

Ep #250: Unpacking Permission-Giving Thoughts



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 250.

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 everyone. So today, we are going to really dive deep into one of my very favorite things to look at when you're trying to change your relationship with alcohol and the habit of drinking and how much you're drinking, and that's to look at permission-giving thoughts.

So these are thoughts that serve as excuses or justifications or reasons to drink. So I've done a couple episodes on permission-giving thoughts, and I actually, I have two episodes in particular that if you haven't listened to, I really recommend that you go back and check them out.

Because one of the concepts that I introduce is something called the rolodex of excuses. And I talk about it in episode 78 and episode 126 and really understanding the rolodex of excuses is kind of the foundation for understanding the deeper work that we're going to dive into today.

But just to revisit that concept really quickly, the idea of a rolodex of excuses is that your primitive brain, that part of your brain that's just caring about find pleasure, avoid pain, do it as easily as possible, that part of you that's just looking for a reward, it has this rolodex that it flips through all the excuses that it can come up with to see, hey, what is going to motivate this person to take action? Which thought is going to result in reaching for a drink or reaching for another?

Because remember, the drink just sits there. So you start unconsciously kind of flipping through this rolodex, and it's kind of like calling a number in

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the phonebook to see if anyone's going to pick up. So you might have a thought like, "Oh, glass of wine would be good. I really need a break. I think a drink would help me relax, or I've had a crazy day, I've had a long week, I've been so good, one won't hurt, it's heart healthy, I deserve it."

You know your brain can kind of go on and on with more and more reasons and excuses and justifications for you to reach for that drink and to say yes. Now, the thing that you need to understand when understanding this concept is that I like to think of it as your lower brain frantically dialing numbers to see who's going to pick up.

And if someone does pick up, and by that, I mean if one of those excuses leads to drinking, your brain learns something. So it learns something with the habit. It starts to understand, hey, that thought led to a reward. So maybe the thought like I deserve it, that was a thought for me that would often lead to me reaching for a drink. I deserve it.

And the more that I would reach for a drink, I have that thought, and I would feel kind of entitled to this rewards, my brain, what I didn't understand was happening behind the scenes, my brain was like, aha, I get it, this is a good thought to think.

It started to be something that I would think more and more often because that primitive brain that just cared about the reward, it realized, oh, she believes this thought. This is a good thought to think because nine times out of 10 she will act on it, and we'll get the reward.

Now, it's important for you to understand this concept but I do really want to caution you as you hear me talk about this. I've had people say like, "Oh my God, you're right, it is a rolodex Rachel, and there's just so many thoughts in there and there's just so many excuses and so many justifications that my brain can go to." And people will start to see this rolodex as a problem. It's not a problem. That's really important for you to understand.

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You don't have to delete every permission-giving thought from your brain and make sure that you never think it again. You just have to teach your brain a new way to respond. You have to start to understand what that thought leads to and what it teaches your brain.

So you start to understand that thought in the think-feel-act cycle, you start to see the result that it's creating. And when you start to learn how to respond differently with curiosity, rather than I'm going to just willpower and fight off my desire, you can start to disassociate that thought, that excuse from the reward of drinking.

I will still have the thought I deserve it sometimes. It's not like I've deleted it from my brain, but it's now for me when it appears, I'm like, aha, there you are. I understand not only what it leads to, but I also understand because of the work that I've done that whenever I start telling myself that I deserve it in reference to something that I can consume, something that I can put in my body, it's always a sign for me to pause and slow down and be like, hey wait, how are you actually feeling right now?

What are you actually desiring? Because I promise that what you're desiring is more and deeper than just a beverage or a cookie. So I don't want you at all when you're listening to this to feel kind of freaked out or to see the rolodex as a problem. It's really not a problem. It's really an opportunity for you to get to know not only the think-feel-act cycle on a deeper level, but also for you to get to know yourself on a deeper level.

So in the other two episodes, I do go into strategies for how you can handle the rolodex. But today, what I actually want to do is start to unpack permission-giving thoughts in a way that I haven't necessarily done on the podcast. We do this all the time inside the 30-day challenge.

