

Ep #152: Hostess Anxiety



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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 152.

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.

Well hello everybody. We are talking about how to be a good host or a hostess today. I thought this was a good thing to be talking about since we're right around the holidays and so many of you are throwing parties and opening up your home to friends and relatives. And a lot of you are not necessarily enjoying that experience.

This is a big thing that can come up for a lot of people when they take a break from drinking. So what happens is we become so focused on wanting to make sure that everyone has a good time, and inadvertently, we have taught our brain to rely on alcohol to make that happen.

And this is where anxiety can creep up. But here's the thing; you don't have to avoid having people over. You don't have to resign yourself to being miserable or squirrelling yourself away in the kitchen to keep yourself busy, and most importantly, you don't have to feel anxiety over hosting parties or inviting people into your house.

This is true if you're taking a break, it's true if you're just trying to cut back. It's true if you never even drink alcohol but you feel a lot of anxiety around hosting. But in order to enjoy being a host, you have to redefine what it means to be a host or a hostess and what it means to be a good one.

For some of you, having people over to your house, throwing a party, you feel so much anxiety around it and that has gotten very mixed up in what your brain believes it means to be a good host or hostess. That anxiety is something that a lot of people are used to coping with by opening up a

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bottle of wine and then a bottle of wine for your guests, and let's just have wine solve all the problems of the anxiety that we feel.

But anxiety you feel about hosting parties or hosting events is one of those things that you probably don't realize can be changed. A lot of people will say to me, "Well Rachel, this is just who I am. Some people love hosting parties and I don't." We say it as if we were born that way, as if it's part of our DNA, part of how we are and how we came out of the womb, but that is not the case.

You can change it because if you are feeling anxiety, it's because of your thoughts. That's where you have to look. It's to your mind. That's where we pay attention and that is what the think-feel-act cycle is for.

So this is what we're going to talk about today. First, redefining what it means to be a host or hostess, second, looking at the obstacles that get in the way and of course, all the obstacles are always found in your mind. They're not found in your kitchen or found in your living room.

And third, how to create what I call a host or hostess manifesto. It is so powerful when you do this. I've had many of my clients actually use this exercise and have loved seeing how powerful it is for them and how powerful it's been for me in my own life.

Okay, so first, let's talk about what it is to be a host or hostess. What does that mean? I will tell you that my college roommate and I threw so many parties. Our first two years of college, our room was the party room. And my idea back then of how to be a good hostess was pretty simple. Invite people over, procure a bunch of booze, clean up our room, which is kind of funny that we would do that because it would always be a wreck. We should have just left it a wreck.

But we'd clean up the room and clean up ourselves. Get ready for the party. And it sounds so simple, but my anxiety would really start to creep in

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as soon as the day started to draw near. Are people going to show? Was it going to be fun? Was the party going to be a success? Were people going to have a good time?

I remember on the day of the party, I would wake up and I would have all these butterflies. My roommate and I would start getting ready after dinner and I would just be thinking as my anxiety was growing and growing, “Well, we have all these drinks. We have coolers full of Cider Jack,” because that’s what I was drinking in college. I drank a lot of Cider Jack.

And I would tell myself, “Well, it won’t hurt to have one now and to start early. That way, I can deal with this anxiety. I can get a little buzz going before people arrive.” So I taught my brain very early on that parties started with me drinking. I always pre-gamed. I was always starting to drink before my guests would arrive so that I wouldn’t be a ball of nerves when people showed up because I didn’t know any other way to handle it.

And when people finally showed up, then I thought my job was just to offer them drinks and more drinks and more drinks. And that’s pretty much what I thought it meant to be a good hostess. I would keep drinking and everyone else would keep drinking.

So I would end up drunk and they would end up drunk and we’d have a successful party. The end. That was what I thought it meant to be a good hostess. And I’ll tell you, it might sound kind of simplistic or rudimentary to hear that now, but let’s be honest. How much do these rules still apply for you today?

You invite people to a party, which seems like a really good idea at the time, but in the lead up you start feeling a little anxiety. And the day of the party, your anxiety ticks up even more and maybe you’re in the kitchen cooking or getting ready, or whizzing around the house trying to make sure everything looks perfect. And you’re worried about how the night is going to go.

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Then you think to yourself, “Well, it won’t hurt to open up the wine early, right?” You start drinking before people even arrive. Then they do arrive and they start drinking and you’re tipsy and they’re tipsy. It’s just the exact same game plan as I was following in college. I was just doing it with fancier glasses.

