in the moment when you're drinking you don't want to moderate, you don't want to say no, you don't want to stop.

If you let go of your insistence that no, no, no, I really do, I really do want to moderate, I really do want to stop. If you let go of this notion that you're determined to moderate, you just can't figure it out, if all of that drops away then what you're left with is why don't I want to? And that is the only question that's actually going to help you change the habit and change your relationship with alcohol.

So don't just listen to this podcast, go do it, go take action. Get a piece of paper, write out your answers. Don't do it in your head. See what you uncover. It will be unique to you and how your habit works and how it was

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created. But this really is the key to changing your drinking habits and changing your relationship with alcohol. It's being honest with yourself about the fact that part of you doesn't want to.

Part of you doesn't want to say no and you know what? That's a good thing. That has information for you. That has wisdom for you. We don't have to pretend that that part of us doesn't exist. We have to learn how to use it.

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.