We start to really dig into the thoughts that are fueling your desire and fueling the habit of drinking on a deeper level. So I saw this come up, I had this really beautiful example a couple weeks ago. Someone was totally new

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to the 30-day challenge, new to taking a break, and we were starting to examine how the break was going for her.

Now, you have to remember, I saw this all the time, but it is worth repeating that success when it comes to the 30-day challenge is not about being perfect during the 30 days. Most people kind of go into it with that mindset. I'm taking a 30-day break, so obviously in order to succeed, I have to not drink for 30 days.

And one of the things that I think is so important is to kind of see that success has nothing to do with whether or not you drank. And I know that might break your brain a little bit. It kind of broke my brain at first too. But I want you to consider that success is not about just saying no because just saying no, when most people engage on that goal, they really shut down curiosity and they really block themselves from understanding the habit on a deeper level.

And more importantly, if you make a goal and then you give in, most people assume that means I failed. And what I'm always trying to help everyone that I work with understand is everything that you might have a knee-jerk response to as seeing as a failure or a setback, it's actually a stepping stone. It's actually an opportunity for you to start to learn about the habit on a deeper level.

And most people, myself included, spend years, if not decades not understanding this because the idea is success means I said no, and failure means I said yes. And you have to really take that out of your understanding. You have to kind of reframe what success looks like.

So I was talking with this person, and she was talking about sometimes I'm successful to say no to a drink, so I've been successful at times during the break, and there are other days where I'm not as successful and I end up drinking.

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And she was really perplexed by this, but here's the thing; she wasn't giving up. She wasn't like, well, I tried, that didn't work. She understood, okay, there's something I'm not understanding here, there's something that I need help figuring out.

So she brought this to a coaching call, and we started kind of looking at this together. Now, I do just want to add here that what she was experiencing, it's so common. People often when they commit to something, they will feel very confused when they don't follow through on that commitment, when they give in.

So I have this a lot in my own life. I would really want to change my relationship with alcohol or change my relationship with food or change my relationship with money or work, all these things that I wanted to change. And I really felt so strongly about the desire to do this, and I really believed that I was all-in on my commitment.

And I would invest in programs, and I would buy books, and I would do all the things, and then it wouldn't work. And so often, in that moment, the moment that it didn't work, I would make it mean, "Oh God, I just can't keep a promise. I'm just not someone who can keep a promise to myself."

That's really how it felt to me. It felt like I was just someone who very easily gave in to her base or lower desires. And that is what kept me stuck for so long and I truly did feel confused about what was going on. And the reason why is because I didn't have the think-feel-act cycle. I didn't have a really logical way to look at everything I did or didn't do.

I was just kind of reverting to my old stories about myself. "Oh, I don't know, I just give in really easily, I'm just an all as nothing person, I'm just someone who never follows through." I would just revert back to these stories that I had just totally made up about myself.

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And the more I believed them, the more that I would find evidence that they were true, when in fact, all I had to do was start to look at, hey, my actions don't just happen. There's a thought that leads to a feeling. So what's happening there? I was always skipping that step.

And really having that way to logically look at everything that I was choosing to do, including the moments where I would break a commitment to myself, that was such a powerful moment for me to just start to see, hey, maybe this has nothing to do with who I am, or my personality, or my DNA. Maybe I'm just not having awareness of these unconscious thoughts that are driving the decisions that I make.

So that's really why I think that think-feel-act is so powerful. It's so powerful to help you understand the decision to drink, the decision to say yes to another, the decision to say yes when you promised you would say no, the decision to hide from people and to not ask for help and decide, no, I should be able to figure this out on my own.

Having that as a logical framework to understand why I was making these choices, it turned what often felt so confusing into like, oh, this is just a puzzle that I can solve. So anyway, we were on this call, and we were working together because she was feeling confused.

Why did I sign up for this challenge and sometimes I'm successful at saying no and sometimes I'm not? So we were just looking at the think-feel-act cycle and plotting it out together to understand, okay, let's just see if we can find the thought that's motivating the decision to drink.

And I do this a lot during coaching calls. I'll actually share my screen and start writing it out with the person and I think it can be really, really powerful to just see what often we only try to look at in our mind, and to just get it down on paper and break it into the different steps and just look at it.

