

Ep #259: Willpower vs. Powerfully Living



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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 259.

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 everybody, welcome to another new year. I cannot believe it. I started this podcast in 2017, and here we are in 2022. This is crazy. I want to kick off, though, this year's topic; I was thinking about what do I want to start this year with? And I wanted to start with a topic that came up recently inside Take A Break. So, someone inside Take A Break was talking about how to use the decision to take a break from drinking to use it for a year of really powerful living vs. a year of gritting teeth and willpower. And as soon as I heard that, I really just loved that distinction because I think so often our mind doesn't let us imagine beyond the experience of willpower and resisting and gritting our teeth when it comes to changing any habit, but especially when it comes to changing a habit like drinking.

And so, maybe you're in this place--A lot of people start the New Year, a lot of people are doing dry January. A lot of people are like, you know what, I want to take a break, maybe it's for 30 days, maybe it's longer, maybe it's shorter, maybe it's for a year, but a lot of people I think have this kind of, deep inside of them, this kind of like sense, or know, like, I think this could be a good thing for me. I think taking a break from drinking, I think it could be good. I think I kind of need this. I think that doing this could really shift doing something in my life. So many people have this intuition, but then, we think of the practicalities of taking a break and saying no and not drinking and hanging out with people and having soda water. Then it's like, oh, god, right? I mean, I remember what my brain would do on this, and it was kind of like, ugh, this is going to suck. This is going to be hard. This is going to

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be one long battle with my desire and using willpower, gritting my teeth, and trying to avoid people's questions.

I think our mind is so limited in what it images for us that so often, people have this kind of knowing or intuition that this could be a really powerful thing. But then, when they think about the practicalities, because they've never seen another way, it's like, no, thank you, that doesn't sound fun. And so, when this came up recently inside Take A Break, I really loved how the person framed it. You know, she framed it as, I want a year of powerful living vs. a year of willpower, but how do I know how to do that?

I just want to back up and say that just this framework—The framework alone of understanding that there are these two different paths that you could head down. That alone, I think, is incredibly transformative because so many people out there just don't even realize that taking a break is going to be anything more than an exercise in just say no. They don't realize that the option to use it as a platform or springboard for really a time of powerfully living is actually available to them. I didn't realize this for a long time.

Because for me, I took many breaks over my career. I remember so often, my knee-jerk was to go to this place of like, okay, I'm not going to drink, usually because I was so bad last night, or I was so stupid, or I am so embarrassed by what I did. Still, it was like, I'm not going to drink. I am going to buckle down, and I'm going to be good. That's how I always approached it. Rather than, what if I took this time to understand myself better? What if I took this time to understand why do I have this relationship with alcohol? How did I develop it right? Rather than the kind of explanations that so often we come up with. Which is like, I don't know, I have always been this way, or I don't know, I have an addictive personality, or I don't know it runs in my family.

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What if I actually use this time to really shine a light on what is going on when I feel desire, when I feel urges, when someone offers me a drink when I notice that desire for more? What is actually happening inside of me, instead of that really limited story of I don't know I'm just an all or nothing person, or I've always thought more is better. I really think that you can use taking a break as kind of shine a light on everything, including every story that you have about yourself and everything that you believe isn't impossible for you. Not even just connected to alcohol, but everything.

That, to me, is really exciting because it has nothing to do with willpower. It has nothing to do with gritting your teeth. And I don't care if you take a break for three days, three weeks, three months; it doesn't matter how long. You really can use that time as an exercise in willpower, or you can use it as an opportunity to start powerfully living and really start transforming, not just your relationship with alcohol, but your relationship with yourself. That's what I want all of you who are here, maybe you're in the middle of a break, maybe you're in the middle of dry January, maybe you're considering, maybe you have that little piece of intuition that's like, I think I should do this. That's what I want all of you to know is really possible and what we're going to talk about today.

