

Ep #176: Will This Work for Me?



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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 176.

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 everyone. I'm going to talk to you guys today about a question the I get all the time. All the time, people ask me, "I really love everything that you're teaching here, but is it going to work for me? Is it going to work for my specific situation?"

So what people really want to know is will understanding how their brain works help them change their relationship with alcohol. Will learning how their thoughts and their feelings are connected to the decision to pick up a drink, will it help them make a different decision and put the drink down. And is it really possible for them to change their desire.

Now, my short answer is why not? Why wouldn't it work for you? And I want you, if you have found yourself in the same boat, asking yourself, "Is this really going to work for me?" I want you to really consider this question. Why it is that you think you might not be able to learn how to do this? Why you might not be able to learn how to change your habits and manage your mind?

Why would your specific situation be any different from mine, any different from the thousands of women that I have helped do exactly that? How you answer this question about why you're telling yourself right now your situation might be different, that really is the key. That is everything.

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And so that's what I want to talk to you about today. Not so much will this work for me, but why you believe that it won't, why you're questioning that. Because as long as those questions are there, you're not going to take action. And if you don't take action, you can't change your relationship with alcohol. You can't change the habit.

So before we dive into all of people's excuses and their reasons and all the evidence they try to give me for why their situation is different, I want to touch on something really important. I want you to understand that right now, your brain is primed and I mean primed to find reasons why you can't change. Not just the habit of drinking, but why you can't change many, many things in your life.

So you may not realize it, but your brain all the time is scanning for evidence. It's scanning the world; it's scanning your current situation and your past and what it believes will happen in the future. It's scanning all of these things for evidence that you can't do it, that your situation is different, that you can't change.

Now, what does this look like? It might look like you tuning into the podcast and hearing me say that I started drinking when I got to college and think to yourself, "Oh, well I started a lot earlier. I started in middle school. Or I started a lot later. I started in my 40s." Or you might hear me talk about how I really had a habit around using alcohol in social situations to feel at ease, and you might notice your brain saying, "Oh, well that's not me. I don't have any problem in social settings. It's drinking at home that is my issue."

Or you might hear me talk about how the habit of drinking is all about responding to an emotion, and this is one where so many people really love to push back with me. They say, "No, it's not because of an emotion. I just really love to drink. I just really love a cocktail. I just really love wine."

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And now listen, if you're a regular listener, you know and you have heard me say this over and over again. If you feel in any way deprived or restricted or annoyed or unhappy when you say no to a drink, then you're drinking in response to an emotion. It doesn't have to be that you're depressed or dejected. It simply can be that you're trying to get rid of something like deprivation.

But the point is that your brain is always scanning for evidence for how your situation doesn't apply, how you are the exception. Basically, your brain is like okay, maybe it worked for Rachel and maybe it works for her clients and maybe it works for other women, but my situation is different.

And I want you to really understand why this is happening because if you can't understand why it's happening, you can't start to change it. There's a reason why your brain is hunting for evidence that you can't do it, that you can't change your relationship with alcohol, when the truth is you can.

And I'm going to tell you this; I get it because my brain used to do the exact same thing. It was always trying to prove that my situation was different and that I was unique and that my friends couldn't relate. I mean, the title of my book is Why Can't I Drink Like Everyone Else because that's what my brain was thinking all the time, how I was really unique compared to everyone around me.

There are two reasons why the brain does this. First has to do with evolution and the second has to do with how habits work, and I'm going to cover them both. So when it comes to evolution, I want you to think about it this way. Your brain was designed to spot problems. It is very good at looking at its surroundings and finding danger.

It's very good at finding flaws, it's very good at spotting what isn't working instead of what's right and what's good and what is working. And you don't have to think about it just in the evolutionary context. Think about when you

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got a B minus in school. Did you think about how, “Hey, I did 80% of the work correctly,” or did you fixate on the 20% that you did wrong?

Or maybe at the end of the day after you’ve had a very busy day, do you notice your brain focusing on everything that you accomplished and giving yourself a pat on the back, or does it only want to look at everything that you didn’t get done? Everything that you should have gotten done.

The brain loves to spot what it thinks is wrong, what it thinks isn’t working. So looking for what was wrong in the environment, it was truly very beneficial for humans thousands of years ago. Survival depended on our ability to dodge danger. So the brain developed in a way that makes it easier for it to notice danger, to spot danger. Because if you can notice it, if you can see it, then hopefully you can avoid it.