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And you hear me talk about the think-feel-act cycle all the time on the podcast. But suddenly, when you're actually using it as a tool, it really does start to change things for you. So it's kind of the difference between hearing someone describe something or describe a technique and it can be like, oh yeah, that's really interesting, that makes a lot of sense, and then you try to do it yourself for the first time and it really can flummox you at first.

It's like, why is this so hard to figure out when it makes all this logical sense? And it really is just because it's a tool that you're not used to employing and using in your life.

So we're looking at the think-feel-act cycle and we're trying to understand the moments when she made the decision to drink. And the thought that she identified was I just want this week to be over. I kind of laughed when she shared that because I just mean, how many times have you had that thought?

I know for me, it has come up so often. It's just like, oh my God, I just want this day to be over, I want the week to be over, I need the month to be over, I want this year to be over. It's just so common.

And what happens when you think this thought, it creates desire for you to find something that will make you feel good. Let's pour a drink, let's eat something, I mean, I can't speed up the rotation of the Earth and make this day go by faster, I can't speed up how long it takes the Earth to revolve around the sun and make this year go by faster, but I can head to the fridge, I can head to the liquor cabinet, let me reach for something to just make me feel better. That's the habit at work.

Now, the reason why I wanted to share this specific thought with you on the podcast is because it's such a perfect example of why it's so important, once you understand how permission-giving thoughts work, once you understand the rolodex of excuses to do that kind of next-level work and

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start to dig a little deeper and unpack that's really going on behind these thoughts.

It's just like scratching beneath the surface. I'm not talking about doing a deep dive into your childhood or your past. I'm just talking about asking one more two more questions and kind of considering what is this thought really about? What does it really mean?

Because here's the thing; with a thought like I just want this week to be over, a thought that so many people have had, so many people can relate to, when everyone kind of shares that thought at one point or another, our tendency as humans is just to kind of accept the thought at face value and move on.

We don't get curious with it, we don't question it, we don't kind of ask ourselves what is this really about, what does this really mean, and we miss the opportunity to understand a layer of the habit that is so powerful and so needed if you really want to create permanent change with your drinking.

And so I asked her, I asked this person, I said, "Okay, so when you say I just want this week to be over, what do you really want to be done with?" Because the week doesn't feel like anything." Now remember, because we so often have these thoughts, if you were to say this to your best friend or to your partner, they'd be like, oh my God yeah, I totally get it.

That's why I think coaching is so important because it asks us to take a different look and interrogate our thoughts as opposed to how we usually kind of move through the world, which is accepting everything at face value.

So I asked her, so what do you really want to be done with? And it took her a moment or two. She had to think about it. And she finally decided, "I guess I just don't want to feel disappointed. Like, I go through the week,

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and I think to myself, this is it? This is what my life is? This is all of it? This is what my life is going to look like for the next 30 years?"

Now, all it took was one question to just scratch the surface. Okay, when you say I just want this week to be over, what do you really want to be done with for her to come up with that answer. And again, it's so powerful because really, this is a thought.

If you were to say this another person, you're just like, oh my God, I just want my week to be over, most people would just be like, amen sister, me too. We don't often interrogate these permission-giving thoughts that lead to the moment where we reach for the drink, or we reach for the food, and we have to interrogate them if we actually want to change the habit.

So suddenly also, I think what's really important about this is that suddenly, you start to understand what's going on on a deeper level. Instead of just like, I don't know, I just have this desire to drink, it's just because I want my week to be over, suddenly you see, oh, I want to stop feeling this disappointment that I feel. That's what's actually fueling my desire.

Because I have this belief that life should be more interesting and it should be more engaging and I should feel more excited about my life and instead, I'm just kind of going through the motions and I feel stuck in the same routine, and I feel kind of trapped. It's supposed to be in 4D and I'm in 2D. Everything feels kind of flat and stilted.

And listen, I can relate to this because I can really understand this. I really understand having these moments where you look around at your life and you're just like, is this it? I did all the things, I got my degrees, and I worked really hard, and this is it? This is life?

So I really can understand with this feeling of disappointment and then the desire to be like, well, at least we have a glass of wine, at least I get to drink something or eat something.

