

Ep #144: Subtle Willpower



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With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 144.

Whether you want to drink less or stop drinking, this podcast will help you change the habit from the inside out. We're challenging conventional wisdom about why people drink and why it can be hard to resist temptation. No labels, no judgment, just practical tools to take control of your desire and stop worrying about your drinking. Now, here's your host Rachel Hart.

Hello everybody. So before we get started with today's episode, I do want to let you know that I am doing another Ask Rachel Anything webinar in the month of October. So I'm going to be doing only one of them this month and it's on Monday, October 28th at 12pm Pacific.

So if you are a listener to this podcast and you have questions for me, maybe you listen to me on your commute and you find yourself asking questions out loud when you're driving, or on the subway, or you're just thinking oh, I wish I could ask her this one area where I'm stuck, this is your chance to get your questions answered.

It's an hour-long webinar where I teach you a little bit about how to use the think-feel-act cycle as a tool and then we just go right into your questions. So we can get all your questions, all your burning questions answered. So if you want to join, make sure you go to rachelhart.com/askrachel. That's all one word. You can sign up there. There are limited spots for this webinar and when you sign up, you will be able to get a copy of the replay.

And they are always fun, we always have a great time, and I love, love, love getting through as many of your questions as I can because we just get so many into the podcast and I can't keep up with them all here, but I can answer a lot of your questions all at once when I do these Ask Rachel webinars. So make sure you check that out. Rachelhart.com/askrachel.

So today what we're going to be talking about is something that I am calling subtle willpower. There are so many of you who are either in the Take A Break program, maybe you finished the 30-day challenge, and you're

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reporting to me, you know what, that was a lot easier than I expected. I didn't think that it was going to be so easy. And I want to know, how do I know if I am on the right track in terms of whether or not I should keep the break going or whether or not I'm okay to reintroduce alcohol?

And that's why I want to talk to you about subtle willpower today because you have to know if you're actually engaging in this and it is so easy to miss because that is going to tell you what the right next step is going to be for you.

So I've talked about willpower a lot on this podcast because it's something that you really want to make sure that you are avoiding. Willpower is when you are resisting how you're feeling, you're resisting looking at what's going on and when you are resisting, you can't see the habit unfolding. You can't actually change what you can't see.

You have to start to learn how to allow the urges, allow your feelings. That is the only way to actually create sustainable change. And I will tell you that especially at first, you'll really know when you're using willpower because it feels so strong and tense. You feel like you're gritting your teeth. You're white-knuckling it.

It feels exhausting because you're using so much energy to resist the thoughts. I want it, I deserve it, who cares, why not, screw it, using so much energy to resist the desire and the deprivation and the entitlement, and all of the emotions that you're having in your body connected to the habit.

So most people at first have no problem identifying when they're using willpower. Other times, people will say, I don't think I'm using willpower. I feel kind of fine and I'm not gritting my teeth. And I will be able to see as an outside observer, as their coach, oh actually, you're using kind of subtle willpower.

And I'll be able to show them how to spot it. I'll be able to show them that actually, even though they say they're feeling fine, even though they say

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I'm not gritting my teeth, it doesn't feel exhausting, that they are using just kind of low-level form of resistance in order to make it through their break.

And so I want to actually talk to you guys about this today. It's a little bit of an advanced topic, but I think a lot of you are really ready for this where you are in your own journey. I also want to talk to you about it because it came up for me recently.

And this is one of the beautiful things when you start to learn how to manage your mind is you just see that you're always going to kind of deeper and deeper layers. You're getting to know your brain better and better. You're just better able to manage that lower brain of yours more and more effectively.

So a couple months ago, my husband started a new job. And that job has him on the road much more often than we were anticipating. So we were not really expecting this, but this is how things have unfolded. And he was actually in India for eight days recently. Eight days.

This is longer than his regular trip. We got about a week's notice before he left. And when he initially called me and said, "Hey honey, they want to send me to Bangalore for eight days," at first, I tried to play it cool. And I was like okay, we're going to figure this out, it's going to be alright.

And then he got off the phone, I had maybe an hour or so and I was kind of thinking about it and thinking about what it was going to mean to not have him at home for eight days, and I called him back at work and I was no longer playing it cool. I was now kind of at the we have a massive emergency happening level. That's what was happening for me.

And I called him back and I said, "Do you realize how long eight days is? I just looked at the calendar, honey, I just counted out eight days. It is forever. This is ridiculous. You need to talk to your boss. Don't they know that you have a family? What am I supposed to do?" I mean, I was in full meltdown mode.

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And I actually pulled myself together in the course of that conversation and we talked for a little bit and I decided, you know Rachel, this is really crazy. You're going to be fine. This is not a big deal. You're injecting a lot of drama into the situation. I've talked about this on the podcast before when we kind of unnecessarily add a lot of unnecessary drama and high emotion into situations.

