Ep #4: Liquid Confidence

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With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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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.

Hi everybody. Welcome back. Today, we are talking about confidence. I am going to be talking to you about what confidence is, why it is so easy to fall into the trap of thinking that we need a drink in order to feel more self-assured and at ease in social situations. I am going to talk about some of the pitfalls of liquid courage and then go over three things that really zap our confidence.

In the last episode, I talked about how common it is to use a drink at the end-of-the-day to unwind and the pitfalls of trying to pour a glass of wine in order to cope with end-of-the-day stress and anxiety. Confidence is another really common reason why so many people drink, just like wanting to take the edge off, wanting to feel at ease in social situations, wanting to loosen up, feeling less awkward, more social, more outgoing. It's something that a lot of people deal with and it's a topic for me that I particularly relate to because it was feeling confident while drinking was such a reason why it felt really hard for me to change this habit.

So, I really started drinking in college. I didn't really drink much before then but college was when drinking kind of became a pastime for me and I think looking back the reason why I did is because when I first started drinking, I realized how it transformed me into feeling attractive, feeling funny, feeling outgoing and it felt a little bit like a magic elixir. So I had all this insecurity that gnawed at me before going out. I had all these hangups all the time that were whispering in my ear and when I started drinking, all of that just dissolved and so I learned that when I was pretty young, I learned that at 17 and I just kept repeating that pattern as a way to feel more confident, especially when I was socializing.

You know I talk about this a lot in the book that I wrote "Why Can't I Drink Like Everyone Else" but you know that very first college party that I went to, I got way too drunk at that party, but still I saw a huge upside and the upside was that I felt comfortable when I had a buzz. When I started getting drunk, I felt like I fit in. I felt like all of my worries went away and I felt like I

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was finally able to have fun and so even though there were a lot of negatives attached to it, I still saw a big benefit.

I was really for so long at the mercy of all this constant negative chatter in my mind, you know thoughts about I don't fit in, I am not attractive enough, I never know what to say or do when I am hanging out with people. I just felt weird and all of these thoughts, they just really amped up in social situations and for me drinking was such a relief. It was such a needed respite from that chatter and I felt like when I was drinking, I have this belief that the person who I was with my really close friends, the funny, engaged, present person who was actually enjoying herself that she could finally come out.

So I knew that person was inside of me but I didn't know how to coax her out in social situations, why I was feeling a lot of anxiety without drinking and so I practiced using alcohol and getting drunk as a way to feel more confident and to bring that part of me out.

Now, back then I didn't know anything about the think-feel-act cycle. It's a cycle that if you have been listening to earlier podcasts, you have heard me talk about before and I am going to be talking about all the time. It's this idea that our thoughts create our feelings and our feelings drive our actions and you can use this cycle and look at this cycle and understand why you feel the way you do and why you act the way you do but I had no idea about this cycle. I didn't understand that the feelings of anxiety and insecurity that I was feeling were all produced by how I was thinking.

So my thoughts that I was thinking were "I don't fit in", "I'm not pretty enough", "I never know what to say or do", "I'm weird." I thought these were just true, I thought these were just assessments of how I really was and I didn't recognize them as thoughts and I certainly didn't recognize them as what was creating how I was feeling.

Now just so you know this thinking was with me for a lot of the time, it's not like it only appeared in social situations but when I was in social situations, that's when it really turned up, that's when these thoughts just really came out and I started thinking them over and over again and I think a lot of people can relate to this idea of being your own worst self-critic and practicing that, starting from a really young age, I have a pretty vivid memory of getting my school portrait done when I was four years old, so I

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had just entered kindergarten and I refused to smile for the picture because I had a big gap between my front teeth and I was four years old but I was so embarrassed by that and I thought to myself, "I'm not going to smile because if I smile, people will see the gap."

Right, so many of us have an experience like that where we can think back to a pretty young age where we have this negative chatter and this negative self-critic that appears and I know that I really did a lot of this negativity, especially around my appearance.

