

Ep #220: Chain of Events



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With Your Host

Rachel Hart

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

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You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 220.

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. Today, we are talking about the chain of events that leads to the decision to drink. So, I talk a lot on this podcast all about the moment right before you drink. So, the moment that you come home and it's five o'clock, you walk into your house, and you have that urge. The moment that you pour a glass. The moment that you order a drink.

And it is really helpful to focus on that immediate moment when your desire appears. We do a lot of work on that. But once you start doing this work and learning about how the habit works for you – and remember, your habit is unique to you.

It looks different for everyone. So, you really have to start doing this work so you can map out, what does my specific habit look like? What are my triggers? What is drinking connected to for me? What thoughts? What emotions? The people, the places, the things that I'm doing, what is it all connected to?

But once you start doing this work, you realize that the decision to drink, it often didn't start in the moment right before you had a drink. It often started a ways back.

There was a chain of events leading up to that moment. And until you can really see the path that your decision-making followed, until you can really understand the chain of events that led to that moment, it's really hard to

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make a different decision and change the habit. So, that's what I really want to focus on with you today.

Now, what's fascinating when you start doing this work and looking at the chain of events that leads to that moment of drinking, you might discover, "Okay, the chain of events, yeah, it started earlier in the day. But you also might discover it started a couple days earlier, or a couple weeks earlier, or even a couple months earlier.

So, it's really important that you start paying attention to this because if you're only looking at the immediate moment and you missed what happened yesterday or the week before or last month, you're going to miss a really important piece about how the habit works.

So, remember, all of your drinking originates from your mind. Now, do not mishear me. I am not saying that your mind has a problem or your brain has a problem or it's written in your DNA and that's why you're drinking.

What I'm saying is that your body doesn't make a move towards alcohol until your mind has a thought about it. Which means it's not where you are or what you're doing or who you're with or how you're feeling that leads to pouring a drink.

All of these things can be important to pay attention to, but they're not the reason why you had the drink. The reason is what you were thinking. Because it's only ever your thought that translates into the action of drinking.

So, just to give you an example, I see this example all the time when people decide that they're going to challenge themselves to take a 30-day break. So, people will sign up for the challenge and they will say, "Okay, I'm doing this. I'm not going to drink for 30 days."

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But unconsciously, they have this thought of, “But on day 31, I’m going to drink.” And usually, this is a very unconscious decision on their part. They aren’t going through their calendar and making a big red circle on day 31 and saying, “Okay, that’s the day I can drink.” But they have made that decision in their subconscious mind.

Their subconscious mind has marked the date on the calendar. And we usually discover this kind of part way through the challenge. So, people will come and they’ll say, “Okay, I’m on week three or week four and I’m noticing that my desire is increasing and I can’t figure out why this is happening.”

And they’ll tell me, you know, “I signed up and I started week one and it was challenging. It wasn’t, you know, a piece of cake, but it was challenging. I did week one. And then week two and week three, they were kind of surprisingly easy. I was kind of amazed at how absent my desire was. And then, all of a sudden, here I am in this last week and it’s like, bam, where did all this desire come from? My desire is back,” even though they haven’t reintroduced alcohol.

The desire starts to kind of creep back in and it’s a little confounding for people because they’re like, “Wait a minute, what’s going on here? Last week I didn’t have any desire. Last week, I was like, this is so much easier than I thought, I really don’t actually need a drink in the evenings. I don’t actually really need a drink when I go out with my partner for dinner. And then this week, in week four, all of a sudden I just find myself thinking about drinking and having all this desire.” It can be really confusing.

And so, what we do is we work on the chain of events. We start to backtrack. We don’t just focus on that immediate moment when their desire appeared. We start to really uncover, “Okay, what happened in the lead up?”

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And often, that takes us back to the moment that they made the decision to do the challenge. And they recognize, “Oh yeah, I guess I did think I’ll do this for 30 days, but day 31 obviously I’m going to drink again.”

Now, that decision they made was almost a month ago. And I’m not talking about the decision to do the challenge. I’m talking about the decision of like, “Day 31, obviously I’m going to reintroduce it.”

That decision from a month ago is triggering their desire now. And if you don’t realize the chain of events, if you don’t start to see it, if you don’t watch it kind of unfold, it’s almost like you have to really map out what was going on. If you’re not able to do that, it’s really easy to feel like, “Well I don’t know, this isn’t working. I did all this work. I took a break. And now I just have all this desire appearing out of nowhere.”

But it’s not appearing out of nowhere. It’s appearing because it’s following a very clear chain of events that just happened to start several weeks ago. And the chain of events doesn’t happen only in this scenario. You can find it unfolding all the time in the background.

And it doesn’t just happen when you take a break. It can be happening right now if you are drinking. So, maybe while you’re grocery shopping, you decide, “You know what? I’m going to put a couple bottles in my cart because that’s my favorite brand and it’s on sale right now.”

So, you put those couple bottles in and you’re not necessarily deciding, “Oh yeah, I’m going to drink them all tonight.” But your brain is making a plan to drink at a later date. The habit started when you saw the sale sign advertising that your favorite brand was on sale.

Or maybe you have friends coming into town who you haven’t seen in a while and you think, “Oh my gosh, it’s been so long since I’ve seen them. I should really just let myself have a good time when they’re here.”

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So, often, when I work with people in this scenario, they won't even have a thought, "I'm going to let myself drink." They'll have the thought, "I should let myself have a good time."

But of course, we have to understand, you have a habit around drinking. And for a lot of people, the brain connects having a good time with alcohol. And so, it's no surprise that you end up drinking during the visit because of course your brain is like, "This is how I have a good time. I drink."

