

# Ep #184: Why You Need to Depersonalize Suffering



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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## Ep #184: Why You Need to Depersonalize Suffering

You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 184.

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. We are going to talk about suffering today. We're going to talk about why it is you're suffering and how to have less of it in your life because there really is one thing that you can do that will mean that you suffer less.

And the reason why it's so important for you to understand this and why I wanted to talk to you about this topic today, because if you are stuck in the habit of drinking, I guarantee that at some level, you're also experiencing suffering about the habit. So maybe you're beating yourself up, you might be telling yourself, "I really should be smarter than this, I should be more responsible, I should have learned my lesson by now."

You might look at your friends and family and think, "Why can't I be like them? Why don't I know when to call it quits? Why can't I drink like a normal person?" What ends up happening is that your brain creates this divide. So there's you and your bad decisions, and there's everybody else. This is the divide that the brain creates.

I mean, the name of my book is *Why Can't I Drink Like Everyone Else*, which is kind of a crazy sentence when you think about it. The concept of everyone else, who exactly is this everyone else? There are seven billion people on the planet and then me. That's really how my brain understood it. That's what it really felt like for me.

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And it sounds silly when we look at that question, why can't I drink like everyone else more closely, but I'll tell you, at the time, those words felt so painfully true for me. I really believed, I really felt like I was the only person who couldn't figure out her drinking. All of my friends in college, they were normal. My parents and my sister, they were normal drinkers. My colleagues were normal drinkers, but I was the one who wasn't normal. I was the one who was different.

Now of course, there was a lot of evidence to the contrary. There are lots of people out there that struggle with their drinking. Lots. We know this. We see this every day. But I couldn't see that. My brain rejected that evidence and I really truly felt utterly alone with my struggle. I really believed that no one else could relate and that my situation and my problem was unique.

And I was very certain that the suffering that I went through around my drinking and around this habit and the decisions that I made and my confusion, that it was really all about me, and it was personal to me. And this is how the vast majority of my clients are feeling as well. They feel alone, they feel like others can't relate, and their suffering feels very unique to them and very personal.

And that's what I really want to dive in with you guys today and talk about. Why does suffering feel so personal? When really, it's actually not personal at all. In fact, there is a collective suffering that the brain is blind to. Really understanding this, that your suffering is not personal, seeing that there is a collective suffering, this will help you more than you realize when it comes to changing your relationship with alcohol because it will force you to shift your mindset and start to see your struggle and your pain in a different light.

I was thinking about this recently, this idea of personal suffering because for a couple weeks now, I've been listening to a short video in the morning called This is Water. So it's actually an excerpt of a commencement

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speech that the author, David Foster Wallace, gave to the graduating class of Kenyon College back in 2005.

You can actually get a book of his entire speech. I really love it. I recommend it. But a small portion of the speech was actually turned into a short video that's about 10 minutes long. And I've been listening to it in the morning when I've been getting ready and putting on my makeup.

Now, in this speech, in this portion of the speech, he's talking about the importance of education, of course, because he's talking to a graduating class of college seniors. So he's talking about why it matters and why it matters in your day-to-day life, not why an education matters on your résumé.

He's not talking about the degree that you get in school or whether or not you graduated from college. He's talking about the importance of learning how to think. And that truly is what I believe the think-feel-act cycle, which is the tool that I talk to you about on almost every podcast, I really believe that's what the think-feel-act cycle is all about. It's all about learning how to think. Not what to think, how to think.

When I tell you guys that it's possible to change your relationship with alcohol, what I'm talking about is that you can learn how to think about it differently. How to think about your desire differently, how to think about what happened last night differently.

I'm not telling you what to think, and that distinction is really, really important. It is always up to you to decide what to think. But before you can do that, you have to learn how to think. How do you critically examine your thoughts? How do you understand what they're creating for you in terms of how you feel and then how you behave in response to that emotion?

How do you decide whether or not something is true? Whether or not a thought serves you? Whether or not you want to keep thinking it or start

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brainstorming something else to think? This truly is what the think-feel-act cycle is all about. It's about understanding the habit of drinking beyond just that moment where you say yes.

