

Ep #260: Transforming Failure



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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 260.

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, my friends. A new year is underway. I am so excited for today's episode because I was thinking a lot. I was thinking so much about all of you. All of the people who wake up in the new year and think, okay, this year is going to be different. My drinking is going to be different. My relationship with alcohol is going to be different. We get to decide that this is going to be true for us. I want you to really understand that. So often, we think, well, let's just see what happens.

I hope it changes, but let's just wait and see. But really, you just get to decide, and I know so many of you are excited for this transformation. You are tired of being stuck in this habit that you know it's not really serving me. I don't like the results that I am getting. You're tired of worrying about it. But the piece that you have to really ask yourself when you're kind of geared up for the new year and thinking about how this year's going to be different. You have to be willing to ask yourself the question, why do I think that this year might not be different? Why do I think things might not change when it comes to my drinking?

Now, listen, nobody likes asking this question, especially in January. Still, it really is worth your time to spend a minute being curious with how your brain answers this question. Why might I not change even if it feels really uncomfortable to consider that might be the case. Why might things stay the same? Your answer to this question is going to show you exactly where you need to focus your energy. It's going to show you exactly what you

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need to work on. Still, so often, people don't even want to go down that route because they don't want to sit in January and think, yeah, but it might not happen. I might not change. I might wake up at the end of this year feeling like it was Groundhog Day.

You have to be willing to do the uncomfortable thing. Sometimes, the uncomfortable thing is just sitting with that question and listening to the answers that your brain comes up with. Now, here's the thing I believe that you can do this. You can stop worrying about your drinking. You can change your desire. You can become someone who feels no desire. You can become someone who can take it or leave it. I believe that it's possible for you, but the more important thing for you to understand is, do you believe it's possible for you? Are you hoping and wishing that it will happen? That you will create this change but secretly, you are kind of fearful that it won't.

You have to also believe in yourself. The only way to fully believe is to understand and be conscious and aware of all the areas where you are disbelieving. We have to look at both sides of the coin and what I see with people all of the time, and you know I know this. I know this inside and out because I did this over and over again myself, is that the new year comes, you know, and we're kind of rearing to go, and we're like okay, this year is going to be different, and things are going to change, but then we're so fearful of it not changing.

We're so fearful of the question, why might things stay the same? Because we have so much judgment about why we're not at the place we want to be. Why do we have this habit? Why did we drink too much last night or last week or last year, whatever? I will tell you this, I was so fearful of that question. I had so much judgment that I had no plan for what would happen when I failed. I had no plan for what would happen when I would slip up when I would promise myself that I was going to be good tonight and take it

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easy, or I wasn't going to drink at all. And then, I woke up the next morning feeling like, oh, God, Rachel, what have you done?

I had no plan for that. My only plan was to not screw up. My only plan was to be perfect, and one of the mindset pieces that I really want every single one of you to embrace the shift that I want you to make is this idea that failure is not a problem. Failure is not a problem. You might think, well, it certainly feels like a problem when I feel crappy the next day, but it only feels like a problem because of what you're making failure mean. What you're making, breaking your promise, or drinking too much, mean about you and your ability to change. That's the only problem.

So, when you keep making a promise not to drink and then breaking it, or you say that you're going to be good and maybe you are good for a while, and then you just want to be bad, right? You just want to rebel and have some fun, or you wake up in the morning, and you swear up and down, you know what, today's going to be different. Then, all of a sudden, the afternoon rolls around. You find yourself stopping by the liquor store on the way home, whatever it looks like for you. I want you to know that none of this means anything about your ability to change your drinking. Your ability to change your relationship with alcohol. Your ability to have a different relationship with alcohol. They mean nothing.

What you're labeling as a failure right now is really an opportunity to understand the skill that you're missing in the moment. So often, people look at their relationship with alcohol, and they think, okay, so what I need to do is be perfect. I need to not screw up. Instead of understanding, listen; this is about skill-building. What are the skills that you are missing in the moment? This is where you can grow and learn, but not if you make these moments where you find yourself drinking more than you wanted to or drinking when you said you wouldn't. Not if you make these moments mean, well, I guess I can't do it. Something's wrong with me.