And you know, after that little meltdown with him on the phone, I kind of got myself together and I wasn't really looking forward to him being away but I wasn't really worrying about it and I wasn't griping about it. And I just kept saying to myself, you know what, you're going to be fine. It's really not a big deal. Women do this with husbands who go away for much longer. Women do this without a partner. Parents do this without another person all the time. You're really going to be fine.

And here's the thing; it totally was fine. My baby and I were together for eight days and it was not a big deal. My husband would check in every day, we would do a little video chat, and I wasn't putting on a face. I wasn't lying to him. I wasn't pretending. I was always reporting hey, you know what, things are going a lot better than I expected. This is easier than I thought it was going to be.

I just kept telling him, it's going surprisingly well. So much better than I anticipated. And he came home after eight days of being in India and it was great. It was great to see him; I was really excited to see him and had the baby meet him outside. The baby was actually kind of more excited to see the roly suitcase because he could push that down the sidewalk.

But everybody was happy. And it was so great to have my husband home, and then a little later on that day, a little later that afternoon, the weirdest thing happened to me. I noticed myself feeling really hungry. Like, insatiably hungry.

And I have talked to you guys in the past about how overdrinking and overeating, they go hand-in-hand and this is something that you untangle

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one and you start to pull at the threads for the other. The other one starts to untangle as well.

So overeating has been something – that's a habit that I learned long before I started overdrinking, but it's also something that's just not something I really struggle with anymore. But I had this intense urge to eat. And I was kind of watching it and I was thinking, this is kind of strange. It's weird that I feel so hungry and so intensely hungry, especially when I think about what I ate earlier in the day and it wasn't really out of the ordinary and nothing's really changed with my eating.

And I'll tell you know in my life, my eating is pretty straightforward. Food is planned out, it's very conscious, it's very deliberate. I don't eat in front of the fridge anymore. I don't eat standing up at the kitchen counter anymore. I don't really snack. I don't sit on the couch and mindlessly eat in front of the TV.

And all of that has been a huge change, but really, learning how to allow the urge to drink is what taught me how to allow the urge to mindlessly eat, which is what I was doing so often. So I couldn't really figure out what was going on and I became very fixated on dinner and when are we going to eat and I'm so hungry and I have to have dinner.

And my husband brought home dinner that night and I ate way past what I would normally eat. I mean, I ate to the point of feeling really uncomfortably full and I haven't done that in a long time. And I just remember thinking, it's kind of like when you're watching yourself outside of yourself like, Rachel, what are you doing? What's going on here? This is so weird.

Your husband's home, why are you eating this way? Everything is good. Now, here's the thing and this is the piece that I want you guys to pay attention to. The next morning, I woke up and I coached myself, which is what I do every single morning.

I wake up and I look at the contents of my brain. What's in there? I always talk about how I think it is so powerful to just look at what is in your brain

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before your day starts. And of course, what was in my brain was the night before.

Like, what was going on? What the heck happened? You had eight days with your son, which was so much easier than you expected, you actually came away feeling really proud of how you handled it, especially after that initial meltdown when you got the news.

Your husband came home, it was wonderful to see him, it was wonderful to see your son so excited to see your husband. You weren't stressed out, you weren't angry, why did you have that insatiable hunger and why did you answer that insatiable hunger by eating way too much at dinner?

And as I was doing my coaching and I was looking at the think-feel-act cycle, I realized something that I had not seen until that moment. All that week, the entire time that my husband was gone, I was counting the days. He left on a Saturday and I started counting that very day.

Okay, I made it through that day. Seven more to go. Six more days. Five more days. Four more days. We're halfway there. Okay, only three now. Only two. One more day. He's coming home today. I was willpowering my way through that week. I was willpowering my way through that entire situation even though it wasn't that bad. Even though I wasn't experiencing a lot of negative emotion.

I kept telling myself because I was counting the days until he got back, I kept saying oh, things are going to get easier when he gets home. I was waiting for him to get back so that I would feel better. But that's not how the think-feel-act cycle works.

How I felt on any given day, whether my husband is there or not has to do with what I am thinking. That's it. My husband being gone didn't create my feelings. Being on my own with my son didn't create how I was feeling. My thoughts created my feelings. But that's not what I had been telling and repeating to myself day after day.

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Every morning I was waking up and thinking okay, five more days, and every evening being like okay, tomorrow it's only four more days. I was reinforcing this idea for the entire time that he was away, when he gets home, I will feel better. So what happened?

He got home and it was really nice to see him but there was not some sort of magical shift in the universe. I was still me with all my same thoughts and all my same feelings and that didn't just automatically change and go away because of course, he doesn't create my feelings. His presence does not create my feelings.

And I will tell you, it was an hour or two after he got home, after I had been telling myself for eight days okay, just make it through another day and then he'll be home. That's when the insatiable hunger kicked in. I didn't see it at the time, but I had willpowered my way through those eight days telling my brain, you know what, a reward is coming. You're going to feel so much better.

