

Ep #266: Frustration at Failed Attempts to Change Your Drinking



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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 266.

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, everyone, welcome back, so today we are talking about what to do when you have tried a million things to change your drinking. I will tell you, I understand this very well. This was my situation for a long time. I tried so many things over the years. I tried setting rules about when. So, telling myself, listen, no drinking during the week. Only do it on the weekends.

I would set rules about how much. You know, don't have more than two, or I would set rules about how long, right? So, I would tell myself, okay, only one drink and an hour, or I would try to make a drink last for a certain amount of time. I tried to pace myself with a friend who was a slower drinker. I had all of these rules about not drinking on an empty stomach or only drinking when I was eating food or alternating with water.

I would sometimes try to enlist other people in my own commitment, so I would kind of announce at the beginning of the night, you know, I'm going to be good tonight. I'm only going to have three rounds or something. Or I'd try to enlist my best friend or my partner, and say like, listen, just like make sure I'm not crazy, make sure I'm good tonight. I also, at one point I remember trying to switch to things I didn't particularly like drinking.

So, I switched to whiskey at one point in the hopes that would slow me down. Then, sometimes I would just try to avoid situations altogether. I would turn down invites. I would avoid seeing certain people, and a lot of

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times, I would just resort to don't be so stupid, Rachel. Write out all the reasons why this is bad for you. You should learn your lesson. Write out all of the embarrassing things you did or the ways that it's harming your health.

I tried a lot of things, and I will tell you it was so frustrating because it was very hit or miss. Sometimes it worked well, and sometimes it really didn't, and I didn't understand. I was so frustrated because I felt like I really am trying to make a change here. What I didn't realize at the time, and I realize now, and I see my clients doing the same thing.

I see now that what I was actually doing was trying the same thing over and over, just different flavors of the same thing, even though they all sounded very different. What I was trying to do ultimately was to become better at following rules. I was trying to become better at either just avoiding alcohol altogether or being really disciplined, being really good when I was drinking.

And here's the thing that I didn't know at the time, but now I do know, habits don't change through avoidance. They don't change through discipline or being a good person. Habits only change by learning what's at the root of the habit. What's truly fueling it and then practicing and a new way forward. So often, we try to change the habit from the outside in, setting rules, avoiding situations, instead of changing it from the inside out, and that's what the think, feel, and act cycle is all about.

It's about starting from the inside out. And so, what I want to do today is just give you three steps. And my guess is you have never tried if you're in this situation, the feeling like, I don't know. What I am doing it sometimes works, and it sometimes doesn't. Or you feel like I'm just trying a lot of things and I'm not getting success? So, we're going to cover those three

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steps, and then I'm going to talk about a couple of things that I want you to be careful about as you start practicing them.

So, the first thing, step one, is just to identify the root cause of your drinking, and I'm going to tell you a lot of people get stuck here. So, say, well, the problem is alcohol, or the problem is me. Listen, the root of your drinking, the root cause, has nothing to do with alcohol. It's not the taste. It's not the effect that it has on your judgment. It's not that it's intoxicating. It's not the fact that it's all around you.

The problem or the root of your habit it's not you. You are not a problem. You are not stupid because you're not learning your lesson. It's not a matter of not being disciplined. It's not about the fact that you aren't a good person. This is where most people kind of default. It's like, oh, the problem is alcohol, or the problem is me. The problem is neither of those things. The root of the habit is when you really boil it down; when you really look at it from the inside, you start to see it's how you respond to the urge to drink.

If the urge wasn't a big deal if it was no problem to let that urge go unanswered. I really want you to think about that for a second. If it was no problem to let that urge go unanswered, if the urge itself wasn't a big deal, it would be really easy to say no to your desire. Now, when I introduce this, that we want to actually focus on how you respond to urges, most people will say, okay, so like, tell me how to make the urge go away. Show me how to get rid of it.

But what I want you to know if that's where you're starting from, you've got it backward. You taught your brain unconsciously, but you did teach your brain to expect a reward, maybe when you got home or when you're cooking dinner or after you get the kids to bed or when you're at a restaurant when you watch the game when you're with your friends when

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you feel bored. You taught your brain to expect the reward of alcohol in these moments.

