

## Ep #18: Understanding Your Emotions



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With Your Host

**Rachel Hart**

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## Ep #18: Understanding Your Emotions

You are listening to the *Take a Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 18.

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 friends, how are you? I'm really good. I was celebrating Cinco de Mayo this weekend with my friends in San Francisco. I was actually hanging out with my really good friend Ranjit, who I have known since I was 17, so forever, and let me tell you, we were friends in the days when I would have thought that Cinco de Mayo would be impossible to celebrate or at least pretty much no fun to celebrate unless I was getting tipsy, probably more like pretty drunk on margaritas.

I was actually talking with someone recently who is just starting this work and they were telling me how celebrations just don't feel complete without a drink, without a glass in your hand, and I can tell you that I can so relate to being in that place myself, to feeling like who can you possibly celebrate? I felt that way 110%. What am I supposed to do at a celebration? It's not a celebration if you don't have a drink in your hand. So for me to be where I am now, so far from that thought, so far from the idea that you need to have a drink to celebrate or to have fun, I really would not have thought it was possible.

I really wouldn't have. I really would have believed that if someone said that to be that they were either weird or fooling themselves, right? Lying to themselves. But I'm telling you guys, it is totally possible, and when out for Cinco de Mayo I had so much fun, I laughed so hard, I felt totally at ease, totally myself, and I was not drunk. I promise you there was definitely a point in my life where that just would have felt impossible.

I also wanted to shout out to Ranjit because I will tell you, every time he has me over, he makes me a special mocktail and you know what, I really

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appreciate that. I love it when someone thinks about me and knows that I'm not going to be drinking but wants to have something fun for me as well, it's really thoughtful, so thank you Ranjit. I really do appreciate it.

Okay, so this is the second episode that is all about the think-feel-act cycle. I really wanted to go more in depth on this because I've heard from so many people who really point to this piece of the work that I do, the idea that our thoughts create our feelings and our feelings drive our actions as really their kind of favorite part or the piece of this work that they're most excited about, and I think it's because so many of us spend so long feeling like I don't understand why I drink so much, right? It doesn't make sense. Our drinking can feel perplexing. It can feel like it just is something that we have no idea why we do the things we do, and this cycle will give you a framework and I think that's why so many of the people that I've been hearing from are really excited about it, because it's the first time that they have a framework to understand why they do what they do.

So the last episode, episode 17, I talked all about the first part of the cycle. I was talking all about your thoughts, so if you haven't listened to that, go back, check it out, really understand that piece before we get to today's topic, which is the second part of the cycle, your feelings.

I promise you that learning how to tell the difference between the different parts of the cycle is essential. If you want to understand why you drink more than you want, if you want to understand why you rely on alcohol in certain situations, and if you want to understand how to change your desire, you need to be able to tell the difference between each part of the cycle. I've said this before, but the think-feel-act cycle is not just an interesting concept. I mean, it is interesting, but it explains all of the results you have in your life, including why you are having a hard time changing how you drink, so it's so crucial that you understand it.

Alright, feelings. Let's dive in. What is a feeling? I should actually mention before we go any further, that I'm going to use the words feeling and emotion interchangeably. So the think-feel-act cycle could also be the think-have an emotion-act cycle, but it doesn't sound as nice. Think-feel-

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act. Okay, so what is a feeling? It's an emotional state, right? You're happy, you're sad, you're bored, you're lonely, you're jealous, whatever it is. You get the picture, it's an emotional state. But here's my next question: how do you know when you're experiencing a feeling or an emotion? I'll tell you, this is a question that usually stumps most people, and here's why. When most of us talk about our feelings, nine times out of ten, we are describing our thoughts.

Now, remember, if you're going to use the think-feel-act cycle to change your drinking, you've got to get really good at distinguishing between each part of the cycle, and that means you have to understand the difference between your thoughts and your feelings. So a couple days ago, I was working with someone who is trying to use these tools to change her drinking. So she is really aware that she drinks to avoid certain emotions, and one of those emotions for her and frankly for many of us, is anxiety.

She drinks so that she can stop feeling anxious in certain situations. So we were talking about a party that she was going to attend and the anxiety she was having around it, and first I wanted to know, what were the thoughts that she was having about the party, and she said, I haven't seen these friends in forever and I'm always so self-conscious around them, I feel like they're always judging me or talking about me behind my back and I hate feeling this way, I seriously think it would be easier to just not go to the party at all.