What was fueling your desire? What was creating your desire? What were you thinking in the moment? What were you telling yourself? It's the kind of thing that most people will say, "I don't know, it just happened. I'm not thinking anything. It was all too fast." Because that's what happens when you have a habit.

Your thoughts, which of course are always there, you don't take an action without thinking something first, they're just in your unconscious. And the work that I teach you is let's figure out how to bring the habit, the habit of drinking, the decision to say yes, your desire, let's figure out how to bring it out of your unconscious mind into your conscious mind so that you can look at it, you can examine it, you can decide whether or not you want to keep it, and you can work on changing it.

This really is the foundational skill when it comes to changing any habit. Learning how to think. This will serve you so well because you will discover that you're always able to get off autopilot. That's what habits are. Habits are just actions on autopilot. Actions that you don't have to think a lot about.

And it's not just the habit of drinking. It's the habit of overeating, of Netflix marathons, of shopping sprees, actions are always the result of a feeling that was created by a thought. But once you have done it enough, your unconscious brain says hey, you don't need to pay attention. Don't waste any energy thinking about that. We'll take care of it.

You have to get your conscious brain back online in order to change it. And it is possible. It might seem difficult right now, but it's more than possible. It's just that no one has ever shown you how to do that. Now in the meantime, because we don't know how to do this, we don't know how to

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get our conscious brain back online, so we don't understand why our drinking just feels like autopilot or it feels like it just happens, in the meantime, there's a lot of suffering.

There's a lot of unnecessary suffering that I want to help show you today you can start to clean up, you can start to shift. Because if you want to change any action, if you want to change the habit of drinking, you've got to get intimately acquainted with your thoughts. Brute force will not do it. Gritting your teeth will not do it. The only solution here is learning how to think, which is why I was really reminded of this video that I've been watching.

So I'm actually going to include a link of it on the website in case you guys want to check it out. I really think it's quite lovely. You can buy a book of his entire commencement speech. But he talks about what happens standing in a long line in a grocery store, and here's what he has to say.

"My natural default setting is the certainty that situations like this are really all about me, about my hungriness, my fatigue, and my desire to just get home. And it's going to seem for all the world, like everybody else is just in my way. And who are these people in my way? And look at how repulsive most of them are and how stupid and cow-like and dead-eyed and non-human they seem in the checkout line, or how annoying and rude it is that people are talking loudly on cellphones in the middle of the line. And look at how deeply and personally unfair this is."

Now, I will tell you this; my brain has done this many, many times. Standing in a checkout line at the grocery store, so hungry, so tired, just wanting to get home. The line is much longer than I want it to be, and just feeling like everything in the world was conspiring against me, and everyone was in my way and everyone was creating problems for me.

So he goes on to say, "Or, I can choose to force myself to consider the likelihood that everyone else in the supermarket's checkout line is just are

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bored and frustrated as I am. And that some of these people probably have harder, more tedious, and painful lives than I do.”

I love this piece so much. I love what he’s trying to teach us there. Because what he’s trying to show us is learning how to think, learning how to observe your brain in action and the thoughts running through it on default, on autopilot, it’s not just about learning how to think so that you can do well in a classroom setting or do well in a job. It’s about learning how to think so that you can start to shift moments like these.

Moments when you’re stuck in a checkout line, moments when you’re stuck in traffic. Learning how to think is literally a skill that you can apply all day long. And this is what I’m talking about. This is the work of what I call depersonalizing suffering.

So you shift from this is all about me, this is all about how I’m suffering, to the suffering I am feeling right now is just human. It’s the human experience. We all feel it. Maybe not at the same time or in the same ways, but it is a part of every human existence.

Suffering is human. No one is immune to it. No one is immune to feeling like I just can’t figure out why I do these things, I can’t figure out my brain. Not one single person on this planet has a habit where they haven’t thought to themselves, “I know it’s not serving me, but how am I going to change it? What am I going to do? I can’t figure this out.”

Learning how to take your brain off autopilot, off that default setting of everything is about me and let’s just do this the easiest way and let’s just do what I’ve always done before is how you change your habits. It’s how you change your drinking. It’s how you change your relationship with alcohol.