So when I started having to wear glasses, when I was in first grade, the fact that I had curly hair , the fact that I thought I had too much hair on my arms, that I had a lisp, when I started getting acne, the fact that my skin was too pale, that I was too flat-chested, had all these really negative thoughts about who I was and my appearance and what it meant about me and how I didn't fit in starting at a pretty young age and so I was very practiced with thinking a lot of negative thoughts and that's one of the big problems is that so many of us have so much practice thinking a lot of really negative thoughts that produce negative feelings, although for most of us we don't realize that connection.

The second problem is that we start thinking these thoughts at a pretty young age and I think many people, I know I was, are really convinced that the way to feel better is to change who we are. Right, no one is showing us the think-feel-act cycle, no one is teaching us that our thoughts create our feelings and so we think, "Well, if I want to feel better, I have to change who I am, I have to change my appearance, I have to be smarter, I have to have more accomplishments."

Whatever it is, we think it's changing who we are that's going to make us feel better finally, and so when I would walk in to parties or social situations, I would have this experience of kind of immediately scanning the room to see if I measured up and thinking to myself, "Do I belong here, do I look right, are these people smarter than me, are they cooler than me, am I pretty enough to be here, am I even going to know what to say or do," and I think a lot of people can relate to that idea of entering a social situation and feeling like all of a sudden you are scanning to see whether or not you fit in, whether or not you belong, whether or not this is going to be okay and that happens at a pretty young age and for a lot of people what will happen is will have those feelings, will have all of those thoughts wondering about

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whether or not we fit in, whether or not we are right for the situation and it produces feelings of anxiety and insecurity and a lot of people learn at a young age or in their teens or twenties that all of these negative feelings seem less bothersome with a buzz and that once they start drinking, they feel more confident and so it's really easy to get into a cycle and it's cycle that I got into very quickly which was I would feel kind of nervous and insecure before heading out to a party, then I would get there, I would still feel pretty awkward, so I would start drinking and all of the thoughts that I was having did start to quiet and as they would quiet, I would feel better, right, and then I would also be getting you know the buzz that alcohol is giving me and I would start to feel more confident and I would start to be enjoying myself and not having to deal with these negative feelings and I would say, "Well, now I am having a fun time."

Now the problem is what happens the next time you go out. The next time that insecurity and awkwardness and unease appear, well they are still there. You haven't done anything to address them, you have only essentially found a Band-Aid or a way to cover up how you are feeling and this was really my problem. Drinking quieted my self-critic. It put me at ease and it made me feel I thought that this was how I could be confident, you know, I just needed a little liquid confidence to speed up the process, but nothing that I was doing was actually resolving any of my thinking or any of my feelings that I was having in the long run. So, the more I repeated the cycle, the more dependent I became on looking for liquid confidence instead of figuring out how to be confident on my own and it's really a terrible cycle.

I started doing this in college and I repeated it all throughout college, I mean drinking really was a pastime for me. I maybe much had my nose to the grindstone during the week, but as soon as the weekend rolled around, I really thought that the point of the weekend was to drink and to get drunk.

So, I practiced this quite a bit and I practiced it all throughout college, but here's a thing, I kept practicing it in my 20s and actually even into my 30s. It had just become so routine that the way I would feel better when I was socializing with people, the way that I would feel more outgoing and more confident was if I had a drink or more than one drink to help me along the way. I wasn't learning how to do it for myself.

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So, when I tell you what the biggest mistake is when it comes to confidence and I know that this was something that tripped me up for a really long time. It's the idea or the belief that confidence is a personality trait rather than a skill and so I for example thought for a very long time, well there are just like a lucky few group of people who are born more confident than others. They are born less anxious, less worried and I wish that I was one of those people but I wasn't born that way. That's not my personality.

So, of course, everybody is born with a different personality. We all have different inborn traits, right? But we also have the ability to learn and change how we feel through practice and so what I think happens is that we basically take the concept of nature versus nurture, right? The idea of what nature gave us versus what we learn and grow to do and we really decide that nature is really the most important piece, right? It's the way we were born, it's our inborn traits. That's the most important piece and we kind of dismiss nurture, right?

