

Ep #248: Why You Shouldn't Take a Break from Drinking Too Seriously



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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 248.

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.

Alright, welcome back everyone. We are talking today, why you shouldn't take a break from drinking too seriously, why you shouldn't really take your drinking too seriously, or really take anything in life too seriously.

And if right now you're like, what is she talking about? If this seems really counterintuitive, I get it, but I want you to hang with me for this episode to really unpack something that most people never do. Because we're told from a very young age, "Listen, life is very serious, you only get one chance at it."

And we're told that drinking too much is serious. "You need to stop pretending it's not a big deal." And that we should take our goals really seriously. "You got to go all-in, you got to commit, you got to be responsible."

But today, I just want you to open yourself up and consider questioning whether or not taking things seriously, what the world tells us over and over and over we should do with life and with drinking and drinking too much and our goals, I want you to consider whether or not this actually works.

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Is it actually helpful when you tell yourself, "I don't know, life is really serious, drinking too much is serious, I need to be really serious about taking a break from drinking." Is this helping you?

I'm going to promise you right now that the version of me a decade ago, if she could listen to this episode, she would be like, okay, no thank you, the end, stop, don't want to listen to this anymore. This was just so counterintuitive not only to everything I was taught, but how I operated in life.

And you know what, if after this episode you want to go back to taking things seriously, you can. But I just want to give you the opportunity to play with this concept and play with the idea that being serious is actually fueling your drinking. It's actually working against habit change, it's working against the goal of changing your relationship with alcohol, and frankly, working against all of your goals.

So I do this a lot on the podcast. I like to look at words and what they mean. We've had episodes all about sobriety and recovery, all sorts of words here, abstinence. And I thought I would take a look at seriousness. So I looked it up, went to the dictionary, here's what I found.

First, it's something that requires a lot of thought or work. So think about it like this topic requires serious study. You can understand the word to mean a matter of importance. That's the second definition. This is a really serious issue.

Another way of understanding the word serious is, you know, we're not joking around here, we're not being frivolous, this is a serious question. And then the fourth way to understand it is something that has really important or dangerous consequences. This is a serious injury, this is a serious problem.

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Now, I have talked a lot about my own experience with drinking so if you have listened to this podcast, you know that I started drinking when I was 17, it was my very first week of college and I was a serious student. I had worked really hard in high school to get into my first choice college. I was serious about my grades, I was serious about doing well, I was serious about a lot of things.

And it all seems kind of good, but I will tell you this; when the weekend came, I was like, oh my God, hallelujah, let's have some fun. That was my time really where I got to strip off all of my seriousness and when I was drinking, I got to be silly and funny and a little wild and not care.

Now, some of you will be able to relate, some of you will have a different experience. So maybe you were never much of a partier in college, maybe the habit of drinking started when you were older. Maybe it's never about going wild at a party. It's about pouring a glass of wine or opening a beer and having it as a way to unwind from the day and a way to relax. So you're not having a rager on Tuesday night.

But what I want you to consider is that no matter where you fall on the spectrum of your relationship with alcohol, I want you to consider that serious still may be a big part of the habit because it may be a big part of your life.

Think about what do you take seriously. What do you approach with a lot of intense energy? Maybe it's your to-do list, maybe it's work, maybe you're really serious about being a good parent, maybe you're really serious about your goals.

Where do you approach life in a way that feels maybe kind of heavy, where there's a lot of weight behind it? I just want you to be curious. And be

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curious if you notice that resistance is already starting to come up, if you notice yourself thinking, "Yeah, but there are serious things in life, Rachel."

I'm not trying to convince you otherwise. I just want you to consider the role of the think-feel-act cycle because that's what we're always coming back to here. We're always talking about how whatever we do, whenever we reach for a drink, or open a bag of chips, or whatever our action is, it doesn't just happen.