You practiced over and over again associating these situations with a reward. Once your brain has come to expect it, you cannot immediately snap your fingers and say okay, so make my urges go away. You can't just immediately undo it. You have to start by making the urge, making your desire or your craving in these moments your lower brain's longing for a reward. You have to start by learning how to make it not a problem. That really is the key.

Listen, you can't get to this place of focusing on the urges if deep down you're really like deep down I'm pretty sure alcohol is the problem, or I'm pretty sure that I'm the problem. If you're thinking that, then you're always going to be in a place of avoidance, a place of believing that you don't have what it takes to figure this out when in truth, you do. So, you have to start really practicing; hey, the problem is just how I'm responding to my urges. That's the problem. If I can learn a new way to respond to my urges, it will be easier for me to say no.

This piece is really key. It's a step that most people skip because they just want the urge to go away, and they're secretly kind of sure, I don't know. I think it might be alcohol, or I don't know, I think it might be me. That's step number one, really starting to change and shift what you believe is kind of at the root, the root cause of the habit that you have.

Now, step two is to really start to understand why an unanswered urge, so that desire or that craving or that longing that you have that you let go unanswered. You don't fulfill it to really understand why that's a problem. Why is it a problem to feel desire and not move toward that desire? Think about this, spend some time with this because when you feel that

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unanswered urge in your body, what is truly happening in your body vs. the story that your mind is telling you.

We spend so much time when people join Take A Break, and they start with the 30-day challenge. We spend so much time here because this is the place that people really need to spend time untangling because your mind will tell you a story about urges that sounds a lot like, they're awful, they're unbearable, I have too many of them, they're too strong, they never go away, I shouldn't have to restrict myself. If I say yes, I'll feel better. We have so much story attached to the urge. And you have to really start to learn to separate that out and see what your specific story is.

What does that urge actually feel like underneath the story? That's what people discover when they start working with me, and they really start to understand, oh, it's actually really not that big of a deal. Maybe I feel a little restless, maybe there's a little tightness in my body, but the physical sensations of their desire going unanswered it doesn't even come close to matching the story they have of it in their mind.

Now, I do want to add this piece because I hear this a lot when I talk about urges not being a big deal. People would say, okay, fine, like, I can get on board with that, maybe. But that's all fine before I start drinking, but what about once I start? What about the urge to have more once I've already started drinking? Once I start, I can't stop. How many times have you heard people say that? Or have you thought that about yourself, and not necessarily with alcohol, but like once I start, I can't stop?

I'm just an all-or-nothing person. I have this kind of like extreme tendencies around things. I really used to believe this too, and it's a message that is reinforced by so many warnings, right. We hear warnings, but you know, if people struggled to control their drinking as they struggled to say no, then a single drop is going to set them back. Now, what I want you to know is yes,

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alcohol affects your decision making, but I really want you to just be curious and pause and start to examine what actually happens in the moment after your first sip of a drink?

Yes, alcohol affects your decision making, but after that first sip, what is really happening? Is it the intoxicating effect, or is it the story that you have unconsciously practiced so often? So, let's just say for the sake of argument, you know, a standard glass of wine is 5 ounces. When you take your first sip, I don't know, maybe that's like one-quarter of an ounce or like a teaspoon and a half or something. When you take your first sip, what happens when you feel the urge to have another?

What happens when that desire to have more bubbles up? Is it actually true in that moment that you can't stop that your decision making is affected by a teaspoon and a half of wine, or is it true that you've practiced not stopping in the past? I really want you to consider the difference between I can't stop vs. I've practiced not stopping. I've practiced obeying my desire for more.

What is really happening for you in the moment? Imagine the story that comes up if 5 ounces of wine was before you and you committed to just one sip of it? What story would bubble up? What thoughts would appear? You know, I can remember back to a time where I would think things like, why would I just have one sip that's pointless? What's the point of that? Or I already started, so I might as well finish, or it would be silly to waste this. This was expensive.