I graduated from red cups and hard lemonade to fancy stemware and expensive vintages of wine. But it was the exact same game plan. And this is the same pattern that a lot of you follow as well. Now, I know from working with so many different people that it can take different shapes and forms.

Some of my clients will be so anxious about making sure that everything goes perfect and everything in the meal is flawless that they will actually put off drinking for fear of messing up the food or messing up the appetizers. And it’s only when people are leaving and they start to clean up the kitchen that then they finally give themselves permission to drink.

And why not? They survived the party and you shouldn’t waste all these half open bottles of wine. But isn’t it funny to think about needing to survive a party? It really is kind of crazy, but that’s how I felt for so long when I was hosting parties. I know it’s how a lot of you feel as well.

It really doesn’t matter what your specific pattern looks like. It doesn’t matter if you start drinking before people show up, it doesn’t matter if you only give yourself permission to start drinking after everything goes off perfectly and things are winding down.

The thing for you to pay attention to is that you’re always going to rely on alcohol to be a “good” host or hostess or reward yourself for a job well done unless you change the thoughts that you have connected to what it means to be a good host or hostess. And this is doubly true when you take a break from drinking.

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Because now the pattern that you have had all these years around hosting becomes magnified because you don't have anything to mask what is going on. You don't have anything to mask your emotional state. So you haven't resolved the reason for why you're feeling anxiety in the first place, and that reason is always, always, always what you're thinking.

It's not what's happening at the party. It's not what's happening in the kitchen. It's not the fact that your husband forgot to buy something or that people are late. It has to do with what's happening in your mind. And you cannot resolve that anxiety until you resolve what you think it means to be a good host or hostess.

So I actually looked it up in a dictionary and I found two definitions. I'm going to read them both to you. The first is a host is one who received or entertains other people as guests. So that makes a lot of sense, right? But then I found this second definition that I really like. One that provides facilities for an event or function.

I'm going to tell you, of the definitions that you can choose, the second one is so much better. It's so much better to decide that what it means to be a good host or hostess is to provide facilities for an event or function. Now, I know that some of you are like, wait, what? What are you talking about, Rachel? You're supposed to entertain your guests. You're supposed to make sure that they have a good time.

But guess what. Most of you have really confused providing entertainment, providing a welcoming home and food and drinks with being in charge of whether or not people have a good time. You have confused providing entertainment with being in charge of your guests' emotional state.

These things are not one and the same. Providing the space, the food, the drink is not the same as managing people's emotions, which PS, you can't do. Because you cannot ensure no matter the party that you throw, you

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cannot ensure that people are going to have a good time. That's why I like that second definition so much better.

Because the house can look beautiful, you can light all the candles, you can have the best food and drink, and you know what, sometimes people aren't going to have a good time because candles and food and drink don't create people's feelings. Their thoughts do.

I have the best example of this from my wedding. It was the biggest event that I ever hosted. I think we had like, maybe 125 people there. I invited them all to Connecticut. A lot of people flew a very long way in order to be there. And I love that party, I love looking at photos from my wedding.

We had the most amazing time. We had this gorgeous tent. The food and the drink was incredible. There was music and dancing. And then there was one of my uncles. My uncle was there, and I swear, he was determined not to enjoy himself. Every time I looked at him in the crowd, he looked miserable. Every time I look at a photo of him from that time, he has kind of a scowl on his face.

He did not care about the beautiful tent. He did not care about the amazing food. He did not care about the music or dancing. He was just really having a bad time. And you know what, I love him for it. Because it was such a perfect lesson for me in what it means to host and what my role is as a hostess.

There's no other party in my life that I have spent more time and more money and more energy into than planning my wedding. And he didn't enjoy himself, and you know what, that's okay. Because you can put on the best damn party of your life and sometimes you're going to have a grumpy uncle. You might even have more than one, and that's okay.

It didn't ruin my time, but it could have. If I had made his feelings my responsibility, I could have been upset that I had put in so much time and

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energy and money into throwing this amazing party and he was being a stick in the mud. But I wasn't because I didn't make his emotions my responsibility and that is your goal. That is your challenge.

When you are hosting an event, you are providing the space and the food and the drink, but you are not providing the emotions because you can't provide other people's emotions. Your emotions are your responsibility. Your guests' emotions are their responsibility. Really being clear on that is the key.