It doesn't just suddenly appear. There's a thought and a feeling connected to it. If your thoughts create your feelings and your feelings drive your actions, then what is happening when you take a lot of things in life really seriously? When you have a lot of serious thoughts like, "This is really important, this is a big deal, I can't screw this up, this is a serious matter."

I want you to be curious about what those thoughts produce for you. What is your stress response like in your body? What is your emotional reaction to these thoughts? Because I'll tell you this; I have discovered that a lot of serious thoughts create a lot of serious emotions. A lot of anger and anxiety and overwhelm and frustration and fear.

And serious emotions head us down the path of trying to be perfect, trying not to screw up, trying to do everything right. And then when we're exhausted because we have no margin for error in our lives, when we're exhausted by trying to do everything perfectly and not make any mistakes and get everything done, what do we do? We look for relief.

And so often, these serious emotions, the emotions that are created by serious thinking, serious ways of thinking, they actually teach our brain, hey, you know how we deal with this? You know how we get some relief? We pour a drink.

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These serious thoughts are actually fueling the habit. So maybe you were like me in college. Maybe it's like you build up the anxiety because you're taking everything so seriously all week, and then Friday comes and it's like, off to the races, I can finally blow off some steam.

Maybe it's more of a subtle experience during the day. And so you find that every night, five o'clock is rolling around and you just need that little something to take the edge off. But this is the same habit at work, even though it can look very different.

What you find when you start to dig a little deeper is yeah, a lot of serious thoughts are leading to a nervous system reaction. They're leading to a lot of uncomfortable emotions for a lot of people, which then has you searching for a quick fix to feel better.

And you guessed it, pour a drink. Recently, I've been thinking, I think that seriousness is just fear dressed up in more acceptable clothing. I want you to think about that. Think about how comfortable you feel to say either to yourself or to another human, "You know what, I'm scared. I'm afraid."

I think for so many of us, when we become adults and honestly, even before then, we are so conditioned to judge feeling fearful as silly or irrational. Most adults, and even a lot of kids, we're just not comfortable feeling these emotions. We don't want to be fearful. We just want to have a rational approach to everything.

But no matter how rational you are, you're going to have fear in your life. But I do think this is why so many people find it easier to say, "I'm just taking this seriously," rather than, "I'm kind of afraid right now, I'm kind of scared right now."

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It's a lot easier for people to say, "I'm just being serious, I just take things seriously," than saying, "Listen, I'm scared, I'm freaked out, I'm fearful right now." And I will just share with you from my own experience, I still have to do a lot of work with this.

A lot of work to not kind of fall into it's just a serious matter, guys, this is just a serious business, you know, from big things to very small things in my life. I still have to practice a lot and do a lot of work to say, "You know what, I'm feeling anxious right now."

And that anxiety, I have way less anxiety than I had when I was drinking because of course, when you are drinking a lot and your brain is getting a lot of dopamine every night, what goes up has to come down. There's a reason why people will experience a lot of anxiety when they're drinking and not even realize that it's connected, and why so many people when they do the 30-day challenge will say, "Oh my God, I can't even believe, nothing in my life has changed other than taking a break from drinking and I feel so much less anxious."

So listen, anxiety is still in my life. It's not like I've deleted it. I still have to do the work, I still have to practice observing the thoughts that are creating it. I still have to acknowledge that it's there. But one of the things that I have done so much this year in particular is really practicing just telling myself, "You know what Rachel, it's okay if you're scared."

And that has not been easy for me. And it has not been easy for me to share this with people in my life. It has not been easy for me to tell my husband when I'm feeling anxious or when I'm feeling scared or when I'm fearful, especially when I judge it as an irrational response.

Doing this has been really challenging. It's been really freaking hard. I so often find myself wanting to default to I don't want to be scared right now,

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I'm a grown woman, this is stupid, this is irrational. But here's the thing; the more I gave voice to it, the more authority that I start to have over it, it actually started to help me cut through the layers of judgment and shame and just start to accept, hey, this is what's happening in your nervous system, we don't have to make it mean anything about you.