Or so and so gets to finish their entire glass of wine, why don't I? What I want you to be curious about is what story bubbles up then? And most people never get curious about it because they have the story once I start, I can't stop. So, there's no reason to be curious about what happens after

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that first sip, but it's not that sip that's the problem. It's not even the desire for more that's the problem. It's the story that comes after it.

I want you to consider that the urge for more, even when you have alcohol in your system it, still isn't the problem. The problem is the story that you're telling yourself, and right now, that story's probably completely unconscious. It's a story about what it would mean to stop once you've started. What it would mean to let your desire for more go unanswered. How it would be silly or stupid or wasteful or restrictive or unfair, that's what you actually need to pay attention to.

You have to really shift from seeing the urge as a problem to understanding it's that story that you have unconsciously learned and practiced over and over again that is the actual problem when it comes to change. That urge, that urge itself, is harmless. It can't make you do anything. It really is no big deal. But the story about it, that's where all the drama comes in.

So, step one is really understanding okay, so the habit at its core. It's not about alcohol. It's not about me. It's not that there's something wrong with me or something wrong with my brain or I don't have enough willpower. I don't have enough discipline. The habit is really fueled by your urges and your response to them. Now, that doesn't mean you need to make them go away. It just means you need to start practicing a different response.

Step two is then really taking the time to understand, okay, so, how have I made my desire a problem? How have I made my unanswered urge a problem? What is the story I have attached to it telling myself that it's awful or unbearable or too much or too strong or won't ever go away or it's unfair, or I have more desire than other people? What is that story that I have connected to it?

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Again, the problem is not that you want to drink, or the problem is not that you want to drink more. The problem is that storyline that you have practiced about what it means to let that desire go unanswered. So often, what I hear from people is they're like, connecting it to their whole day, right? It's like, listen, I've just had this really crappy day, and now I'm supposed to feel restricted here? You start to really see what we make it mean about unanswered desire and how we connect it to kind of this deep unfairness. That's what you have to start to untangle.

Then, step three is the decision that you're going to practice a new story about an unanswered urge. Now, notice that none of the steps I'm outlining are about setting rules, hiding out from temptation, or avoiding being around people who drink. It's not about emptying your liquor cabinet and pouring it all down the drain. It's not about rules. It's the exact opposite. It's about engaging with what shows up from a place of curiosity. It's not about telling yourself listen, I'm only allowed to have one. It's about being curious about what story starts unfolding the moment you have that first sip.

It's also not about telling yourself, okay, I just can't be around certain people. I have to not be around alcohol. It's noticing, hey, what storyline starts playing out in my mind when they're drinking and I'm not. That's how you change the habit from the inside out. It can't be about rules. It has to be really understanding the think, feel, and act cycles that are unconsciously unfolding inside of you, and the truth is once you make the decision that, you're going to start to practice a new story.

You can practice any story you want. You can start to practice, hey, you know what, urges are normal. They're part of being human. My lower brain was designed to make me crave and want things that doesn't mean I have to listen to it. The urge is supposed to be here right now. It was supposed to be here, of course, it's here because it's five o'clock or I'm at the restaurant, or

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I'm watching the game, of course, it's here. I taught my brain to desire alcohol. That's not a problem; I can unlearn it.

The urge is harmless. It can't make me do anything. It's a little bit of restlessness, and I can handle that. You can start practicing the story about how the urge is revealing to you how the habit actually works at the deepest level. It's showing you your mind. It's a window into what's truly fueling the habit, and that's your thoughts, that's your thinking. You need to start practicing. You know what, every time the urge shows up, it's here to teach me something. I

It's how I gain greater awareness. It's how I learn how to manage my mind. It's how I start to see the thoughts that are the real obstacles blocking the transformation that I want. This I will just tell you, this is why all of my attempts were hit or miss for so long because I wasn't doing any of this. I didn't even know to engage with the urge. I just thought the urge was a problem. I wanted it not to be there. I didn't want to have any unanswered desire.

I didn't know. No one had told me that I could change the story about it. I just believed I had too much. I believed that saying no meant restricting myself, missing out, feeling awful, and not having a good time. I didn't realize that was all just a story and that as long as I kept listening to it, I would be stuck in the habit that the story was optional. I really did believe for the longest time that not even just around alcohol but all kinds of urges that I was having that if I didn't follow through on them, I would just feel miserable.

