

Ep #26: Turning Discomfort into Chaos



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Rachel Hart

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #26: Turning Discomfort into Chaos

You are listening to the *Take a Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 26.

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.

Hey everybody, how are you? I just got back from a week in Alaska, which was amazing. I wanted to go there for so long, and it did not disappoint. It is so vast and so green, and it has grizzly bears, and grizzly bear cubs. What more could you ask you? I have to tell you, sometimes when I am out and about something will happen during the day and I will think, oh my god, I have to tell you guys, I have to do a podcast about this. And I will tell you that I had one of those moments in Alaska.

We spent July 4th at Denali National Park and if you don't know Denali, it is this incredible national park in Alaska, it is huge. When I got there, I learned from a ranger that the park is about the size of Massachusetts, which still is a little hard for me to wrap around, but despite its size, despite how vast it is, there is only a single road in the park. Just one. That's it. They're trying to keep the park as wild as possible, so instead of letting everybody drive in with their private cars, you have to take a bus operated by the national park service.

And this, my friends, is where my story starts and where you come in on this bus. This podcast, it's all about changing your drinking and changing your desire to drink and how to handle urges and doing all of that with the think-feel-act cycle. But I always tell people, the very best part of doing this work is that it is a meta skill. It is so much bigger than just changing your drinking, so much bigger. If you can learn how to shift this habit, then you can apply all of the tools that I am teaching you to any problem that you have, no matter what. And so that is what I want to show you today. I want

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #26: Turning Discomfort into Chaos

to show you how I applied the tools that I learned to change my drinking to a problem that I faced on a bus in Denali.

Okay, so we're going to talk about two things today. One, what happens when you turn discomfort into chaos, and two, the muscle memory behind what I am teaching you. So I have been getting a lot of emails from you guys and I keep hearing a similar complaint from many of you. So a lot of you are writing me and saying you know, I'm trying to take a break, I'm trying to cut back, but I have all these urges and I hate having urges. Urges suck, they're so uncomfortable, they never go away, when are they going to go away? I just don't want to have any urges, can I do this without any urges? And you can't, urges are part of the habit cycle, and so a lot of you write to me, I just find myself giving in, it just happens, I can't handle these urges.

And if you can relate to this sentiment, then I want you to know that the reason you are struggling with your urges is twofold. First, you are turning your discomfort into chaos, and I'm going to explain in a bit what I mean by this, but that's a really important thing. You're turning your discomfort into chaos, and two, you are neglecting the fact that this work requires practice. You have got to practice this work, you cannot just listen to the podcast. You cannot just intellectually understand it or read my book and think, that sounds interesting, that's an interesting approach. You have to practice, you have to practice so you can build muscle memory.

So I want to talk first about this idea of turning discomfort into chaos. This is not a concept that I came up with, I actually first read about it in a book by a guy named Dusan Djukich. I hope I'm pronouncing his name properly. Anyway, the book it called Straight-Line Leadership, and here's what he has to say. Most people do not deal with their discomfort rationally. They escalate their discomfort into chaos. Chaos is the irrational, emotional place where your mind goes when you've melted down and can no longer think or make sense of the world. It usually happens when you start catastrophizing or when you exaggerate the drama of any given situation.

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #26: Turning Discomfort into Chaos

Now, I know what he's talking about there, it sounds kind of extreme, right? That idea of chaos sounds kind of extreme, but I think that you would be surprised how often - once you start paying attention, how often you notice your brain going into chaos. Because chaos sounds like this is impossible, everything is terrible, I can't take it, it's awful, it's the end of the world, I'm going to die, right? On the face of it, the idea of chaos sounds extreme, but I bet you would not be all that hard-pressed to think about a recent time in your life where you have entertained thoughts like these.

So before I go any further into this concept, because I know you guys love beating yourself up. I mean, I did too for a really long time and it's something I still have to work on, but if you're beating yourself up right now, please don't. All of us have thoughts like this, it's normal. This is part of how your brain evolved. It evolved to see danger around every corner. Thoughts like, this is terrible, this is the end of the world, I'm going to die, I need to get safe, right? Those were thoughts that kept us safe, so chaos happens to everyone. It's not a big deal. The question is, are you willing to learn and to practice another way forward?

So here is what happened to me on the bus in Denali. My husband and I boarded the bus that would take us about 50 miles into the park. It was a six hour drive there and back, but I didn't hesitate one bit. I wasn't nervous, and in fact, my brain envisioned this kind of lovely dirt road that would wind its way through the hills and valleys and all the beautiful landscapes I would see and all the wildlife I would see, and you know what, it was pretty much true. For a good part of the trip, that was pretty much what the road was like. It was lovely. And then about three quarters of the way through our journey, the road started to change. It was no longer this lovely road that was winding through valleys. The road started to climb, and I realized that we were going over a mountain pass, but not just any mountain pass.

This was a very, very narrow gravel road that had been carved into the side of a sheer cliff face with no guard rails and nothing to prevent us from plunging over the edge. Not to mention the fact that we were going around these hairpin twist and turns as we were climbing the mountain, and I will

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #26: Turning Discomfort into Chaos

tell you from my vantage point on the bus, I was about midway back. It looks like the road was so narrow that at some points on the road, it seemed like the bus could barely squeeze past the edges of these mind numbing vertical drops. And guess what? My mind was in total chaos. I was terrified. I've talked about this before, but I don't like heights. I find some of the roads in California to be a bit much to take for my east coast sensibilities, and this was a whole other universe, these roads.