I see this scenario happen a lot. I see it happen with birthdays and anniversaries and all sorts of celebrations. People will say, you know, "I didn't make a plan to drink. It just kind of happened."

But when we look at it together, when we start to examine, "Hey, what was the chain of events? What was leading up?" We often find, "Well, I did tell myself that it was okay to indulge and have fun because this was a special event or these were people I haven't seen in a long time or this was a real milestone anniversary." So, you are making decisions. And they can happen weeks earlier. They can happen months earlier.

I see the chain of events unfold when people are kind of wobbly about their commitment when it comes to not drinking. So, they might head out to dinner and think, let's just see what happens. "I'll just see what happens..." is the beginning of the habit.

The habit doesn't start when the waiter says, "What would you like to drink tonight?" The habit starts when you're in the car on the way to the restaurant or when you're getting ready for your night out and you say to yourself, "I'll just see what happens."

Because what do you think is going to happen if you don't direct your brain to do something on purpose? When we don't direct our brain, when we don't make a decision, what does the brain fall back onto? It falls back onto autopilot. It goes back to the habit. The habit's going to lead the way.

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That is the problem with the thought, “Let’s see what happens.” If your brain has created a habit with drinking, your lower brain already knows what’s going to happen. It already has it all mapped out. It already has a plan.

It’s not waiting to see how things turn out. It’s not heading into that evening with curiosity. It’s like, “No, duh, I’m at dinner. We order cocktails when we’re out at dinner. That’s how we do things.”

When you tell yourself, “I’ll just wait and see,” you aren’t waiting and seeing at all. You are putting your prefrontal cortex, the part of your brain that can really start to bring the judgment and weigh the pros and cons and make decisions about tomorrow and the future that will serve you, you’re putting your prefrontal cortex in the passenger seat and letting your lower brain drive the car.

And guess what. Your lower brain only knows one way. It only goes one route. And that one route is a road that it has driven over and over and over again. Only when you make a decision ahead of time do you put your prefrontal cortex in the driver’s seat and decide, “Hey, you know what, maybe we should go a new way this time? Maybe we should do something different.”

Because your lower brain, it’s never going to want to go a new way. Not because the lower brain is bad or something is wrong with it. Because that’s how the lower brain was designed to work. It’s not supposed to deviate. It’s supposed to find a route that leads to pleasure and then stick to it.

And once it knows that route by heart, that route is always going to be the fastest for the lower brain. But that doesn’t mean just because it’s the fastest that that route is helping you or helping your goals. “I’ll wait and see...” is not, I’ll wait and see. “I’ll wait and see...” is I’ll let my lower brain decide.

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Sometimes even just swapping in that language and recognizing, “Oh yeah, I’m just going to let my lower brain decide and I know what’s going to happen,” because the lower brain doesn’t decide to go a different way.

I really do want you to start thinking about the habit in a new way. Yes, it’s so important to pay attention to that moment that you have the desire or the urge or the wanting or the longing, that moment that you pour a glass, that moment that you raise the glass to your lips.

Yes, that’s all incredibly important. And there is a lot of work and a lot of intervention that can be done around that immediate moment. But there’s so much opportunity for you to just start to really understand the habit at a deeper level, when you start bringing this chain of events work into the work that you are doing to change your habits and change your relationship with alcohol.

So, think about it like this. The habit doesn’t start when you get home from work and pour yourself a drink. It started yesterday at the grocery store when you bought that bottle of wine that was on sale. And the habit doesn’t start when you’re at the restaurant with your friends and they say, “Hey, let’s split a bottle, that would be fun.”

It started two weeks ago when you made the date with them and you told yourself you’re going to let yourself have fun because you hadn’t seen these people in so long.

The habit doesn’t start when the flight attendant asks you, “Hey, would you like a drink?” It started on the way to the airport when you told yourself, “Listen, as soon as I board the plane, I’m going to have a drink.”

You have to start to challenge yourself to go back as far as you can remember. When did the chain of events start that led to this decision in the moment? That is going to really help you start to uncover your patterns. And by focusing on the chain of events, you will start to reveal everything,

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everything going on in your mind that's leading up to that moment where you make the decision to drink.

And you'll start to see, "Oh, my decision didn't just happen in the moment. It happened earlier today. It happened yesterday. It happened a week ago. It happened a month ago."

What it starts to do for you is really show you, really reinforce that drinking doesn't just happen. When you have a habit, it can feel sometimes like it's just happened, "I wasn't planning to drink. I didn't have a plan. I didn't have it written in my calendar. It just happened."

But it doesn't just happen. You are making decisions all along the way that are keeping the habit alive. Even if those decisions are fast, even if those decisions are right now unconscious, you can start to reveal them. Because we have the ability to sow our brain down.

We have the ability to take what is in our unconscious brain and bring awareness to it. It's an ability that only the human brain has and it is really your superpower, your ability to not just be on autopilot but actually observe your brain at work.

And once you do that, you start to see, "Oh yeah, there was a whole chain of events leading up to this. My decision didn't just start in the moment. It started a while back." And the more you see this, the more that you can start to intervene, the more that you can start to decide to do something different.

So, really ask yourself, where is my habit actually starting? Did it start earlier today? Did it start yesterday? Did it start when I was at the grocery store? Did it start when I put those plans on my calendar? Did it start when I signed up for a break? Where is the chain of events leading you to?

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The answer is always going to be where the habit originates. And if you can backtrack there, you are going to have such a powerful tool in your ability to start to make different decisions. 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.