

Ep #236: Why You Should Imagine Not Drinking (Even if You Want to Drink)



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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 236.

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

Hello, hello, hello everyone. Now listen, I decided today that I wanted to talk to you all about an exercise that I actually have people do inside of the 30-day challenge and it's one that I get a lot of pushback from people about.

And because of that, I really wanted to explore this exercise and my reasoning behind having everyone do it no matter what your goal is on the public podcast. And that is really about imagining your life without alcohol. Just totally without it.

Not that alcohol isn't on the planet, but just imagining your life without it. So other people are drinking. This exercise can be so powerful to really understand and change your drinking patterns. Everyone does it inside the 30-day challenge and everyone has a lot of thoughts about it.

And so that's what we're really going to talk about. Now, when you do this, when you allow yourself to go to this absolute extreme and you hear me talk about all the time on the podcast, we don't need to decide that you're never going to drink again for the rest of your life. That's not what I'm talking about here.

In fact, I think making that decision can be very unhelpful for some people. But when you allow yourself to go to this extreme, what happens for you is

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

Ep #236: Why You Should Imagine Not Drinking (Even if You Want to Drink)

it surfaces all of your thoughts about drinking. All the thoughts that for a lot of people are pretty unconscious, it really comes up.

Your thoughts about what it means for having fun or feeling relaxed or connected and relating to others, your thoughts about celebrations and holidays and family get-togethers. Imagining your life without it, where other people are drinking but you're not.

It immediately starts to give you a lot of insight into how the habit actually operates because it's showing you a lot of the unconscious thinking that is connected to it. Now, you can do this exercise today after the podcast. All you really have to do is just write down, imagine what your life would be like without alcohol and see what thoughts come up for you.

Those thoughts are going to give you a lot of insight. But I really do want to talk today about why this is hard for so many people to do. I want to talk about the three most common pitfalls I see when people use this exercise and why they happen.

So make sure if you're going to do this that you listen all the way through to this episode. Listen to all these obstacles and see which one might apply in your situation before actually doing this exercise and writing it out on paper. What you envision your life would be like if literally you couldn't drink.

So the first obstacle and I want to do this one first because I imagine a lot of you are having this obstacle come up for you. The first obstacle is people just say like, "I don't understand, what's the point? This doesn't apply to me, this doesn't apply to what I want, it's not relevant to my goal, my goal is not to quit, so why should I imagine quitting?"

I find that some people have a lot of very strong resistance to even considering what life would be like without drinking. And in some ways, I

Ep #236: Why You Should Imagine Not Drinking (Even if You Want to Drink)

think this happens because it's like, the question itself, it's almost like opening a door to something that they are sure that they don't want.

So for those people, if you're in that situation, it's like, why would I even consider this option unless you're trying to tell me that that's what I should be doing? And I don't want to be doing that, I don't want to say no to alcohol for the rest of my life, I want to keep drinking, I just want to drink less.

But I will tell you that I understand this resistance because I had this resistance myself. And by the way, you can have the goal to change your relationship with alcohol and that can mean I just want to drink less in a sitting, or I want to drink less frequently, or I want to feel like I can trust myself when I'm drinking.

And it's still helpful for you to imagine your life without alcohol. Consider your life without it. It's not a sneaky way to get you to see oh, all the downsides and how it's actually really bad for you and really you should never drink again, that's actually the real thing that you should be doing.

No, it's a way for you to just look at all of the thoughts, it's like the scaffolding that's holding up the habit. Now, I think why so many people feel very skeptical when I present this exercise to them is because over and over again, we are told listen, if you drink too much, the solution is to stop forever. If you can't control your drinking, you have to say no for the rest of your life.

This is the message that we get from AA. If you can't control it, you have a disease, and the only cure is to stop forever. And you know what, this is not the news that most people are looking for. This is not the news that a lot of people want to hear.

Ep #236: Why You Should Imagine Not Drinking (Even if You Want to Drink)

And so when I bring in the idea of considering your life without alcohol, people are nervous and I think rightfully so, that that's the kind of ultimate goal here. She says take a break from drinking, but she really means don't ever drink again.

I think we have this suspicion so deeply ingrained because so many people believe when it comes to alcohol, they know what is best for other people. They know that oh, other people just really need to stop. Oh, I really know what this person should do. We're told this over and over again.