And that in and of itself helped dissipate how much anxiety and fear I was experience. Instead of pretending that it wasn't there, I opened myself up to it. Telling myself, sharing with my husband, hey, this is what's going on inside of me, which feels incredibly vulnerable, instead of trying to say this is just a really serious matter, we got to be really serious about it.

That felt much more comfortable for me, but it just wasn't helping me. My anxiety was always going to come out sideways later. Because if serious thoughts are creating stress, then your lower brain thinks there is danger. Your stress response has been activated. Cortisol and adrenaline have been released. It doesn't matter if you logically know that the work project or getting something checked off your to-do list isn't a life or death issue.

Your lower brain is just there like, danger, Will Robinson, danger. And most of us are given no instruction, zero instruction on what to do once our stress response has been activated, once we're in fight or flight. So we try to figure it out for ourselves.

And I will tell you my go-tos in no particular order were, okay, let's just try to never make mistakes and do it all perfectly so I have zero margin for error, and hopefully if I can do everything perfectly, then I'll stop being stressed out. Of course, that didn't leave a lot of room for me to be human and not a robot.

And then once the stress response had started, once that was lit up inside of me, then I was like, okay, I don't know, let's eat something, let's light a

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cigarette, let's pour a drink, let's just get really drunk and forget about all the seriousness that is really stressing me out right now.

You have to commit to teaching yourself a new way forward, instead of just saying, listen, life is serious, we got to take things seriously, drinking too much is a serious problem. You have to commit to actually being curious to what is truly going on and questioning is this even helping me.

I'll tell you this, I remember so vividly the first time that someone said to me, she was doing the 30-day challenge and she was right towards the end of it and she said, "I just have to tell you that I laughed so loudly last night with my daughter. We were just making a scene in the living room. We were being so silly and we weren't drinking at all."

And what she realized through this work was that she was constantly denying herself permission unless she was drinking to be silly and be loud. She was telling herself so often, you have to be serious, you have to be adult, you have to care about what people think.

And for her, it was just such a moment to see that all of a sudden, it wasn't about the glass of wine. It was about something that she had been denying herself. It was about a freedom and connection that she truly, truly desired what more than whatever was in her glass. She just didn't even realize that she had this layer of seriousness on top of everything and that pouring a drink had become a kind of this is my way out of it.

I really do think that's what so many of us want. We just want to be carefree. We just want to not worry and be loud and laugh until our belly hurts and be silly and be in our bodies and feel comfortable and not have judgment about them.

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It's like all the ways that you see very young children, that they can connect with all of that because they haven't been trained yet about you shouldn't be so loud, you shouldn't be so weird, you need to sit still, you need to grow up, you need to be serious.

So often I really think that that's what people are really searching for. That's what their real desire is. It's deeper than blowing off steam, it's deeper than stress relief. It's just permission to be without constantly patrolling or policing your behavior.

And I really do think that this seriousness, it has infiltrated so many aspects of our lives, including how we think about drinking too much and how we approach taking a break from drinking. So many people that I work with say, "Rachel, I'm worried that I might have a real problem. Maybe I'm an alcoholic."

And it's said with so much seriousness. Some of you might be listening right now and you're like, yeah, this is serious, drinking too much can kill you, it can wreck your liver, you can die. I'm not disputing that. I'm just asking you to be curious about how that think-feel-act cycle unfolds for you when you approach your drinking, you approach how much you had to drink last night in this serious way.

If we understand that seriousness is often just fear and anxiety dressed up, if you understand that, what happens when that fear and anxiety is there? What happens when your stress response is activated by your fears about what this will mean for you? What do you do? How do you show up? Is this actually helping you?

I think a lot of us really believe that logically, it should. If I'm fearful about something then I'm going to take action. Then I'm going to get my act together. Except what we find is that for many people, the exact opposite

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happens. We don't take action, we put on blinders. It's like it becomes too scary to look at.