Just to be clear, because I think this is a really common misconception that I hear all of the time, it really has nothing to do with the amount of time that you spend not drinking. So often, we approach habit changes, I just need to not do something or start doing something for a period of time, and that's going to be the key. What I want you to know is that it really has to do with the intention that you set and how you approach it. How you approach all the moments when you feel that desire come up. How do you approach all of the moments where you didn't follow through on your promise or your goal?

So, that I think is an important piece to remember it's not about how much time you spend and it's also not about not drinking. I want you to hear me

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say this powerfully living; living a powerful life is nothing to do about not drinking. This is not the kind of message you know, frantically a lot of people get behind this is not the message, oh you know I treat my body as a temple, and I would never let something as bad as alcohol touch my lips, no. There's nothing to do with that. You can go your whole life without ever having a drop of alcohol, and by my definition, that has squat to do with living a powerful life. I don't believe that what you do or don't consume somehow taps you into some sort of higher plane of consciousness. Powerfully living is about getting to know yourself better.

So, one thing that I want to encourage people all of the time, especially when they're starting out in Take A Break is okay, so you feel this desire, you notice this craving or this urge. What do you actually deeply want right now? Do you even know the answer to that question? I will tell you I had no idea what the answer to that question was for me. I was like, what are you talking about? I want a drink. I want something to eat, like, what? But that question alone really can change everything when you find yourself craving a drink, craving something. What is it that I actually want? It can be so transformative to just pause and practice asking the question and answering it. If you could do one thing right now, only one thing, that would be it? Just ask and answer that question every time you have a craving. I am desiring a drink. What do I actually really want right now?

What is your answer? Is it a break from whatever you're doing? Is it a moment to forget about your day? Is it the ability to feel at ease? Is it a connection? Is it excitement? Is it belonging? Is it relief? If you just practice asking and then answering that question every time you felt the desire even if you still went ahead and had the drink, even if you still poured the glass of wine, or fixed yourself a cocktail, if you just got into the habit of doing that, that would totally shift your understanding of what your desire, and what the habit is really about. And I want everyone to hear this, who's just thinking, listen, I just love the taste. I want you to know that this question applies for you, too.

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You can love the taste of a good Cabernet or love the taste of chocolate or love the taste of coffee, whatever it is. But just by practicing asking and answering this question, even if you're totally certain that all you want is the taste of something, just by being curious with yourself, you can really radically open up your perspective. Because you know two things can be at play at the same time. You can love the taste of something, and you can desire something deeper. One does not preclude the other. And in fact, sometimes what people discover is that they have so unknowingly trained their brain to believe that the taste of something is the path to that deeper desire that they're not even fully conscious of, but it's just right in front of them. It is so engrained that this whole process is happening outside your conscious awareness.

So, you have to do this, but you can't just ask yourself this question one time or two times. You have to really get in the habit of asking over and over again. Are you even willing to do that? Are you even willing every time there's an urge or a craving to just pause? Even if you have permission—give yourself permission to go ahead and just have the thing you want, pour the drink, eat the thing. Are you willing to just ask and answer that question honestly? That is powerfully living.

Powerfully living to me, is also about intention. Am I making my choices intentionally, or am I on autopilot? Because all habits but drinking especially can very quickly become a habit that runs on autopilot. You're not even fully conscious or aware of the choices that you're making. You don't intentionally think about whether or not you want to have the strength, just what you do when you get home, or when you go out, or when you see certain people, or when you're at certain celebrations, you don't intentionally think about whether you actually want more, you just finish what's in your glass or finish what's left in the bottle. That's just what you do. That's autopilot running.

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Powerful living is about getting off autopilot and making intentional choices and then being curious when you find it difficult to follow through with your intentions. This is where I would get caught up. I would be like, okay, I am making intentional choices. I am setting an intention. I am not just going into it blindly. But then, I didn't know how to make good. I didn't know how to follow through on my intention because you better believe it. If you have been operating on autopilot when it comes to any habit, but especially drinking. If you've been operating on autopilot, intention alone is not enough.