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Now, here's the thing that I do want to point out for all of you listening. Some of you may hear me talk about this and you're like, I'm not feeling disappointed. How this thought manifests for you, what it's really about, how you answer the question of okay, so what do you really want to be done with when you say I just want this week to be over, this day to be over, this year to be over, whatever it is, maybe for you it's not about disappointment, it's about anxiety, or grief, or boredom, or anger.

The point is that days and weeks and months and years don't feel like anything. What you want to be over when you're reaching for relief, what you want to be over is how you feel, your emotional experience of days and weeks and months and years.

And when you understand that, you can start to just really understand your desire to reach for a drink when you get home or reach for a drink when it's Friday, you can start to understand it in a really different light.

That is what I'm talking about when I'm talking about unpacking your permission-giving thoughts. You give yourself this deeper understanding of the habit and that deeper understanding, again, you just have to ask yourself a couple more questions. You just have to be kind of curious.

What does this mean? What am I really talking about here? But once you do that, you can start to see, huh, there's no magical number, there's no magical amount of alcohol that is actually going to solve feeling disappointed or solve feeling anxious or solve feeling angry or bored or grief, whatever it is.

It takes your brain, and it shifts from where most people are, which is I just got to say no, or I just got to figure out when to say enough is enough, or I just got to figure out this is how much I'm allowed to drink and then no more. It shifts your focus away from yes or no and the quantity and the amount, and it starts to actually put you in a direction that's so much more

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powerful, which is actually doing the work on the deeper emotions that are fueling the habit.

And listen, it doesn't mean that anything has gone wrong because you start to understand, oh, I'm feeling disappointed a lot in life, or I'm feeling anxious a lot in life, or I'm feeling bored a lot in life, or angry a lot. Nothing has gone wrong here. I think that that is a mistake that people think when we start talking about emotions.

It's like, oh God, I have all this disappointment, or I have all this anger, oh no. It's like, no, you're just a human. Humans have emotions. This is a normal thing. We're just so used to being blind to them and then unconsciously trying to solve them by drinking and eating and buying and trying to act our way out of emotions when of course, that never actually works.

This deeper understanding of a permission-giving thought, it really helps you see that changing your drinking habits and changing your relationship with alcohol is not about being more disciplined. It's not about having more willpower.

I did not become a more disciplined person. I did not suddenly find that missing willpower DNA inside of me, I don't know. But that's not what happened, and I certainly didn't get better at following rules, and I certainly didn't become a good person.

What I started to do was actually understand what I was actually desiring in the moment, and remember, that can change. The drink that you pour yourself on Monday, the desire that you have there can be totally different than the drink on Wednesday or the drink on Saturday.

But what I started to see that I had actual deeper desires, I wanted my life to be more satisfying and more interesting and I wanted to feel more

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connected, and I wanted to have more confidence, not just about myself but that I could handle anything that would come my way.

And that to me is the real shift. Not about just say no to a drink, not about just only drinking a certain amount. It's having more of what you actually truly deeply desire in life. And guess what? It's by asking questions like this, it's by scratching the surface of your permission-giving thoughts and understanding, hey, what's really going on here that you can start to head in that direction.

Because I promise, what you really desire is way more than a drink. What you deeply desire is way bigger than a beverage. All it takes is finding those permission-giving thoughts and deciding, you know what, I'm just going to be a little curious. I'm not going to take them at face value.

When I find a thought like I want this week to be over, just going to say what exactly? What do I really want to be done with? And what you find is that the desire that you have is very connected to how you are feeling in any given moment, and your brain believing, oh, pour a drink, that's the solution.

Understanding that, understanding what's going on just a little bit beneath the surface, it starts to point you in a direction to create a life that is bigger and better and more pleasurable, and you can feel more connected. Because I will say this until I get blue in the face, it's not enough for us to just say no and pat ourselves on the back because we're being so healthy.

I don't think that that sustains anyone in the long run because what we truly desire, what we truly want is to feel more, to feel more pleasure and more connection and more enjoyment and have more fun, and that isn't available through willpower and discipline. That's only available when you start to scratch the surface of these permission-giving thoughts and start to understand, hey, how am I feeling right now and what is blocking me from feeling that?

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And that's why the think-feel-act cycle is so powerful because the answer is always right there for you if you're willing to look and the solution, the pathway to change is right there too. Alright everyone, 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.