So the human brain became really hypersensitive and hyperaware to anything that was potentially negative. So just consider, your brain has a built-in bias towards negativity. And that served humans really well. It helped keep the species alive, but now in a modern world where your survival is not on the line day in and day out, it’s kind of a problem.

And it’s definitely going to hinder you when it comes to changing your relationship with drinking. Because if your brain is unknowingly finding all the ways in which it’s not going to work and you’re not going to be able to do it and you won’t be able to succeed and your situation is different, then guess what’s going to happen.

You’re not going to do anything. You’re going to stay stuck. You’re going to be in this kind of pity party and in this kind of place of feeling helpless and hopeless. And I’ll tell you, I was stuck there for a very long time. So that’s the first reason why your brain’s knee-jerk reaction is to think about how everything I teach won’t work for you because of evolution.

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So that internal unconscious negativity bias, it's there and you need to be aware of it. Now, the good news is that just because you have a bias doesn't mean there's anything wrong. Once you become aware of it, once you start to notice it at work and notice how often your brain just wants to go to what isn't working and what's wrong and what's flawed and what's a problem, you can start to question that pattern.

That's the beauty of having a human brain. You don't have to stay on autopilot. You can choose to question and think about other things and look for other evidence. You can start to notice your brain coming up with all the reasons, just very quickly and very automatically about why you can't change the habit and why you can't change your desire to drink, and then you can flip it around.

You can start to point your brain in the opposite direction and tell it on purpose to go find new evidence that supports that you can do it. So the first reason that you are kind of quick to say this might not work for me is because of that evolutionary bias. But the second reason why your brain is hunting for evidence is just because of how the habit cycle works.

I talk about the habit cycle all the time. When you drink, your brain gets a reward. It feels pleasurable. You get a buzz. And the brain likes rewards. Along with that negativity bias, searching the environment for rewards helped humans stay alive.

Now, when you change your relationship with alcohol, your brain will at first be denied the reward of pleasure. But please notice I said at first. Not forever. Not if you learn how to generate pleasure on your own, which is something that I think is a huge piece of the puzzle that pretty much everyone overlooks.

People don't focus on creating pleasure. They just focus on saying no. And they also don't focus on what is blocking pleasure. That is frankly even

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more important to understand, how your thoughts and your feelings are actually blocking pleasure.

Because you're saying no to a drink and you haven't yet mastered the skill of learning how to create pleasure on your own and pinpoint the things blocking it. You're just used to pouring a drink. So at first, you're like, hey, I don't like this, this isn't good, this isn't pleasurable, this isn't fun.

But here's the thing; pouring a drink is not a skill. It is not a solution to actually create long-term sustainable pleasure in your life that doesn't have any downsides, doesn't have any consequences. Just think about it this way. I like to think about how you have a drink and you create pleasure that might last for 20 minutes. You might have that buzz there for 20 minutes until it wears off.

So what do we do? We have to have another drink to keep the pleasure going. You see where this is leading. You see why this is a problem. Because all it teaches you to do is to keep seeking out the buzz, seeking out drinking. And that of course is not sustainable. That's where all the negative consequences come in, and where it also teaches your brain, "Oh, I just need to pour a drink. Oh, I just need to have instant gratification. Oh, I just need to find the easiest way to feel good right now."

What I want you to know is that you can learn to create pleasure for yourself that doesn't fade after 20 minutes. It doesn't leave you in this place of a kind of insatiable hunger. It's long-lasting and it doesn't create any negative consequences.

Your lower brain, the unconscious brain, the most primitive part where the habits reside, it doesn't care about this. It just wants to keep the habit of drinking. Whenever you feel desire, it just wants you to say yes because habits are easy. They take next to no energy. Habits deliver that reward that the brain was designed to find.

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So the lower brain, think about it. It's primitive. It doesn't care about tomorrow, it doesn't care how you're going to feel about in the morning, it doesn't care about your dreams and your goals. It only cares about your immediate moment. It only cares about immediate instant gratification.

So it's really like a toddler inside of you. That toddler doesn't care about tomorrow. It doesn't care about half an hour from now. It cares about what it wants, when it wants it, period. Now, a lot of people hear me say this and they're like, "Oh great, I've got a toddler in my brain. This is terrible."