Don't get me wrong, it is a huge first step to just truly consider what do I actually want to do? But you also need skills to make your intention a reality. I think we as a society neglect this piece of the puzzle, and it causes so many people so much pain. So, kind of collectively, we are fed this message, and we repeat this message; you should just be able to say no. And if you can't, you have a problem. That's the message that we give. It's not just wrong. It's incredibly harmful when you're trying to change a habit.

So, I think about it so often, like, I was so committed often to really like. I want to change my relationship with alcohol. I don't want to drink like this. I don't want this to be who I am. I don't want to wake up the next day and feel this way. So, I would start to bring intention into it for many of the first couple of years when I was drinking; there was no intention, right? But I would start to bring intention, but then I had none of these skills to back it up. I didn't know how to watch my brain. I didn't know anything about the think, feel, and act cycle. I didn't know how to welcome an urge, like, what are you talking about? I just want to, like, make sure all my urges would go away. This is why so much of what I have people do in their first 30 days when they're working with me it's not just about saying no. It's really about practicing skills, learning those kinds of foundations, and also, how do you pick yourself up when you have this intention and then it doesn't go the way that you planned. What do you do then?

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Because those were the moments for me that I didn't know what to do. I didn't know how to look back on it and learn from it. I just knew how to crawl under the covers, you know, pull the covers over my head, and just feel like, god, something really might be wrong with me. I'm such a screw-up here. You know, we really understand this idea that we need skills in every other area of our lives. You know, if you think about basketball and you've practiced dribbling for years with your right hand. Still, your intention is to become really good at dribbling with your left hand because you know lots of people can dribble with their left hand, and you know it's possible, and you see people do it. So, you should be able to do it, too.

Then, you try to do it at your first game, and you dribble the ball off your foot. Imagine if your approach to that failure was, oh, well, normal people can do this, and if I can't do this, then something is wrong with me. I should just be able to do it. That's exactly the approach that we take with drinking. So, powerfully living is really okay; I'm going to set this intention, and I know that I need the skills and practice to back it up. I'm not going to set a standard of perfection for myself. Like, it's all or nothing. I am either perfect, or I'm failing. It's not the only acceptable measure of success is perfection. It's what I'm always trying to understand. I'm always trying to learn. I'm always trying to look back and figure out what went wrong.

One of the most important skills that we build in those first 30 days because so many people come with this idea of it has to be perfect. It's like, listen, you're going to learn so much more if in the moments when you're not perfect, instead of being like, well, that didn't work. I knew it wasn't going to work for me. If in those moments you're actually able to turn it into a steppingstone instead of viewing it as a setback, a failure, it's an opportunity to really learn, hey, what happened? What was I thinking? How was I feeling? What kind of triggers were around me, and how am I going to show up differently next time?

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We have this one exercise that I think is one of the most powerful exercises that we do in everything that we study in Take A Break is called learn and move on. It's the one that I see people have the most resistance to using. It's like, oh, god, I just want to forget about last night. Do you want to pretend it didn't happen? I just want to like double down on being good. That's what we're so used to doing. Instead of like, let's just look at the math of the situation. Let's take all the drama out. Let's just understand the math of it.

How much did you drink and why, with no judgment, no beating yourself up. Let me tell you that is a skill in it of itself. So, it's about intention, but I also believe that powerful living is about taking responsibility for your life and all of your decisions and not being an asshole to yourself. And I always have to add this part to not be an asshole because I think as soon as people hear the word responsibility, it's like, oh, god, okay, I have to be the enforcer. I have to be the person who lays down the law. I have to hold myself accountable. Which let's face it, right, like most people have no idea how to hold ourselves accountable in a loving, compassionate way.