But more importantly, it’s how you learn how to suffer less. It’s how you learn to embrace just being fully human and the fact that we all have some

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level of suffering that is a collective experience. It does not feel like a collective experience when you're stuck in a supermarket line. It does not feel like a collective experience when you wake up the morning after a night where you drank too much and you're in a shame spiral.

Nothing about it in that moment feels collective. It feels entirely individual. But we all have personal suffering. Maybe it's about your drinking or your eating or your body or your family or how you've been treated in this life. Maybe it's about all of the above. But because that personal suffering is common to everyone, that's a way for you to get out of the narrow vision that your brain wants you to see.

Now, everybody's suffering might look different, but it truly is the common experience. We have a collective suffering, a collective pain just because we're human. And I want to tell you that when, in your moment of despair or suffering or beating yourself up or being in a shame spiral or telling yourself yet again, why haven't I learned my lesson, why can't I figure this out, why aren't I more responsible or smart enough, when you have that moment of being able to connect to the fact that you are not alone with how you feel, you are not alone in this pain, it actually helps you feel a little bit better.

Not because you're taking joy in the fact that other people are suffering just like you, but because you realize that you're not alone. You realize that you're connected. That is not what personalized suffering wants you to believe. Personalized suffering wants you to believe nobody can relate, nobody gets this, nobody knows what this is like.

When you depersonalize suffering, it's no longer something that's just about you. It's no longer something that is just happening to you. It's something happening always on this planet on a collective level. It's the suffering of being human. Because that truly is our condition.



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The human condition, the human experience is all of the emotions. It's not just the slice of the pie that we request. It's not just happy and peaceful and content and joy. It's also sad and angry and despair and boredom and frustration. It's all of it. That's the full human experience. The light and the dark. The contrast of how we feel.

And the problem is this is also what we're fighting so hard against all the time. I didn't want the full human experience. I just wanted to feel good. I wanted to feel good and be happy and not have any worries and not have any doubts and feel totally confident, but that isn't what is real.

What is real is having all of it inside of you. Believing that we should only be happy, only be joyful, only have a pleasurable life, that's what we're sold. That's what we're sold by advertisers. That's what we're sold by people who want us to buy stuff.

And that is often what we hope we are going to find at the bottom of a glass. Then I'll feel good, then I'll have fun, then I'll be happy, then I'll feel pleasure. I couldn't understand this concept, this idea that I was constantly personalizing my suffering, I was constantly making it all about me and how I was different and I was unique and no one could relate.

I couldn't understand that I had kind of this tunnel vision. I saw just me and my pain and my troubles and my worries and my shame. And it was like the whole world fell away. When I was truly in that moment of what is wrong with me, why can't I figure this out, why am I drinking too much, it was like the whole world fell away, and all I could see was the story of myself.

And it was not a good story. It was not. And it was on repeat a lot. That's why your suffering feel so personal. Not because it is so personal. Yes, it's happening to you, but it feels so personal because you keep playing the same thoughts over and over and over again about why you're suffering. What's wrong with me? Why can't I figure this out? What's my problem?

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I had those questions on repeat for years. So what ends up happening is you identify with your suffering. It becomes part of how you see yourself. What's wrong with me? Why can't I figure this out? What's my problem? All of those questions become part of your identity.

And it's insanely painful. It's insanely painful to think those questions about yourself all the time. Rather than what I'm offering is what if the habit is just a puzzle? What if drinking too much is just a puzzle? And you can figure out how to solve it. And you know what, everybody's got puzzles to solve.

Might not be drinking too much. Maybe it's eating too much. Maybe it's spending too much. Maybe it's hating your body. Maybe it's hating your parents. Whatever it is, what if it's just a puzzle? That really can start to change everything because it removes you from being the problem. It removes your brain from being the problem, and it just gets you to work.

Hey, let's figure this out. What do I need to do? What have I tried that hasn't worked? What can I try next? It's so much easier to solve the puzzle when you're not steeped in woe is me. And listen, I get it. I was steeped in woe is me for a very long time, and you know what, I still sometimes get steeped in woe is me.