But the good news is that you don't just have a lower brain. You have a higher brain, the conscious part of your brain, the part of you that can use logic and reasoning and weigh pros and cons. It's the part of you that can decide to do things on purpose, not just out of habit. It can decide to go after your dreams and your goals, even when it's uncomfortable, even when you have to step outside of what your usual routine is.

Now, you might right now not have a lot of practice accessing that part of your brain, but trust me, you can. You can learn how to do it. It's like any muscle that you can make stronger. Learning how to access your higher brain, your prefrontal cortex, the part of you that can do things on purpose, the part of you that cares about the future, that is what you need to do in order to change the habit.

So where does this leave us? Your brain is predisposed to think about what won't work. It's predisposed to think, "I don't know, sounds all good on the podcast but probably not going to work for me," because it has a built-in negativity bias and because it's used to reacting to the demands of your lower brain in an instant, immediate way.

It's used to just going after the easiest reward, regardless of the consequences. Now listen, your lower brain may not want you to change your relationship with alcohol, but you don't need to convince it or change it

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or get it to function in any other way. You don't need to tell your lower brain, "Hey, you know what, we really need to pay attention to the future."

You just need to access your higher brain. You just need to get good at exercising that muscle. Because there is a part of you that cares about tomorrow. There's a part of you that wants to be probably a better partner, a better friend, a better mother, a better sister, whatever. There's a part of you that cares about way more than just instant gratification at the expense of everything else in your life because there's a part of you, I know, that has dreams and goals.

Maybe for some of you, it's been a while since you've tapped into them, but they're there. So when you notice your brain telling yourself that what I teach won't work, now you know why. This is going to be your brain's default position unless you direct it to think otherwise.

So with that in mind, let's talk about how you know if your specific situation is right for this work. Now, what I teach is really simple. First, drinking never just happens. Between the glass of wine and your mouth is a decision. Now, that decision might be so fast and so automatic, it might be so deep in your habit brain that you don't even feel like you're aware of it and you may think to yourself, "I don't know, it just seems like drinking just happens."

But here's what I'm going to promise you, there is a decision there. You're just not aware of it. You don't yet have conscious awareness of that thought. Now, the good news is you can learn how to bring that awareness to what is happening, to the habit.

And once you create that awareness of the thought that kicks off the decision to drink, then guess what? You have the map to change the habit. Now, I teach people how to do this using a concept called the think-feel-act cycle. You hear me talk about this all the time on the podcast, which

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basically is just showing you that every action you take, not just the decision to drink but the decision to do anything is connected to what you're thinking and how you're feeling in the moment.

You have to pay attention to all three pieces. Think, feel, act. So the question is are you willing to accept that your drinking never just happens? This can be a real shift for a lot of people. It was a real shift for me. Because it felt so true.

Because I didn't have awareness of the thoughts and feelings behind the action of drinking in my own life and it felt like yeah, I don't know why it happened, I don't know why I said yes. I don't know why I'm waking up the next day feeling terrible.

I want you to know this. Some people hesitate to really accept that their drinking doesn't just happen because they think if they accept that fact, they think if they accept that there's always a thought and a feeling connected to it that they can bring awareness to, they think, "God, well then I'm to blame. Then I'm at fault."

But I want you to know this; this isn't about blaming yourself. This is about being curious as to what is actually driving the habit so you can change it. Because listen, there is no use in blaming yourself, but also there is no need in blaming yourself because no one's ever shown you how your brain works.

No one's ever taught you anything about how your thoughts and your feelings and your actions are all connected, so how could you possibly know what's going on until you start doing this work and take a look? So that's the first thing.

The second thing that I teach is that alcohol is neutral. It is not good or bad. It is not tempting or impossible to resist. It is not right or wrong. It is not

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virtuous to say no and it is not a vice or a problem to say yes. The fact of the matter is it's neutral and you get to decide what relationship you want to have with it.

That is up to you and no one else. Maybe you want to drink less. Maybe you're really sick of drinking and you're ready to just stop. Maybe you're not sure what you want but you know that things can't keep going in the direction that they have been. It really doesn't matter.