So these were all the thoughts that she was having about this party. Now, remember last week, we talked about how our thoughts may feel true, but they're not necessarily an objective assessment of the world. The truth was, she was invited to a party. Everything else, all the thoughts she was having about being judged by her friends and worrying that they say stuff about her, all of that, all of those thoughts were opinions or assessments she was having.

But here's the thing, they were also what was creating her anxiety. The party itself was neutral. The party didn't make her feel anything; the party doesn't create any feelings in her body. She doesn't have a feeling until she

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has a thought about the party, and all of her thoughts were creating a lot of anxiety for her.

Okay, so those are all her thoughts, everyone's going to judge me, I just feel so self-conscious around these people, so I asked her, when she thinks these thoughts, when she thinks about the party, how does she feel, and what she did is what almost everyone does, we all make the same mistake. I asked her when she thinks these thoughts, how does she feel, and you know what she did? She told me all about her thoughts again. I asked her, when she thinks these thoughts, how does she feel, and she started talking once about how she was worried about her friends and seeing them again and how they were going to judge her, it was the same litany of thoughts.

Here's the thing, we all do this. Ask someone how they are feeling and you rarely get an emotion. You rarely hear from people, I'm feeling sad or I'm feeling anxious or I'm feeling angry. Most of what you get is a story of what's going on, what's happening around them, their assessment of the world or themselves. So many of us conflate our thoughts and our feelings and it is so important to distinguish between the two if you are trying to use the think-feel-act cycle. You cannot conflate them, you must be able to distinguish, you must be able to see them as separate.

I talked about this in the last episode, but just as a recap, a thought is a sentence in your mind. It is the language that is running through your head. I talked about that electronic news ticker in Times Square where the headlines are just constantly going past, and usually these thoughts are judging and assessing the world around you, and you, for that matter.

Now, a feeling or an emotion is very different, and it goes back to my original question: how do you know when you're experiencing an emotion? Here's the answer, the answer is you know when you're experiencing an emotion because you feel it in your body. Every feeling, every emotion creates a distinct set of physical sensations that are located somewhere in your body. Now, most of us do not think about it this way, but any emotion you feel, it will change your breathing, it will change your heart rate. Maybe

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your breathing slows down or gets more shallow, maybe your heart rate speeds up, maybe different muscles tense or relax, parts of your body may flush or tingle or sweat. You get the picture. You know when you're feeling an emotion because you are experiencing it in your body and the way you experience it is through the distinct physical sensation that every emotion produces.

Now, most of us overlook it, and I did for a really long time. Unless that emotion is so intense, unless it's so intense and we're really feeling like our heart pounding in our chest or we're really feeling our stomach knotted up, most people when they talk about their feelings or emotions, they breeze right by what's happening in their body and they go straight to the thoughts that are running through their mind. But a feeling or an emotion is not a thought, it's not a sentence, it's a single word. It's happy or sad or angry or anxious or lonely or bored. That's what a feeling is. It's a single word, and all of these feelings can be located in your body and the way you do that is by paying attention to the physical sensations that you're having when you experience it.

Okay, so let's go back to that party example. When I pointed it out to her, when I pointed out that when I asked her what she felt she just gave me all her thoughts again, but her thoughts were not what she was feeling. Her thoughts were not her emotion. When I pointed this out, I asked her, so what does anxiety feel like, and the question stumped her, and I'll tell you, it's a really common - sort of think, I don't know, I don't know what this emotion feels like, because we're not practiced at thinking about our emotions in this way. We're not practiced at thinking about our emotions as a set of physical sensations, unless they're really, really, really strong.

But when she focused on it and when she started to think about it, she thought okay, I think when I feel anxious I have an elevated heart rate, I think when I feel anxious my breathing gets more shallow and maybe there's some tightness in my chest. Now, you might be thinking, so what? Why do we care about this? But you have to describe what's happening in your body. It is not enough to just tell yourself, well I just got to stop feeling

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anxious. I don't want to get in touch with myself, I just want to stop feeling anxious. But you have to get in touch with yourself, you have to start to understand what's happening in your body if you want to use the think-feel-act cycle.

The other thing is that there is a huge, huge benefit in being able to separate out what's happening in your body from what's happening in your mind, and you need to be able to separate out the two if you want to harness this cycle. When you separate out what's happening in your body versus what's happening in your mind, the first this is you're no longer going to be at the mercy of a negative emotion. And what I mean by that is you're no longer just going to feel overwhelmed by it.