If you can't control it, you have to stop forever. What I'm telling you is that no one knows what is best for you. No one knows what is right for you but you. You are the ultimate authority. And I think a lot of people actually have to spend some time really sitting down and considering what it means to be the best authority for yourself.

It's something that I have to wrestle with in my own life. So I often will find myself thinking like, I mean, yeah, I say that people are their own best authority but I kind of know what's best for my husband, I kind of know what's best for my parents, I kind of know what's best for my sister or my best friend or my son.

We're so conditioned to believe that we know what is right for other people. We know the choices that other people should make, and the truth is we don't. And it's something that I have to work on, I have to practice in my own life all the time.

If someone had told me when I was 22, "What's best for you Rachel is to just stop drinking forever and ever, never have another drop for the rest of your life," they would have been very wrong. Now, maybe it looked that way from the outside, people looked at some of my behaviors and looked at how much I was drinking, maybe it looked that way for some people back then.

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

Ep #236: Why You Should Imagine Not Drinking (Even if You Want to Drink)

But someone making that decision for me, I would have lost all of the trial and error, all of the years of trying to figure out why I had this desire that I didn't seem to be able to shake, why I always thought more was better, why it felt like I was missing an off switch in my brain.

All of that trial and error, all of the struggle, that's what brought me here to you. Having all of this desire and wrestling with my decisions to drink and wrestling with drinking more than I wanted to and feeling like I was missing out and feeling like I was only successful if I completely took it out of my life, and then it would come back in and it would come back in even more, all of that helped me figure out a new way forward. It helped me understand my mind better. It helped me understand how the habit was really working.

I think that what happens is that we tell ourselves that we know what is best for other people because we're all just trying to cope with the human condition. We're all trying to cope with the fact that life is just not rainbows and daisies. We've all got challenges and obstacles and we all struggle to overcome them. We're all going to experience fear and doubt and grief and pain, and we can't erase that from anyone's human experience.

And on top of that, we have no idea how long any of us have on this planet. So when you consider all of this, it can feel like, oh my gosh, I'm in such a precarious situation and the people I love are in such a precarious situation. It can feel really unsettling.

And so we turn around and we say like, okay, this is what you should do. I know what's best for you. But we have to drop that idea that we know what is best for other people so that we can assume the identity of hey, you know what, I'm the only person who knows what's best for me.

It has to be a two-way street. Or else you're in this kind of position that just doesn't hold up of I know what's best for others, and someone else knows what's best for me? Wait, wait a minute, that doesn't feel very good. I don't

Ep #236: Why You Should Imagine Not Drinking (Even if You Want to Drink)

want someone else to know what's best for me. I want to be in charge of me.

Not only that but believing that the answer or the solution to your drinking or changing any habit lies outside of you, it just denies your own power. Your own ability to find a solution that works for you.

Now, we aren't taught how to do this. We aren't taught how to rely on ourselves to know what is best for us, especially because we aren't taught how to cope with negative emotions. We're taught that negative emotions are a sign that something has gone wrong.

Now, when you're taught that negative emotions are a sign that something has gone wrong and no one teaches you how to cope with them, other than like, hey, here, have this drink, hey, here, have this food, hey, here, distract yourself with your phone, it's going to feel like a pretty precarious place to be in.

But you don't have to be stuck in that place. The problem is when we deliver to people's solutions that aren't actually solutions, they're just rules. You must do this, this is your only option, it breeds a lot of suspicion, especially around alcohol, especially in this area where the predominant narrative is if you struggle with alcohol, if you can't control it, the only solution is to never drink again.

And I think that is in part why so many people are extremely hesitant to even answer this question because it seems like, okay, you're trying to say that you actually know what's best for me. Not at all.

This question, imagining your life without alcohol is just about peeling away all the layers of what's making up the habit. What are all the thoughts that are kind of holding the habit in place? It helps you see them.

Ep #236: Why You Should Imagine Not Drinking (Even if You Want to Drink)

Now, the second pitfall that I see when people start to do this work of imagining okay, what would my life be like if everybody else drank and I didn't, I couldn't, people will say, "I already know the answer to this Rachel because I've gone periods without drinking, I've taken breaks before." And so they want to skip right over.

So maybe they stopped drinking for a month or six months or five years or whatever, and they tell themselves I know what my life is like without it. And I want you to consider that maybe you don't. Not really.