Because you always get to decide what's right for you. But the only way to do this is to actually look at how the habit is working and why it is that you've developed the relationship that you have with alcohol. And I can promise that the relationship that you have with alcohol right now is not one where you truly see it as neutral.

That really is the key. One of the things that I'm a huge proponent of is the power of taking a break. Because when you are in the habit cycle, when you are making the decision to drink, it is very hard to see the forest for the trees. It is very hard to understand that alcohol is truly neutral when you're still operating with the habit that does not actually believe that it is.

So you have to just ask yourself, am I willing to consider and to challenge my brain to understand that truly, alcohol has no moral value? Not only that, not only alcohol has no moral value, but drinking and how much you drink has no moral value.

A lot of people will get really excited when they hear me talk about this concept and the idea that like, yeah, it's not bad. But here's the thing; can you be equally excited that it's not good? That alcohol just is? Or people will say, "I feel so good when I'm not drinking," but then I watch them beat themselves up for how much they drank in the past.

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Are you willing to bring curiosity to that as well instead of saying, “Oh, well, obviously it’s good not to get drunk and it’s bad to drink too much?” Are you willing to apply the idea that alcohol truly is neutral and drinking truly is neutral? Are you willing to apply that concept there? Are you willing to examine basically - this is what I’m asking you.

Are you willing to examine all of your stories about alcohol being amazing or a poison or a way to connect or a blot on your past? Because if you’re willing to examine all these stories, then you can really see it for what it is. Then you can understand why you developed the relationship that you currently have with it.

But the fact of the matter is that alcohol is just a part of being alive. It just exists on this planet. It exists without even human intervention. Humans may have learned how to harness the process of fermentation, but fermenting was happening well before humans.

And that really is the key, really understanding it’s your stories. It’s all of your thoughts that are currently actually making it difficult for you to change the habit. And finally, I teach that your brain has the ability always to rewire itself. You can always learn new habits. You can always teach your brain to say no without willpower or deprivation or feeling like you’re missing out.

Not only that, but you can actually change your desire. You have the ability to change how much you want to drink. And I’m going to tell you, this is one of the most radical pieces of my message and what I teach because we are taught to believe that our desire is fixed, that it’s unchangeable. And I want you to know that’s simply not true.

I cannot tell you the number of clients I have who say to me, “I just don’t want to drink anymore,” and they can’t believe it. Or they’ll say, “I had a glass of wine and it didn’t even taste good,” and it blows their mind because before doing this work, they would have said, “Oh my god, I love

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to drink. I've always loved to drink. It's just amazing and I have a lot of desire and I can't ever imagine any other way."

But you have to really ask yourself if you're willing to do the work to change your desire, to notice that when you say no to a drink, maybe right now you feel deprived or annoyed or self-conscious. Are you willing to not only notice how you're feeling but then take responsibility for how those emotions are connected to what's happening in your mind?

The sentences that you're thinking. Not what's inside of your glass. Because that is the only way to rewire your brain and change your desire. It's by practicing new thoughts in the face of how you feel, and you cannot practice new thoughts if you're also telling yourself, "Well, the reason I feel this way is because I'm not drinking."

No, the reason you feel this way, however you feel when you say no is because of what's happening in your mind. The sentences running through your brain. That's why.

So I'm going to tell you, if you are willing to do these things, then this work is right for you. Period. If you are willing to accept that drinking never just happens, that there's always a decision between the glass of wine and your mouth, if you are willing to embrace the idea that alcohol truly is neutral and drinking truly is neutral, it's not good or bad.

Now, your stories, your thoughts, everything that you have been conditioned to believe, that definitely has told you that it's good or bad. But if you're willing to accept that and also that your brain has the ability to rewire itself, you can always learn, you can always make new habits and new neural connections, then this work is right for you, period.

My only caveat is this. Because one of the most powerful tools I teach is how to take a break from drinking, you have to do it safely. And I'm going to

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tell you this, by and large, the overwhelming majority of people who currently want to change their relationship with alcohol, they can 100% do it safely.

But if you're someone who is physically addicted, and by this I mean you have to drink to prevent yourself from getting sick, so when you don't drink, you get tremors or shakes or other really concerning physical symptoms when you say no, then please don't take a break. Please don't stop unless you're under a doctor's supervision.