And then when no reward came, my brain was like, okay well, we were promised a reward so I'm going to go find one. And this, my friends, is subtle willpower. I didn't feel like I was white-knuckling it. I didn't feel like there was a lot of resistance. In fact, I didn't feel a lot of negative emotion.

But I was telling myself over and over again that things were going to be better when he got home. I was counting down the days and I didn't even realize I was doing it. I didn't even know it was there. And that's what so many of you are doing when you take a break from drinking. Especially those of you who are saying to me, wow, this is so much easier than I expected. But when can I start again?

You're activating all this subtle willpower and you haven't even seen it yet. You are counting in your mind how many days do I have left. But here's the thing; there's no need to count. There's no need to worry about how many days you have left unless you believe that the circumstance of not drinking is causing how you feel right now and that you will feel better when you start drinking again.

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That's the real work of what you have to unravel. If you are looking forward to an end point when your break ends or when the cheat day comes on your diet, you are using subtle willpower and it is so easy to miss. I would have missed it too had I not been 100% conscious of my eating and also willing to look.

Now, I didn't catch it in the moment but that's not a big deal. That's what a lot of you would get very caught up on that. Oh god, I don't overeat or I don't overdrink or I'm not supposed to do this, why did I do it? I didn't get caught up in that. I was just like, huh, this is weird. What's going on? And I looked at it immediately.

In the past, I would not have done that. I would have beaten myself up. I would have been terrible to myself. I would have not wanted to look. I would have said, oh god, let's just forget it. Don't even look. I'm just going to get back on track on Monday.

And then overeating on Saturday would bleed into overeating on Sunday and then my promise that I would get back on track on Monday, I probably wouldn't make that either. And then all of a sudden, it would just be rolling. Just going on for days and days and weeks.

But instead, I just looked at what happened and I said god, that's so strange. That's so out of character. I'm surprised by this. What am I missing? What can't I see? And I saw something that I had missed for those entire eight days. I was willpowering my way through the week simply by telling myself that when he got home, I would feel better, which of course wasn't true.

Yes, when I saw him I had thoughts that made me feel happy to see him, but it didn't immediately change my entire emotional state from that point moving forward. Things only get better when you think better thoughts. If you're counting down days, you're using willpower, even if it's very subtle. Even if the count feels like it's just a factual thing. Even if it doesn't feel like there's a lot of intense energy behind it. If you're counting, it's willpower.

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And I don't want you to miss this. This is the sort of advanced level that's really easy to miss unless you mastered your own self-coaching practice. That's why when you're in the Take A Break program, a huge piece of it is learning how to use the think-feel-act cycle as a tool, as a regular practice that becomes part of your life.

Because that way, you are able to catch things so much more quickly. So think about it. I had one eight-hour period on a Saturday where my eating felt a little funky and I immediately caught it and I immediately changed directions. I got right back on track the next day because I could see what was happening.

In the past, I would not have had only an eight-hour period where my eating was a little funky. I would have had eight weeks where my eating was totally off. It would have gone on for way more than eight hours. I would have gone down the spiral of well, I screwed up again so I might as well forget today.

And that is what you are really learning when you learn how to manage your mind and learn how to use the think-feel-act cycle as a tool is that there are little tiny ways in which you can still be subtly sabotaging yourself unless you have the knowledge and the know-how, how to take a moment where you don't show up the way you want to and just look at it as data.

I didn't make it mean anything about me. I didn't make it mean anything about the work that I had done to change the habit of overeating. I didn't make it mean anything about my future success. I just said that's weird, let's see what's going on here, and I uncovered something so powerful that I would have missed before.

Now, guess what's going to happen? The next time my husband leaves for a trip, I am going to be onto my brain. I am going to immediately notice if I start counting days because I've brought awareness to it. And that is the power of really understanding something like subtle willpower is showing up in your life. Because that is going to tell you where your deeper level

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work is. There are always more layers for you to uncover and that's what makes this work so powerful.

Alright guys, if you have any questions, anything at all that you want to ask me about the habit, urges, how to deal with people, how to handle when you wake up in a shame spiral after a night of drinking too much, why it is that it's so hard to say no, whatever it is, please join me at the Ask Rachel Anything webinar on Monday, October 28th at 12pm. I'm going to blow your mind answering all those questions.

All you have to do is go to rachelhart.com/askrachel to register. Alright everybody, I will see you next week.

Okay, listen up, changing your drinking is so much easier than you think. Whether you want to drink less or not at all, you don't need more rules or willpower. You need a logical framework that helps you understand and, more importantly, change the habit from the inside out. It starts with my 30-day challenge. Besides the obvious health benefits, taking a break from drinking is the fastest way to figure out what's really behind your desire. This radically different approach helps you succeed by dropping the perfectionism and judgment that blocks change. Decide what works best for you when it comes to drinking. Discover how to trust yourself and feel truly powered to take it or leave it. Head on over to RachelHart.com/join and start your transformation today.

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