Some people are going to have a great time. Some people are going to have a bad time. That's how it's going to work always. Your job is never to try to manage their emotional state. It's try to manage your own. Because let me tell you, that is a big enough job in and of itself.

Here's the thing; you will for sure have a bad time if you make someone else's enjoyment your responsibility. Now listen, that does not mean - I am not suggesting that you hang a bunch of florescent lighting and you put out water and saltines and then you say to the people that you invite to your home, "Have at it."

That's not what I'm suggesting. You can still make your home lovely and plan amazing food and drink. But think of those things as the bonuses. They aren't the main event. The main event is always for you, how you show up and what you take responsibility for and the time that you have. Your emotional state during the party.

As host or hostess, you're providing the space for the event and you can fill that space any which way you like, but you are never ever responsible for how other people show up in that space. Your responsibility is only ever for you.

I'm going to tell you this. When you're enjoying yourself as the hostess, it makes it so much easier for everyone else to have a good time. You cannot

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guarantee this, but it does make it easier. I know you have probably had the experience when you walk into a party and it's very clear that the host is really stressed out and it's likely that the couple was just in the middle of the fight before the doorbell rang.

And you know what it's like to walk into that. It is not so fun because your brain is thinking like, "I wish I had hung back. I wish we had shown up 20 minutes later." And you also probably know what it's like when you're at a party and the host isn't really there. She isn't really present because she's paying attention to what the schedule should look like in her head, or she's fixated on how she needs to clean up the kitchen and can't have things be dirty.

When the host is having a good time, when you are having a good time, it is so much easier for the people that you have invited in your space to follow suit. Now listen, they won't always. I had a blast at my wedding and my uncle did not. But it certainly helps to set the tone for the party.

So if the most important thing for you is to pay attention to how you are feeling, let's talk about what obstacles are in the way of your enjoyment. Okay, so we've already talked about the very first obstacle, which is the thought everyone has to have a good time. That thought is poison. Everyone does not have to have a good time. In fact, it is most certainly true that everyone will not have a good time. People will have the full spectrum of experiences.

So I just go into hosting with a different attitude. Not everybody's going to have a good time and that's okay. It is very likely that one of my guests might not enjoy himself or herself and I'm okay with that. It's such a relief just to create space for people to have different emotional experiences and let that be okay.

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Because listen, you can either try to fight it or you can try to figure out some way to go into their head and change their thoughts, but I promise you're not going to be very successful. So open up space for that.

The next biggest obstacle is the thought, "Things have to be perfect and everything has to go according to plan." Oh my gosh, these thoughts for me, they were killer. Because what happens? You start preparing the appetizers and you realize that your husband bought the wrong cheese, or you're checking the roast and you realize it's not nearly cooking as fast as it should and the meal's not going to be ready on time.

This is the kind of thing that will make you crazy. If you tell yourself that everything has to be perfect and everything has to go according to plan. Because you know what, it won't. People will be late. One of your ingredients will be missing. Something will break. Something will burn. Who cares?

Because really, and I want you to think about this, why are you throwing this part in the first place? The reason that we have parties, the reasons that we have celebration is so people can connect. It is not to prove to other people how perfect we are, how flawless we are. That's not the point of it.

And I will tell you, when your thoughts are focused on how everything has to be perfect and everything has to go according to plan, you miss the point of a party. You miss that in the heat of the moment because the party is about the people. It's about creating connection. It's not about perfection. It's not about the plan. It's not about the clock.

There are no good hostess awards being handed out at the end of the night. So listen, make a plan. I always make a plan. But expect that things are not going to go according to plan because life is what happens when you're busy making other plans. I love that quote.

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Don't miss the life happening at your party because you're so committed to the fantasy that you sketched out in your head of how it should be unfolding. I'll tell you, I talked about this on the podcast. The last time we had people over for dinner, the smoke alarm went off, which woke the sleeping baby up. I overcooked store-bought lasagna.

I didn't even make it myself. But you know what? We laughed and laughed and laughed and had such a good time, the people that I invited over. Now, the last obstacle is the thought, "I should be having fun." Again, remember why it is you wanted to throw the party in the first place. It was not so that you could host an event where you would experience a lot more anxiety.

Now, I know that some of you are like, "Okay, but Rachel, when it comes to the holidays, I don't even want to have a party but everyone always expects that our family does Christmas Eve." Or, "I didn't even want to invite these people over but my husband insists that we invite all the relatives."