The truth is this is really only a small percentage of people out there who want to change their relationship to alcohol. But the other piece to know is that everything I teach here, everything about the think-feel-act cycle and everything about the brain and how it can rewire itself and everything about desire and the moral neutrality of alcohol, all of that still applies.

It will all help you understand the habit and change the habit but you do have to be safe about taking a break. So after just listening to me tell you all of this, I want you to notice what your brain says. I want you to notice the thoughts that come up. Do you believe that this is possible for you?

Why on earth wouldn't it work for you? Maybe start by asking yourself that question. Notice, really be aware if your brain starts arguing for your limitations. Because this is what I hear so often with people. I hear people say, "I don't know, I think I might be too old."

I'm going to tell you this. I've helped women in their 20s all the way through up until their 70s. No one is too old for this work. A lot of people will say, "I don't know, I think I've been drinking too long." The fact of the matter is that changing the habit is not a one-to-one ratio. It's not the number of years you spent drinking equal the number of years that it will take to actually change the habit and change your relationship.

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And the reason why this is is because you were engaging in the habit unconsciously. It was unfolding in your brain unconsciously. And the work that I teach is all about consciousness. So when you bring awareness to what's going on, you will be amazed how quickly you can start to change.

The third piece of evidence that people will trot out a lot when they really are not believing that they can do it, they'll say, "I don't know, I think it's just in my genes. It runs in my family." I talk about this a lot. Your genes are not your destiny because you have free will. You can learn why it is you're actually saying yes to a drink, how it has nothing to do with the alcohol itself, it has to do with the think-feel-act cycle, and you can learn how to change it.

That's what humans have the ability to do. We're not animals. We don't just need to run on our automatic brain. You have a human brain. You can watch your brain at work. You can watch your habits at work. You can watch how your thoughts and your feelings and your actions all connect.

So when you say, "I don't know, I think it's in my genes," you're denying the fact that you have the ability to intervene with your brain. You have the ability to make decisions. You have the ability to actually stop the habit and choose something different.

And finally, the last piece of evidence that people come back to me a lot when they try to tell me how their situation is different and this won't work for them is, "I've tried so many times before and I've always failed." Now, to this I just say, "What if you weren't failing? What if failing wasn't even in the picture? What if what was happening was that you were on the path to figuring out how to change the habit?"

We're so quick to label what happens as a failure rather than just seeing it as data. You just got some data points about what works and what doesn't,

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and those data points are going to help you on your journey. Most people give up way too soon, simply because they're misinterpreting data.

They don't even realize that they've gotten data. They think that they've gotten a grade. It's not a grade. We're not grading you here. Instead of how they could just say to themselves, "Okay, so what didn't work last night? What else can I try?" Instead of saying that, they say, "Well, that didn't work so something must be wrong with me."

It doesn't matter how many times you have tried to change your relationship. The number is irrelevant. What matters is what you make it mean. Okay, so who isn't this approach right for? I will tell you this. If you believe that the reason that you drink is 100% because of alcohol, this work is not right for you.

Because there's no way then that you can apply the think-feel-act cycle. If you are committed to labeling alcohol as good or bad or right or wrong and you're not willing to see it for what it is, which is neutral, this work is not going to work for you. Because unless you can start to strip away all the judgment, you won't be able to see the stories that are actually creating the relationship you currently have with alcohol.

And this work is not right for people who believe that they can't change the habit or rewire their brain. If you believe that, if you believe that you're not capable of it for whatever reason, then you won't be able to actually apply these concepts because you will constantly be running into, "It won't work, I'm too old, I can't do it, old dogs can't learn new tricks."

So really, these are the people who this work is not right for. Because all of these things prevent you from using the think-feel-act cycle to create the change that you want. But for most people, this work is perfect for you. It's just that no one has ever taught it to you. No one's ever shown you how to watch your brain and understand habits.

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It's something - I say this all the time - we should be learning in school, especially since so many people start experimenting with alcohol when they're in middle school and high school and college. We should be learning about the brain and how habits work and how reward work, but no one teaches us this.

So we're just left to fend for ourselves. But I want you to know, I know that you can do this. I know of the amazing potential that you have to have a radically different relationship with alcohol. Now it's time for you to start questioning all the evidence your brain keeps trotting out for why you can't do it.

It's time for you to start believing something else because that's the only way that you can start to recognize your own potential. Alright, that's it for today. 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.