We only know how to be a jerk to ourselves and yell at ourselves and belittle ourselves. Being responsible for your choices is saying listen, in the moment, last night I had made this decision not to drink and then I drank, or I had made a decision that I was only going to have one. Then, I stayed for another round, or I made a decision that I was going to leave by a certain time, and then I stayed; even though I was tired and I wanted to go home, I stayed, and I kept drinking. Whatever it was, right?

It's taking responsibility like, okay, it was me, those were my choices, I'm not going to blame it on alcohol, I am not going to blame it on my friends. I am not going to blame it on who I was with or what was happening in my life. I'm going to take responsibility, and I'm going to practice seeing if I can do that, take responsibility for my choices, and still be loving and still be compassionate to myself without blame or self-loathing or belittling. Now, I

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know that a lot of you hear me start talking about loving and compassion for yourself, and you're immediately like, I can't do that because I'll just let myself off the hook, and I don't deserve to be loving and compassionate because I keep making the same mistake and I should know better.

But this is what I want you to know, you cannot do better until you really, deeply understand why you made the choice you made. Until you really, deeply understand what exactly unfolded outside of your conscious awareness. And that only comes through curiosity, and when it comes to the day after drinking more than you wanted to or breaking your promise, most people have zero curiosity because we're so sure we already know the answer to why we broke our promise or why we drank too much, right? We think the answer is like, I was stupid. I should've known better. I'm a fuck up.

That's so often what happens, and all of that just blocks curiosity. Not only are these incorrect explanations, by the way, when you start to really understand how to use the think, feel, and act cycle, you start to see like, oh, no, those were not the thoughts at the time that led to the decision to drink. That's just my brain's explanation of what happened after the fact. So, not only do you start to understand that's actually an incorrect explanation for what went down. But you simply can't be curious about what happened last night if your worth is on the line.

Let me tell you when you think the reason that you drank when you said you wouldn't or drank more than you promised you would when you think the reason is well, I don't know that was stupid, or I was stupid, or I should have known better, I'm such a screw-up. When that's your knee-jerk reaction, as it was my knee-jerk reaction for years and years, if not a decade, then you better believe that your worth is on the line. And as long as that is the case for you, you're never going to be able to access the curiosity that you need to truly understand and then unwind and permanently change the habit.

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So, being loving and compassionate about your choices around alcohol or anything you do for that matter that the next day you're like, ugh, I wish I hadn't done that. It's not a kindness to yourself. That's what people hear me say; it's like, oh, I know, I should be nicer to myself. It's nothing to do with that. It's a skill so, you can actually go back and look at last night as a detective and start to identify what was actually unfolding and happening for me in the moment? What were the triggers? What were the emotions? What were the excuses?

All of the things that are wrapped up in the habit right now that, in all likelihood, you don't have good awareness about. And if you can't see it, you can't then change it. Now, listen, everything that I just talked about right now doesn't have anything to do with willpower. It has nothing to do with, like, okay, I've just got to buckle down and be good, and just say no, repeatedly, and just keep my promise; that's willpower. Willpower is staring at a calendar and thinking like, okay, I just have to get through this number of days as if a certain number of days is going to magically change you.

It's not about focusing on the streak. Streaks don't matter. No streak, I don't care how long you go not drinking; no streak is enough to actually change the habit. Habits don't change because time has passed. They change because you change. They change because you have a different understanding of what is going on. You have taken what has been happening on autopilot, and you have really kind of raised it to your conscious awareness, so now you know how to change it. Willpower's also thinking that not drinking is good and drinking is bad. And by the way, when we start labeling it as, you know, not drinking is good, and drinking is bad—this is why willpower becomes all tangled up in our self-worth. Then, all of a sudden, it's like, oh, I'm being good, or I'm being bad.

Willpower is also the ability you know, if only my partner was on board with this, if only my friends weren't such big partiers if only, I didn't come from a family that has a long history of boozing it up, if only drinking and

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entertaining people wasn't part of my job requirement, then it would be easier to say no. We all start out with this. We all kind of start out with these beliefs that it's everything around us. Because we also all start out with the knee-jerk of blaming ourselves and belittling ourselves. So, often I think we unknowingly believe that the way out, to not feel terrible about ourselves, is to then kind of look and see, okay, what are the things in my external environment that can be to blame?