Do not get caught in this trap. Do not get caught in the trap of I didn't even want to have the party. Because here's the thing; if you're having the party, then have the party. Don't go into it kicking and screaming even if that kicking and screaming is only happening in your mind.

If you're going to have a party, you might as well embrace it. Because when you are telling yourself I should be having fun, what will happen is you will not have fun. You will not be having fun because you're judging the fact that you're not having fun. This will become so clear to you, especially when you stop using food and drink to numb how you feel.

When you take a break from drinking, when you take a break from overeating, oh my god, as clear as day. The party is so you can have fun and so you can connect with people. But then if you tell yourself well, but I'm not having fun and I'm not connecting, and then you have a lot of

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anxiety about it, well, the craziest thing is going to happen. You're just going to create more anxiety and more disconnection and more resistance.

This is the thing that I realized for me is that the anxiety that I felt before throwing my very first parties in college, so I was 17, that same anxiety was with me in my 30s when I stopped drinking. It hadn't changed, that anxiety never went away because I never changed it because I never knew how. I was just always drinking over it or avoiding throwing parties.

Your anxiety won't change until you change the thoughts creating it. One of those thoughts is telling yourself that you should be having fun. Because the truth is you should feel however you're feeling. So what I tell myself before people come over is yeah, you're feeling a little anxious Rachel, that's okay.

Because once you drop all your resistance to the anxiety, then you so reduce your suffering. So really, that is my mantra to myself. Yeah, I feel a little anxious right now. People haven't showed up yet. This is how I feel. That's okay. As soon as I make space for it, I'm not trying to cover it up with food, I'm not trying to cover it up with alcohol, I'm not rushing around trying to make sure the house looks perfect. I'm just creating space for me to feel a little anxious and not have it be a big deal.

So I want you to pay attention to that, how often you're telling yourself that you should be having fun or that you are not having fun because you didn't even want to have this party in the first place. If you're going to have a party, embrace the party. But along with that, you have to embrace how you're feeling no matter what that emotion is.

And then I do want to add because I do get asked this question quite a bit in the Take A Break program from the women that are in there, a lot of people want to know because I don't drink, do I serve my guests alcohol? And my answer is always yes, I do. I usually have one really easy cocktail

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that does not take a lot of ingredients. I have one non-alcoholic cocktail that I know I will enjoy. And then I have wine and beer.

So I usually have it so there's pretty much something for everyone. And the thing is you can do it however you want. But what I've decided for myself is that I like catering to my guests. So most of my guests - in fact, I would say almost all of them drink. So I've decided to cater to that. But also, cater to myself, to have something fun and fancy for myself as well.

So those are all the obstacles that get in the way. Of course, they're all your thoughts. That's how the think-feel-act cycle works. We're always looking to our mind to find out how to solve the problems in front of us. But that brings me to the last piece of the puzzle, which I think is so key and I call it the host or hostess manifesto.

You have to make a deliberate decision ahead of time before your party about what you are going to be responsible for and what you aren't going to be responsible for. And when I say make a deliberate decision, I mean write it down. Write down what you want to be in charge of and what you want to relinquish control of.

Decide that now. Decide that ahead of time. That will be so important. We usually don't let our brain decide ahead of time. We just run on autopilot, and autopilot is, oh my god, it has to be perfect. It has to go perfectly. It has to go according to plan and everybody's got to have an amazing time. And PS, I shouldn't feel any anxiety. I should be having an amazing time the entire time as well.

That's what autopilot looks like and it doesn't unfold very successfully. So for me, for my manifesto, I say I am in charge of opening up my home and creating a space for connection. I'm in charge of lighting and ambiance and music and food and drink, but I am not in charge of things being perfect or executing a flawless, perfectly timed meal.

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I'm in charge of my thoughts and my feelings and my actions, and I am in charge of making space for any emotion that comes up for me. But I am not in charge of how my guests feel. I'm not in charge of their emotions. I'm not in charge of whether or not they have a good time. I make space for whatever comes up for them.

I'm in charge of making a plan because I like having a plan, but I'm also in charge of allowing life to happen because things are going to go wrong, things will be forgotten. There will be lulls in conversation. There might even be a misunderstanding or two. But you know what, things will also go right. We will also have everything we need. Conversation will flow and there will be laughter.

And the best part is I don't need a drink for any of it, and neither do you. Alright, that's it for today. Have fun hosting, my friends, and 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 empowered to take it or leave it. Head on over to RachelHart.com/join and start your transformation today.