I still have to practice every day for the moments my brain wants to fall into the habit of this is all about me and it's all about my pain and it's all about my uniquely challenging situation. When you work to really see how you've been personalizing your suffering, how you've been telling yourself that you're alone in this and then you start to do the next level of this work, which is, hey, can I depersonalize my suffering, instead of walling myself off from everyone and saying it's just no one can relate, my situation is different, my situation is unique, no one gets this, instead of going down that path where of course, what ends up happening is you shut down and you push people away and you don't reach out, you just isolate, you don't talk to people about it and you believe more and more that everything you're telling yourself, why am I not smart enough, responsible enough,

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why can't I figure this out, why can't I learn my lesson, you start to believe that that's part of who you are, part of your identity.

When you do that and then you start to see, oh wait, maybe this suffering isn't about me. Maybe it's not who I am. You don't have to make the habit of drinking more than you want to who you are. It doesn't have anything to do with who you are. You don't have to make the decisions that you made last night representative of who you are. They have nothing to do with who you are.

The habit of drinking and the decisions that you made last night aren't about who you are. They're just about those thoughts that you may not have even noticed were there. They're just about your default thinking, these unconscious thought patterns that you haven't yet figured out how to respond differently to, but guess what, you can.

This is the difference between I have a puzzle that I'm trying to solve versus I'm such a problem and I'm trying to fix myself. Do you hear the difference in those two statements? Because the habit of drinking isn't you. You are not the habit. It is not who you are. You and the habit are not one in the same.

This is what labels miss. This is why I caution you guys so much about falling into the trap of labeling yourself. When you say, "God, I'm such a drunk, or I'm an alcoholic," or even, "I'm sober, I'm a non-drinker," all of these labels just reduce you to this one data point.

They're examining you through this microscopic lens of drinking. Because even if right now your drinking feels like a big problem, it's a tiny part of you. It's a minuscule part of who you are. You are way too complex, way too vast, way too unknown to be boiled down and reduced in this way, into a label or into a problem.

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And this is what I want to caution you against. I want to caution you against falling into the trap of personalizing your suffering. The quickest way to change the habit of drinking is to start to see yourself as part of a collective. A collective struggle, a collective struggle that most of humanity does not know yet how to solve.

The struggle to deal with desire and deprivations and emotions like boredom and inadequacy and insecurity and anger and loneliness. This is a collective struggle. It may manifest differently, not everyone may choose to pick up a drink as a way to deal with it, but it is a collective struggle.

Understanding your brain, how it works, your unconscious, all of your default settings, this is the collective struggle. Nothing has gone wrong here. The suffering that you feel, the frustration that you feel is not unique to you.

As soon as you can start to do that and see that, as soon as you can start to depersonalize your suffering, the process of change becomes so much easier because suddenly, it's not all about you. And it's not all about everything your brain has tried to get you to believe, that your thoughts have been telling you, that there's a reason and it's not a good one for why you can't figure this out.

It gets easier because suddenly, you see changing the habit of drinking, it's not about fixing yourself. It's about learning about yourself and learning about your brain and learning about habits and your unconscious mind. It's not about trying to make up for past mistakes. It's about laying the groundwork for the future that you want.

When you depersonalize your suffering, your entire focus changes. And so I really cannot stress enough, if you have ever fallen into the trap of why can't I figure this out, what's my problem, what's wrong with me, why can't I learn my lesson, no one can relate, no one gets this, I understand. I was there too. But that language, those thoughts, it only serves to put on

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blindness. It only serves to make you believe the lie that your suffering is all about you.

When in fact, we are all in a collective struggle to figure all of this out. It looks different for sure, but no one is immune to it. No one gets to go through life without it. And your ability to broaden your view, to take the blinders off, to see that you are part of something collective, that's when you stop feeling so alone. That's when you start taking action. That's when you start asking for help and reaching out.

When you personalize your suffering, it is the quickest way to stay stuck. And so for all of you, I want you to just think about how is what I am going through right now, how is the frustration and the shame and the guilt and the embarrassment, whatever it is, whatever is coming up for you, how does that connect me to people rather than isolate me from them? Alright, that's it for today. I will see you guys 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](https://RachelHart.com/join) and start your transformation today.