So, I want you to really think about these steps as learning a skill. A skill that you can apply well beyond drinking. That is the power of this work. That's the power of really learning how to manage your mind and mastering the think, feel, and act cycle because what people see inside Take A Break

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is, oh, everything I'm learning here has applications well beyond alcohol. That's why it's so transformative.

All of a sudden, you can start to see, oh, I have different tools to approach anything in my life where it feels a little compulsive, or I feel like I'm, you know, following a storyline that later I regret. That I'm eating against myself or that I'm spending money when I wish I wasn't or that I'm just wasting time scrolling through my phone. When I'd rather truthfully be doing something else, but I don't really know how to stop that kind of knee-jerk habitual response.

The only way to stop it is really doing this work or starting to dismantle the habit from the inside out, and it starts with your response to your urges. Now, I want to add that before I wrap up, you really need to be careful that when you start practicing these steps, you have to be careful of the goal to be perfect at it. Because most people will say, okay, yeah, I'm going to practice this. But like, wink wink, I'm going to be perfect. I'm not supposed to make any mistakes. I will tell you this; perfection is not how you create change.

When you focus on being perfect, when you focus on not making mistakes, invariably, what happens is you feel defeated, and you throw in the towel. You give up. You say, well that didn't work either, instead of getting back on the horse, right? And now people will say I can't afford to make a mistake. Listen, I will tell you this when you focus on being perfect, which I know seems like the helpful thing to do.

When you do that, you do that at the expense of making progress, and the goal is always progress. It's not to be in this kind of herky-jerky start and stop mode. That's where I was for so long. It's like I would try, try, try something new to change my drinking. I would try, try, try to be good or be

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more responsible and learn my lesson. And it would work for a while, and then it wouldn't.

When it wouldn't, when I wasn't perfect, I would feel defeated, and I would think God, well, if you're this much of a screwup, you might as well just have a drink and have a little bit of pleasure and enjoy your life a little bit. I was in this kind of like herky-jerky stop and start for so long because I was in that mindset of needing to be perfect; otherwise, I was failing. The idea is always to just figure out how can I keep making progress?

So, you have the urge to drink, but you have the urge to drink more, and you listen to it. That's okay. You don't need to make this mean that you failed. You can be curious after the fact. What happened? What was the story there? Why did I listen to it? How was I feeling? This is not the time to slip into, oh, God, I did it wrong again. I should know better. I screwed up.

This is the time for I am learning. I am learning something new. It's going to be challenging. I'm going to be wobbly at first. It's like riding a bike. I'm going to be wobbly, but that's okay. The wobble doesn't mean that I shouldn't ever get back on the bike. The wobble just means that I'm still learning. I can still practice something new. I can learn from what didn't work. I can use this moment to gain more clarity about hey, why didn't I want to let that urge go unanswered?

What was I actually trying to avoid in the moment? So, if you feel like you've tried so many things and you're really frustrated, one, I'll just say, I feel you. I get you. I know what that is like. I was in that place for over a decade. Two, I promise that you really haven't tried that many different things. You've really been trying the same flavor of the same thing: to be more disciplined and follow the rules you're setting.

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I want you to start really changing this habit from the inside out, instead of the outside in. That means long-term, permanently changing your relationship, not just with alcohol but with your desire and your urges, and going back to these three steps that really will change everything for you. Alright, that's it for today. I will see you next week.

Okay, listen up, changing your drinking is so much easier than you think. Whether you want to drink less or not at all, you don't need more rules or willpower. You need a logical framework that helps you understand and, more importantly, change the habit from the inside out. It starts with my 30-day challenge. Besides the obvious health benefits, taking a break from drinking is the fastest way to figure out what's really behind your desire. This radically different approach helps you succeed by dropping the perfectionism and judgment that blocks change. Decide what works best for you when it comes to drinking. Discover how to trust yourself and feel truly powered to take it or leave it. Head on over to RachelHart.com/join and start your transformation today.