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Now, I know you might want to argue, but it is a failure on my part. I keep making promises, and then I slip up. I keep failing. I can't figure this out. I keep trying, but I can't change. I know a lot of you really want to argue for the fact that it is just failure, and that's what kept me stuck for years. I would make all of these grand plans, and maybe I would be good for a day, week, or a month, or a couple of months, and then, I'd fail. And it was so demoralizing because I would make those failures mean that I was hopeless.

We hear this a lot, right? There are just hopeless cases. As if that's a thing. It's not a thing, people. What I didn't realize is that it's possible to make progress without being perfect. I'm going to say that again. It's possible to make progress without being perfect. It's possible to change your relationship with alcohol, change the habit, change your drinking without perfectly following every rule. In fact, I watch that this is a concept that most blows people's minds inside of Take A Break. When they realize that all of the moments that they would normally be like, oh, God, I screwed up again. I failed again. I didn't follow through again, all of the moments that they would normally turn to beating themselves up and making it mean that there was something wrong with them. It blows their mind when they say, oh, wait, you're saying this can actually be a stepping stone to change?

You're saying that I actually don't need to be perfect to change? That I don't have to swear up and down that I'm never going to drink again, or I'm never going to drink too much, or I'm never going to get too drunk; all of that is the biggest misconception, right? That you have to be perfect in order to change. Change doesn't happen in the land of perfect. Change happens in the land of continual progress. And so, you have to understand what's getting in the way. What is stopping you from just keeping making progress? What is stopping you from growing and learning from everything that's happening?

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Because everything that you chalk up to as a failure, inside of it, it has a hidden piece of the habit that right now you just can't see. You don't have full access and awareness about it. For me, what I couldn't see for so long, years, more than a decade, the hidden piece for me was that drinking was helping me. I didn't know how to deal with anxiety on my own, so I poured a drink. I was missing that skill. I didn't know how to handle deprivation. So, I reached for another, hoping that one day I would just magically feel satisfied. I didn't know how to loosen up and be myself and just let the kind of fun, silly, outgoing, carefree Rachel shine.

So, I reached for a drink to dissolve those hang-ups. I spent years trying to change my drinking based on all of these rules of trying to be perfect and focusing on the quantity and the number and how much. Then I would turn around and look at every time I failed and see it as a failure of my character, a failure of will, a failure of me as a person. Instead of just realizing, oh, I think I'm just missing a piece of the puzzle here. I think I'm just missing a skill that no one ever bothered to teach me. I just need to figure out how to handle anxiety, deprivation, and hang-ups, and insecurity. I just need to figure out how to handle that on my own.

Otherwise, of course, the habit isn't going to change because I'm not replacing any skills. I'm not learning any new skills here. I am just doubling down on like, I've got to be good, I've got to be perfect. And I want you to note that was true for me. It's true for everyone I work with. It's true for you, too. Drinking is helping you. It might be helping you with stress. It might be helping you with deprivation. It might be helping you with relaxation. It's different for everyone. You just have to be willing to approach it from that angle.

Failure to follow through on your promise to say no tonight or your promise to only have one it's not the endpoint. That's how most people treat that. It's like, oh, well, that didn't work. No, failure is your starting point. That's what I couldn't see for so long. That's what the thousands of people that I've

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worked with have struggled to see. They don't understand failure is a starting point, and that's what you're not seeing right now. What do we do, we fail, and then we just bury our heads in the sand, right? I would just do that. I would bury my head in the sand and be like, oh, God, let's just forget that last night happened, and then I would pop out sometime later, and I would be like, okay, here's my new plan I am going to be perfect. Here's the new rule. Here's the new magical amount. That's not the way to change a habit.