We dismiss the idea that you can encourage growth and development in all these different areas of your life including learning about how you think, learning about how to create your feelings and learning about how to feel better or we think that nurture is just something that our parents helped us cultivate, right? That it was their nurturing and once that nurturing ended, once we left our home, then no more nurturing, right?

But really, nurturing is just about encouraging growth and development of different traits and that can continue happening throughout your entire life and when you learn about the think-feel-act cycle, when you learn about how your thoughts are the things that create your feelings, you start to see, okay, well so my thinking is connected to how I am feeling, insecure and how I am feeling awkward and when I am feeling unease when I am somewhere but the same is also true with the feeling of confidence, right? Confidence is also a feeling and is also connected to your thoughts. It's also connected to what you are thinking, right?

But before you can really start working towards building more confidence, I think it is important to identify what is zapping it and you already know that negative thinking, you can already imagine how that is going to be really zapping your confidence, but I think that there are four real keys that are important to understand when you are thinking about why you don't have as much confidence as you would like.

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So the first is what I have already told you about this nature versus nurture, right? So it's this idea of having a fixed mindset. The idea that you think, "Oh, I'm just not a confident person, I just wasn't born that way, that's not something that's part of my personality, I have never been very confident," right? All of these things are in this fixed mindset that says, well, I just didn't win confidence in the genetic lottery, so there is nothing I can do. What you really want is a growth mindset. You really want to be thinking about how confidence is a skill that you can learn. It's something that you can practice and if you use the think-feel-act cycle, you will see how that is possible.

Okay, the second thing that really zaps confidence is perfectionism and I know so many people out there listening struggle with the idea of feeling like they need to do things perfectly or maybe not even struggle with this. Some people I know, I did for a long time, actually really relished that I was a perfectionist. I thought that it was a good part of my personality, but what ends up happening is when you are focused on being perfect, when perfectionism is something that you are struggling to deal with, it means that you end up almost always focusing on all the imperfections, everything that you think that you are not doing right.

So instead of looking at all the things you are accomplishing and all the things that you are doing well, you look at everything where you are not measuring up and perfectionism when our goal is, "I just want to be perfect," it is really one of the quickest ways to just figure out how to focus on everything that's negative and focusing on everything that's negative really will zap your confidence as well.

The third piece is something that's called catastrophizing or this idea of always looking for the worst case scenario, right? Thinking this party is going to be miserable. I am going to not have anything to say to these people. I am not going to have anyone to talk to. I should probably just stay home. So, it's this idea of before you even go out, before you even leave your house, you are already thinking of every worst case scenario for how things can go wrong and you can see pretty easily how that sort of thinking would not lend you in a direction of confidence, but would actually send you in the opposite direction.

Finally, the fourth piece is this idea of people pleasing. It's relying on other people to like us so that we can feel good. You will see it a lot in thoughts about what are people going to think. I don't fit in. I am not sure that I have

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anything in common. It becomes very focused on trying to determine whether or not other people are going to like you. Whether or not you are going to please them essentially and also that thinking really zaps your confidence.

So now that you know that confidence is something that you can practice and learn and you see all the different areas in which if you are a perfectionist or you are catastrophizing or you are people pleasing, how all of the thinking connected into that can really start to zap your confidence.

So, the question becomes, "Well, how do I start feeling better." "How do I start feeling more confident in these situations" and I really think that the key, it has to happen before you leave, before you go to dinner, before you go to the networking event, before you go to the cocktail party, whatever it is, when you are getting ready, really paying attention to what are the thoughts coming up for you, what are you thinking about the event. How do you think it's going to go? What are you really worried about?

You know you want to pay attention to those thoughts and even write them down so you can get them out of your head and onto a piece of paper, maybe you are thinking these things are always so awkward, I never have anything to say, it's going to be so uncomfortable if I am not drinking, I hate how I look, whatever it is just pay attention and notice those worries, write them down even and just be aware of what kind of thinking. You might realize in that moment that some of these thoughts are really on repeat for you. Some of these thoughts you have a tendency to think all the time once you start paying attention to them.