The reason why is that when you give your brain something to do, you get a little bit of your power back, and trying to describe and notice the physical sensations in your body that accompany the emotion that you're feeling is the way you get your power back, because it gives your brain a purpose. Instead of just feeling anxiety, instead of just being at the mercy of it, all of a sudden your brain has a task.

Think about it this way, when you're feeling really anxious, what's normally happening is that you just keep thinking the same thoughts that are creating your anxiety over and over and over again and you don't even realize that you're doing it. You don't even realize that you're just recreating your anxiety every time you keep thinking the same thoughts, so your anxiety just grows. And soon enough, you start to look for an escape, you start to look for a way to run away from it, but with a task, your brain has something else to do. Instead of just ruminating on these thoughts that are creating your anxiety, all of a sudden it can pay attention to your body. So you're not just thinking these thoughts over and over and over again. Your brain has another purpose, so that's the first thing.

The second thing, the second benefit of being able to separate out what's happening in your body from what's happening in your mind is that the negative emotions themselves, whatever they are, they become less intense. So once you start to describe the negative emotions as physical

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sensations, you'll start to notice that they seem a bit more bearable, and there's a really simple explanation why. When most people think about a negative emotion, let's use anxiety, just the word, it just doesn't sound very good, right? It sounds really unpleasant. Think about negative emotions, like anger or irritation or anxiety, disappointment, whatever it is, it sounds unpleasant.

Now, I want you to think about an elevated heartbeat and tightness in my chest. It doesn't sound nearly as unpleasant, right? Because it's not nearly as dramatic. An elevated heartbeat and tightness in my chest kind of sounds a bit more bearable, than telling yourself over and over again, I'm anxious, I'm anxious, I'm anxious, right? So those emotions themselves will become a little bit less intense.

And the third reason why it's so useful to be able to separate out what's happening in your body from what's happening in your mind is that once you do that, then you can start to change how you feel. Once you are no longer just at the effect of how you feel, just feeling anxiety and feeling so overwhelmed by it, but you're actually able to look at your anxiety, you're actually able to describe your anxiety, then suddenly you can also look for the cause of your anxiety.

Now, the cause is always going to be your thoughts. But for most of us, we're so sort of wrapped up in the emotion; it's feeling so intense that we're not even able to look for the cause. But if you're able to give yourself a little bit of breathing room, if you're able to give yourself a little bit of space, then you can start to pinpoint the thoughts creating how you feel. And if you can pinpoint the thoughts, if you can observe them, then guess what? You can also start to question them. You can also start to think about changing them, and then you don't need to turn to something outside of you to mask how you're feeling.

So this is what I want you to do: when you're feeling a negative emotion this week, when you notice that negative emotion, instead of immediately thinking, I don't want to feel this way, or I hate this feeling, or this feels terrible, right? Those are all thoughts, those are all judgments. I want you to

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give your brain a task. I want you to tell your brain, okay, what does this feel like in my body? And at first I will tell you, that you might not come up with anything. Your brain is not used to thinking about your emotions in this way, but trust me, if you pay attention, you will start to notice it.

And once you're able to observe how it feels in your body and just focus on the physical sensations, don't judge them as good or bad, don't tell yourself that they're unbearable or uncomfortable, just notice what they are. What's happening to your heartbeat? What's happening to your breathing? What's happening to your muscles? What's happening to your hands or your feet or your head? What about your temperature? What other sensations do you notice? Pay attention to that. This is so key to help you distinguish between your thoughts and your feelings and not conflate the two. So try that out this week and let me know how it goes.

Alright, so before I go, I want to share with you a new free resource that I put together. If you are struggling to change your drinking, I created a worksheet, it's called Your Complete Picture, that I promise will completely change your perspective. I always tell people, if you only ever do one exercise about your drinking, do this one. It is that powerful; it is the exercise that changed everything for me. If you want to go grab it, all you need to do is go to [RachelHart.com/picture](http://RachelHart.com/picture) and download it now.

That's it everybody, thank you so much for listening. If you have any ideas or questions or topics that you would like to hear me talk about on the podcast, you can always email me at [podcast@RachelHart.com](mailto:podcast@RachelHart.com), otherwise I'll see you on the next episode.

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

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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](https://RachelHart.com/join) and start your transformation today.