You have to start heading down the path of progress rather than perfection. And I want to talk to you about how to do that because the steps are really simple. The implementation is a little bit more challenging because we're so not used to doing this, and guess what? Because we're so not used to doing this with everything in our life, most people operate with all sorts of change because I have to be perfect rather than how do I keep continual progress going? You have to plan ahead for the times, the moments when you will fail. That's step number one. You have to plan ahead for the moments when you're not going to keep your promise when you drank more than you wanted.

You have to plan ahead of time for how you're going to show up. What are you going to do the next day? You cannot just hope that the next day you're going to be magically kind to yourself, or curious, or free of judgment, of course, you're not going to be because you have years of making failure mean something terrible about you or your brain or your ability to change or your character whatever. So, you have to plan ahead. That's step number one. That's why in the 30-day challenge, we hammer this over and over again. This idea that it's not about just crossing days off a calendar. It's not about being perfect. It's about let's introduce the right way to keep going the moments when you hit the roadblock, the moments when you're struggling. Let's introduce a new way for you to actually learn from what happened and move on in a helpful way, not in a way that sets a kind of new unrealistic perfectionist rule for you.

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You have to have a plan for how to handle these moments. So often, I talk about, hey, can we just look at, like, the math of what happened. Like, let's put all the drama aside. The drama is what you're making it mean, but, like, what's the math of what happened last night? Because if we can look at that then, it becomes a math problem, and we can figure out what we can do differently next time.

So, step one is you really have to plan ahead for the moments where failure will occur. We don't want to do this because we create so much judgment about the failure that we go into it, like, no, no, no, I'm not going to screw up this time. This time I'm going to do it right. This time I'm going to be perfect. So, in step one, we played.

Step two is that you're going to have to prepare for the fact that you're not going to want to follow through with step one. You're not going to want to look at what happened last night as math. You're going to want to go right back into oh, my God, crap, not again. I blew it again. You will want to go down the rabbit hole of shame and blame. Not because it feels good but because that is actually the underlying habit. So often, I talk about this inside Take A Break. We think of the habit just has to do with alcohol, and when you start to really unpack it, you find all these kinds of underlying habits. Habits around how we treat failure and how we treat ourselves. The expectations that we have.

The underlying habit for so many people is beating themselves up the next day and then setting this new unrealistic rule. This idea that okay, now, I've really got to be perfect or throwing their hands up and say, well screw it, right? That's what I was kind of going back and forth for so many years. It was like all these crazy plans and focusing on quantity and amount, right, and trying to be perfect, or it was like, I don't know. I am hopeless, so just screw it. I guess I'm just going to drink as much as I want.

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You don't have to be going back and forth between these two extremes. You can actually start to see, hey, I'm just missing some skills. What are the skills? What are the skills that I need in the moment? But step two really is preparing that you will not want to do this on the day after you fail. You will resist learning from what happened. You will want to go into shame and blame, or you will want to go into like, oh, forget about it. I'm just going to do whatever. This didn't work either. You will want to use it kind of like a free pass to drink as much as you want.

This is why it's so beneficial to have someone who's willing to work with you. It's so beneficial to have someone who is outside of you, right? Especially in that moment when you are so stuck in that black and white thinking, right? Either I have to be perfect or just like, who cares? Right? Hopeless case. It's so beneficial to have someone else who can be that you know, an observer outside of you; maybe it's your partner, best friend, therapist, coach, but you do need a person who is bought into the idea that you know what this is not an issue of good, bad, right, or wrong. It's not a character defect. It doesn't mean something's wrong with you or wrong with your brain. It's just a habit. You have to learn how it's working so that we can change it.

We have to learn how that think, feel, and act cycle works so that we have the knowledge that we need. We can see the pieces of the puzzle to start to shift it. Because what ultimately, I want you to be able to do is identify the thought in the moment that led to you saying yes, I'll have a drink, or yes, I'll have another. What was that thought in the moment? That thought really is the key. That's where you need to bring your attention. If you don't know what it is, how are you ever going to change it?