Because very few people will actually approach this question with the curiosity needed. I really want you to consider that if alcohol was gone from your life today, until whatever your last day on Earth is, I really want you with curiosity to consider what would your evenings be like?

What would your meals be like? What would networking events and meeting new people be like? What would work functions be like? What would parties and birthdays and wedding celebrations and anniversaries and New Years be like? What would the Super Bowl be like and March Madness and going to watch a baseball game at the ballpark be like? What would picnics and vacations and trips abroad, trips to Europe and other countries be like? What would dating and intimacy and sex be like?

Have you really taken the time to ask yourself and spend time watching your brain answer these questions? Most people never do that. They want to rush to the place of like, well, I already know what it would be like because I've already done it.

Instead of spending time with how their brain answers this. Because your answers are going to help you understand how the habit works in your special, unique situation. Your answers are going to clue you in to the deeper work that is required for you to really change the habit.

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

Ep #236: Why You Should Imagine Not Drinking (Even if You Want to Drink)

And I will guarantee you this; even if you've said no before, even if you've taken periods away from drinking, I guarantee that you haven't done it with this perspective. You've done it with just say no, I'm not allowed to drink, I can't do this. As opposed to what is it like when you go into it with free will and choice and knowing that you can always choose to drink?

And then the third obstacle that I see for people, people will kind of have this knee-jerk and say to me, "Oh my God, my life would be amazing." So if I wasn't drinking, everything would be better. And I want you to know this; that is just not the case.

If it would be so amazing not to drink, then why are you drinking? Again, I think this happens a lot that people will kind of knee-jerk to be like, oh, everything would be better, everything would be so good. Because we're so committed to this belief system that the way to change is by telling ourselves that the thing we're doing is bad or wrong.

So we do this with alcohol, that we're like, oh my God, nothing good is coming from my drinking, it's only causing problems in my life. We do this in the hopes that focusing on the negative will help us change. I used to do this too. But trying to convince yourself that it's only negative and it's awful and it's only downsides, it doesn't work.

I talk about this all the time. You need to be willing to examine the upside of drinking, and I promise you there is an upside. How is it helping you? It is helping you. Even if you don't like the results, even if you're ready to say goodbye, even if you're sick of the decisions that you make. How is it helping you?

Refusing to acknowledge an upside, refusing to acknowledge the benefit is going to block your progress. Maybe it helps you avoid feeling deprived. Maybe it helps you avoid feeling bored or feeling awkward. There is some way that it is helping you.

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

Ep #236: Why You Should Imagine Not Drinking (Even if You Want to Drink)

Maybe it helps you deal with people that you don't actually want to see or be around your family that you struggle to be around. Maybe it helps you create connection, maybe it helps you feel more confident or more bold. Maybe it helps you go to sleep. There is an upside. If there wasn't, you wouldn't have the habit.

The reason to do this, to ask this question of what would my life be like is to see what lies beneath. What is really driving the habit? And you can't do that if you just say oh, well, there's no point in asking this question because I don't want to stop forever, or there's no point because I already know the answer, because then you just block curiosity, or there's no point because I just know it would be amazing.

You have to be willing to approach this with true curiosity. What I'm offer you with this exercise, what I offer everyone in the 30-day challenge when they do this exercise is to start to really peel back the layers of the habit, to really understand the thoughts that are driving it, that are fueling it, but so often what I see is people get stuck.

They get stuck even going down this path for these three reasons. But what I want you to understand is that doing this, even if you want to drink in the future, doing this is not some sort of sneaky way to get you to see that it's bad for you. It's how you get insight into the thoughts that are driving the habit.

This isn't about a one-size-fits-all solution. It's about opening up a window of curiosity. And I promise you, this question is one of the fastest ways to get there. What would my full life be like? Not just how I would feel waking up the next day, but what would my full life be like in the moment.

When you start to answer these questions, you start to map out how the habit works in your unique situation, so try that today. Ask yourself, what would my full life be like? If alcohol wasn't here, but it's not because I

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

Ep #236: Why You Should Imagine Not Drinking (Even if You Want to Drink)

deleted it from the world. It still existed for other people, but I wasn't drinking.

And notice if you want to fall into one of these three kind of categories of just telling yourself it doesn't apply to my situation, I already know the answer, or it would just be amazing. Really open yourself up. That's how you're going to start to really draw the map of how the habit works for you.

Once you have that map, that's how we start to change it. 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.