Willpower is also this belief that the drink is tempting you, rather than what I talk about all of the time. The drink just sits there. It doesn't say anything. It doesn't tempt you. All of that is happening inside of you. All of that is happening in this think, feel, and act cycle that's so fast and so automatic you probably don't even notice it happening right now. And willpower is the belief that I have to fight against this desire rather than my desire is trying to tell me something. It might even be trying to teach me something.

The actual desire that I feel in the moment, it goes beyond what's actually in my favorite drink. But willpower says, like, no, it's a battle; only the strong will prevail. Listen, I'm not saying that willpower won't ever pop up on your journey or that using it means that you've done something wrong. I'm saying that when all you have is willpower, and I see so many people come to this work, and that's all they know how to use. It's just like, white knuckle it. When all you have is willpower, what ends up happening is you're kind of like, this one-trick pony when it comes to turning down a drink. You just double down on saying no or trying to avoid the situation altogether, and that is not sustainable.

It doesn't feel good, and I will say this over and over again if it doesn't feel good, it's not sustainable. It's not going to last. The goal here is not to just be able to give yourself a bunch of gold stars and pat yourself on the back for how good and healthy you are being. The goal here is to learn how to say no in a way that feels good. That's what I think most people don't even understand is possible. So, really taking a break from drinking, whether

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you're doing it for a couple of days, or for the month of January, or you want to do it for a couple of months, or the entire year, it really, no matter the duration it can be a way to really step powerfully into living a different kind of life and relating differently with yourself, or it can be an exercise in willpower, the choice is always yours.

If you're not sure, like, the person who came to me and said, you know, how do I know? You just have to ask yourself, am I using all the moments of desire and craving, am I using it to get to know myself better, am I using it to be curious and ask questions, am I making choices with intention rather than on autopilot and backing them up with practice even when it doesn't go the way that I want, am I taking responsibility for my choices, but not from this place of being an enforcer, but this place of love and compassion, so that I can be curious and access the curiosity I need to change the habit. Or am I staring at a calendar, or am I just kind of isolating myself? Or am I believing that if all these things in my life were different that this would be easier for me?

You just have to come back to these questions to really understand how you're using your break and decide how do you want to use it? Do you want it to be an exercise in willpower, or do you want it to be not just the way you changed your relationship with alcohol but the way you changed your relationship with yourself and your understanding of your brain? And the skills that you have to have your own back when that craving appears, or when you don't follow through? What do you actually want? So, I'll tell you this, for everyone listening, there is still time to join the first 30-day challenge of the year.

We're getting started on Monday, January 10th. So, we start with a 30-day challenge and then, you stay and take a break as long or as little as you want. It really is about using that break to really at first, learn the skills, and put into practice everything that I teach on this podcast from the think, feel, and act cycle, to developing a different kind of way of interacting and

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responding to your urges to really showing up differently with commitments. You do that for the first 30 days while you're practicing saying no. You work with my team of coaches and me, and then everyone decides then, okay, what then do you want? What is the kind of permanent change that you're after? Whether it is maybe saying, yeah, you know what I think I want to go alcohol free, or I just want to drink less, or I just want to drink not as frequently, or I just want to approach alcohol and make sure it's always about intention and not autopilot, no matter what your goal is, we support you with that.

So, you can head on over to RachelHart.com/January, and reserve your spot for the January challenge now, but no matter what, I really hope if you're considering taking a break this month or this year, come back to this episode, revisit all of these questions. So, that you're not just using it as an exercise and like, oh, I have to get through this sum amount of time, right? And instead, really seeing it as a springboard so the transformation that you want for yourself this year.

All right. 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.

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