Now, most people make the mistake of thinking, listen, no, I already know what the reason is. I broke my promise. I drank too much because I was stupid because I can't learn my lesson because I don't know. It's just who I am. I'm just someone who always thinks more is better. I'm just someone

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who never follows through. Listen, I guarantee these are not the thoughts that actually led to you reaching for a drink.

That's what we have to really understand. So often we think we know the reason why it happened when in truth all of those reasons: I was stupid, I can't learn my lesson, this is just who I am, I have nothing to do with it. What was the thought in the moment that led to the desire or led to the permission or led to the certainty that yeah, I'm going to have that drink? Now, your next day's knee-jerk interpretation of why it happened because I promise you that's crap. But what actually was that think, feel, and act cycle in the moment?

You have to be able to identify that in order to turn failure from an endpoint into a starting point. So, step one is you plan ahead of time for how you're going to handle the moments when you're not perfect; the moments when you drink, the moments when you drink too much. Step two is that you have to also know that you're not going to want to follow through on this new way of handling things. You're so accustomed to viewing failure as a stain on your worthiness or a sign that you can't do it that you're not going to want to follow through. You're either going to want to go back to these kinds of crazy rules, or you're going to go to this place of like, oh, I am hopeless, so you know, a free pass. Just drink as much as I want.

I think part of this, the ability to follow through, is to have an objective outside observer. Someone who is like, listen, this isn't about being good or bad or right or wrong or something being wrong with you or wrong with your brain. Let's just like, understand the math problem here. And then the third step is okay, so, once I have started to understand what was happening in the moment, what am I going to do differently next time. It's so crazy, but most people don't actually want to plan for next time. Because they're like, I just don't want this to happen again. I just don't want to make the same stupid mistake. I just want to be good from now on.

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This is why we set these crazy rules with like no support to back it up. Because we're so committed to like, I don't want to plan for next time because I don't want next time to happen. You have to plan that the thought, whatever thought you identify, whatever it is who cares, one won't hurt, I deserve it, whatever that thought is, you have to claim that you know what it's going to come up again. And planning just to be perfect in the face of it or planning to be good in the face of it; that's not a solution. Following the rules in the face of it is not a plan. It's this kind of perfectionist fantasy that you will just magically be this different person next time.

Listen, you can be a different person. You can show up differently, but not because you just set these crazy rules for yourself, but because you actually have a plan for how to handle the thought that led to you saying yes. How are you going to respond differently when the urge appears? How are you going to respond differently when you feel like rebelling when you feel like you deserve it? When your neighbor shows up with a bottle of wine, when your coworker says, oh, just stay for another round, when your partner says, oh, I mean if you're not going to drink tonight, neither will I. When the waiter asks you for your drink order. When you're overwhelmed with the state of the world, work, kids, or you're in pain or bored, what are you actually going to do other than try to be good? Try not to screw up again.

That's what my plan was for so long. Like, no wonder it wasn't working. It wasn't actually a plan. Most people they have zero plan for what they're going to do other than just say no. But just saying no is not a plan. How are you going to say no? Remember when we're thinking about the think, feel, and act cycle, right, the idea that whatever we do or don't do with anything, but in this case, especially with alcohol that action, it doesn't just happen, it's connected to a thought and a feeling. Saying no is an action. It's part of that action line of the think, feel, and act cycle, just like drinking is also part of the action line. Which means you have to actually understand what is the thought and feelings that I'm going to practice in the moment?

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When the moment reappears, when the thought reappears, the thought so often for years, I just practice like I deserve it. Who cares? One won't hurt. Right? I had practiced that for years and years unconsciously. And then I thought my plan was like, I'm just not going to screw up again. I'm just going to be good this time. I'm just not going to make a mistake. But none of that actually meets the underlying habit.