I think about this when people are watching a really intense film or a really scary movie. And you can just think about really suspenseful moment happens on screen, it's not even happening in real life, and what do some people do? They will cover their eyes, they will look away, they won't want to look directly at the screen.

It's like, oh God, this is too much. And I think a lot of times, that's what people do with their drinking, when they have all this anxiety and all this fear about this being a serious problem, instead of that being the thing that propels them to take action, what actually happens is they end up looking away.

This is what I did for over a decade. I looked away or I looked at my drinking out of the corner of my eye. It was like, I didn't really want to come out from under the covers. I didn't really want to look at my relationship head on because I was so terrified of, oh my God, maybe this is a really serious problem.

This seriousness, it didn't help, it kept me hiding. And guess what all that hiding did? I still had all the fear, I still had all the anxiety. Not just around my drinking but everything in life that I was approaching with a very serious manner. And so I still was just searching for relief. I was still turning to pouring a drink to feel better.

And it's why I talk to people like, can we just strip all of the story away? Can we just look at the data? Can we just look at the math of the situation? How much did you drink last night or last week or last month? Let's not label it as good or bad or right or wrong. Let's not say that might be problematic

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drinking or it might be a sign that something is really wrong with you or wrong with your brain, or that you have a serious problem.

Let's just be curious if your actions don't just happen and if alcohol just sits there, well, let's be curious about what happened. I know when people aren't used to looking, they aren't used to even wanting to collect the data. Because people will kind of have this knee-jerk of I don't know, I don't know how much I drank, let's not talk about the past, let's just move towards the future. That's what I will see with people when they have this kind of fear response.

Or they'll start insisting, I should have just known better. They'll kind of drop into this place of telling themselves that the data doesn't matter because they should have learned their lesson by now, they're too old to behave this way.

It's like, when people are in that place of being afraid this is a really serious thing, they don't even want to engage with the think-feel-act cycle because then they're afraid of what they might find. But there's nothing fearful, there's nothing to be afraid of, you're not going to find any boogiemans.

You're not going to find that you are destined to a life of boredom or a life of wearing a label. And in many ways, unless you acknowledge this fear, the fear that is there, the fear of what does this mean, can I never drink again, am I doomed to a life of boredom, am I going to have people thinking that I have a problem and that something's wrong with me? Whatever your particular flavor of fear is, that is what is actually holding you back from change.

This seriousness is holding you back. This seriousness is getting in the way of you changing your relationship with alcohol. It's getting in the way of you

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being successful when it comes to taking a break so that you can really start to unpack how the habit works.

So think about it. Seriousness, taking things really seriously, taking life really seriously, day in, day out, it fuels that search for relief, that quick fix, that let me feel better. Oh, I know, I'll have a drink, oh, I know, I'll eat something.

And then we keep that seriousness when we decide like, I don't know, I think I got to change something, I got to change my relationship, let's take a break. Except when I see people in the challenge approach the break with a lot of seriousness, what happens? It leads to them throwing in the towel and quitting when they slip up and deciding, see, this didn't work either.

And then the seriousness about your drinking itself for most people, it just has them bury their head on the sand. It doesn't actually lead to them taking action. If anything, it really leads to people kind of dragging this on much longer than it needs to go.

So this is what I want you to consider today. Where in your life, where are you approaching things really seriously? How is seriousness, how has that infiltrated how you think about your relationship with alcohol? Or you think about how much you drank last night or the habit of drinking.

And what if seriousness is really just fear dressed up in more acceptable clothing? What if it prevents you from acknowledging what's really going on? The real emotion there. It doesn't have to be this thing that we can logically explain. Just acknowledging this is how I feel, I'm freaked out, I'm feeling scared, I'm feeling fearful, okay, then what?

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What if telling yourself that life is serious and drinking too much is serious and you have to be really serious about changing the habit and you have to be really serious about taking a break, what if all the things that you think are helping you create change are actually the things that are getting in the way?

Alright, that's it for today. I'll 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.