Now the next thing you want to do is ask yourself okay, here are all the thoughts that I am thinking, here are all the worries that I have, what feelings when I think these things are they creating for me. Now it's pretty easy to just brush it off and say okay, negative thinking creates negative feelings, but I think it's really important to try to get really specific and look at the things that you are thinking and ask yourself for each one what feeling do you think it's creating. Is it creating insecurity, anxiety, dread, whatever it is, be really clear on what feelings are being created when you think those thoughts and then finally once you have a sense of okay, here's all the thinking that's happening in my head. I am starting to understand how these are creating my feelings, so what do I do now, right? And what you want to do is try to brainstorm alternatives.

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Now let me just profess this by saying, I know that for a lot of people, myself included, this felt kind of silly at first. I didn't feel totally comfortable doing this, but at the same time, I was really committed to figuring out how to learn not to need a drink, not to need liquid confidence in order to feel more confident in these situations and I will tell you that this really is your best bet, right? Brainstorming alternatives changing how you are thinking and it's a slow gradual process, but changing how you are thinking really is the way to feel more confident and feel more at ease and self-assured without needing to rely on a drink.

So, for example, I will give you a couple of examples here, but really you are going to have to brainstorm a bunch of alternatives until you hit on something that feels believable and authentic to you. So, these are just examples, but the thought always awkward could become I am sure I am not the only person tonight who is going to feel out of their element. The thought I will never have anything to say could become I am just going to focus on being really interested in other people. The thought, this is so uncomfortable without a drink, could become, I can handle a little bit of discomfort, or I can handle feeling a little insecure. I can handle feeling anxious without having a drink. I hate how I look becomes everybody feels a little self conscious about their appearance sometimes; it's okay, how I look does not need to ruin my night.

Now, I don't know if you notice there but a lot of the alternative thoughts that I suggested there oftentimes what I find really helpful is to just take the focus away from you and to focus on other people. I think a lot of times when especially when we are feeling a lot of negative emotions and feeling insecure and anxious, one thing that our brain has a habit of doing is really just thinking thoughts all about us and I find a lot of times that trying to change your focus and thinking about other people and how other people might be in the same boat, how other people might be struggling as well, how you can just be interested in other people and what's going on for them can be a really useful technique to try to switch your focus.

Now, I don't think that replacing these thoughts is going to mean that you walk into your next party or your next networking event and feel a 100% confident, it doesn't work like this. Because in part you have a lot of practice thinking a lot of negative thoughts and for a long time thinking them kind of unconsciously, not even realizing that they were optional thoughts that you could choose to change, but you have to start

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somewhere. You have to think about how often you practiced grabbing a drink in order to feel more confident in these situations and when you think about how many times you practice doing that, you practice having a drink in order to have some liquid confidence or liquid courage, you need to then think about, "Okay, well now I have to start practicing thinking different thoughts if I want to take a break from drinking, if I want to cut back, if I don't want to use alcohol as a crutch to feel more confident that I am going to have to start practicing something different."

Okay, so here's the recap for today. Confidence is not a personality trait, it's a skill that you can learn. Always relying on liquid confidence never gives you a chance to practice this skill. It never gives you a chance to learn how to practice confidence on your own and it just really keeps you stuck. If you are thinking about what is zapping confidence, pay attention to thoughts connected to perfectionism, people pleasing or catastrophizing, imagining the worst case scenario. All of these sorts of thoughts are really going to zap your confidence.

And then finally you have to pay attention to your thoughts, write them down, write down what you are worried about, notice what feelings they create and start trying to brainstorm and practice alternatives. It really is true that your thoughts are actually the stuff that confidence is made out of and I love that because it means that I can create confidence for myself and I don't external things to feel better.

So that's it for today. Let me know how this exercise goes. I love hearing from my listeners and if you ever want to email me, let me know whether or not the exercise worked well for you, whether or not you got stuck or if you are interested in learning about or hearing me talk about other topics on this podcast. You can email me at podcast@rachelhart.com and please if you found this episode useful and you liked what you heard today, please rate me on iTunes and leave feedback. I really would appreciate it. Alright so see you next week everybody.

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.