Now, this is really a word of caution for all of you listening because so often, the thoughts that you think are going to help, they often don't help in the moment. I was so confused about this for a long time. I was like, I just need to tough it out. I just need to fight this urge. I just need to grit my teeth. I just need to be good. We're so in this place of like, I've got to go to war with my desire. Oh, and P.S. it's about being good or bad, right? Like, my worthiness is also on the line here, but guess what? When you go to battle all of the time, and when your worthiness is on the line, you're going to exhaust yourself really quickly.

So often, what I'm actually trying to show people who are working with me inside Take A Break is that going to battle is actually the opposite of what you want to do. What if you could be curious instead? What if you could open yourself up to the desire and see that hey, it's not a problem? What if you welcomed it? This is what really blows people's minds when I talk about welcoming your urges and welcoming your desire because so often, people are like, why on earth would I do that? Because again, they think they're at war with it, so we don't want to welcome the thing that we're at war with. But when you realize that your urges have no power, they're powerless, well, what would be the problem with welcoming them?

The other thing that I see happen a lot is people are like so surprised that their desire appears. So surprised that they have the urge, and again it's like, why? Why are you surprised? Like, of course, it's here. But what happens when we're surprised? We're like, angry that it's here. It's like, oh, I'm angry that this urge is here. I didn't want it to be here today. Why are

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you bothering me? Instead of like, oh, yeah, I was totally expecting you. I was expecting you because this is what my habit is. My habit is to drink once I'm off the clock, or once it's Friday night, or when I go out to dinner, or when someone offers me a drink, right? It's like, yeah, of course, I was expecting you.

That shift alone can change everything instead of treating your desire and your urges like some sort of surprise attack. It's like no, of course, I knew you were coming, but I also know you're not a big deal. I also know you're a false alarm for my lower brain, and I'm just going to practice responding to you differently right now. I am not going to sit here being so surprised. So, this is what I want you to know, you can change your relationship with alcohol. I don't care how much you had to drink last night or last weekend or how old you are, how long you've been drinking. You can do this. Whatever that looks like for you. Everyone I work with has different goals.

This is the other piece that I really have to kind of reinforce because so often, we're so certain there's only one way, or there's only one right solution. No, you get to decide what's right for you, but only if you're willing to change your relationship to failure, only if you're willing to see it as a starting point, a launching pad for really understanding the habit and mastering a new set of skills that you're missing. This is what we do in Take A Break. That's what I teach in the 30-day challenge. It is to really help people have this new relationship, not just to alcohol, but to failure because if you're in this mindset of the only way forward is perfection, it's going to suck. You need to switch over to the mindset of like, no, I just need to make progress. I don't need to be perfect; I just need to keep making progress. How do I do that?

Whatever that is for you, whether it's taking alcohol out of your life whether it's just exploring, hey, what is it like to be alcohol-free? What is it like not to drink when I come home and when I hang out with people and when I am with my partner? Whether it's drinking less in a sitting or less frequently or

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changing how and why you choose to drink every single goal, no matter what it is, it has the same thing in common. You have to change your response to failure. You have to change your idea that perfection is the only way forward.

This commitment to perfection is actually what's holding you back. Until you know how to do this, until you know how to change your response to failure, you can't change the habit of drinking. Here's the thing when you learn how to do this, not only is it the path that you need to change your habit, it's also a gift that you're giving to yourself in every part of your life. It's a skill that you can apply everywhere because, of course, we don't just run into failure in one place. It doesn't just happen with our drinking. It happens with so many areas. That's why I say that doing this work learning how to change the habit really is a mega skill it really is a skill that you can take and transform your entire life with it.

That, to me, is the power of this. Instead of just sitting here being like, oh, God, I really have to fix my drinking, it's like hey, I'm here to learn the skill that no one ever taught me to change my relationship with failure, to change my response to urges, to see the moments where I want to slip into beating myself up or believing that I'm hopeless and giving myself a free pass to see that actually as a starting point rather than an endpoint because nothing makes you more powerful in this world than knowing how to fail, how to learn from it, and how to keep going.

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.

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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.