So without even thinking, I was just so afraid that I closed my eyes. I just wanted to pretend that I wasn't there. I wanted to squeeze my eyes shut and tell myself that I was on a bus in Connecticut and there was nothing scary happening at all. I really wanted to just transport myself somewhere else. But here was the problem. I was not the only person on the bus. I was also not the only person on the bus who was scared. So there were other people who were literally verbalizing my thoughts. They were literally saying out loud, oh my god, we are going to die. So that did not help.

And then there were other people, like the guy next to me, who noticed that I may have been struggling a little bit and having a hard time, and started making jokes and saying like, I hope we don't fall off, that looks like a pretty tight curve, we definitely wouldn't survive it. And I'm sure there are also people like me, who were just sitting there with their eyes shut, pretending like this isn't happening, I don't want to be here, it's not real. So when it didn't work to just close my eyes and pretend like nothing was happening, I turned to my husband and I said in a very quiet voice, "Honey, I need you to talk to you. I need you to talk to me about anything. Anything, except what is happening right now."

And so he did, he started talking to me, he started telling me a funny story about a moose we had seen earlier in the day and I laughed a little bit with my eyes closed, but I was still really scared. And if you have listened to this podcast, I hope that what I am describing here sounds familiar to you. I have talked about this before, but when it comes to your emotions, including your desire to drink, there are several things you can do. You can react, you can resist, you can distract, and you can observe.

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #26: Turning Discomfort into Chaos

Now, I will tell you what I am describing what I was doing on the bus, first I was reacting. I was escalating my discomfort, I was escalating the fear I was experiencing into chaos. I was letting all the thoughts in my mind about this wasn't safe, we're going to die, there's no way this bus can fit on this road, who makes roads without guard rails anyway, why am I even here, I wish I wasn't here, this is terrible, how did I get myself into this, all of those thoughts were running rampant in my head.

So that's the first thing, I was reacting to the fear and just generating more of it with every new thought that I was thinking. But now, I was also trying to resist. I was also attempting to will the situation away, to squeeze my eyes shut as hard as I could and pretend that I wasn't there. But when that didn't work, I started trying to distract. I asked my husband to talk to me about something, to tell me about something else that was going on in the world, to tell me that story so that I wouldn't have to be fully present with what I was experiencing.

So I hope you notice that, the idea that in any situation, you can react, you can resist, you can distract, or you can observe. I was not doing the latter. Now, here's the thing. It worked kind of, I didn't freak out, I didn't make the bus driver stop the bus and let me out, I didn't start screaming, I didn't start crying. I made it to the top of the mountain pass, but I made it up there with all this additional discomfort, all this added pain. I created all this chaos, and then once all that chaos was created and I kept creating it with all my thoughts, then I started trying to resist the chaos and distract myself from the chaos, and you know what, it was exhausting.

I'll tell you, really by the time we got to the top of the mountain pass where there was an overlook, I felt like I had run up a hill behind the bus. I really just sitting there in that seat on the bus, just sitting there was so exhausting. Now here's the thing, once we got out of the bus, we were at this overlook, and I got out and there were these amazing views. The area, if you've ever been to Denali, it's an area called Polychrome Overlook, and it is spectacular. The mountains that you see in the distance, they are streaked with red and orange hues, and you can see all these glacial ice

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #26: Turning Discomfort into Chaos

formations on the top of the mountains and then you look out on this valley below, this rolling green tundra that is threaded with these things called braided rivers, that are made out of the melted water from the glaciers.

I mean, it was really, it was really stunning, and as I was looking out on this amazingly breathtaking scene, I thought, Rachel, wait, what the heck, what are you doing? What just happened back there? You were reacting and resisting and distracting your emotions, and you created all this chaos, have you learned nothing? Right? I had this moment where I just thought, what were you doing? Did you forget everything that you teach? Everything that you yourself learned?

And this is where the second part comes in. The second part is really about building muscle memory. You know, I have been practicing these tools for years now and I still have moments when I - in that moment, that initial moment of feeling a feeling, I will forget to apply them. And I will tell you now, it's usually when I'm trying something new. But here was the good news for me, in this situation, at some point, I was going to have to go back down the mountain to get home. There was only one road in the park, so the way we came up was the way we were going down. There was no side road that we could take and avoid going over this mountain pass. It was going to be part of my return journey.

And so once I realized that I hadn't applied these tools that I was really feeling my fear but then creating all this chaos around it, creating all this reaction to it and then resisting and then distracting, I realized okay, I can do something different on the way down. And so I told my husband, look, I'm going to try a little experiment on the way down, I'm going to try to keep my eyes open, I'm going to practice just feeling the discomfort, I want to try to tune into my body instead of resisting it and tuning out. So look, I might not be very talkative on the way down, so that's just a little heads up, it's just because I'm trying to focus on what's happening in my body.

And you know what, that's exactly what I did. I kept my eyes open the entire way on the way back down, and not only did I watch what was happening on the road and not only did I take in the scene, but I also

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #26: Turning Discomfort into Chaos

watched what was happening in my body. I took out my phone so that I could jot down notes about the sensations that I was feeling, and I noticed you know, my heart was pounding, I was having that flipping sensation in my stomach and my palms were sweating, so pretty standard sensations, I think a lot of you could probably identify, and I could identify with those sensations being connected to fear.

But here's the thing that's really interesting. As I paid closer attention to the fear in my body, I started to see the fear in a way that I had never seen it before, and I noticed much more detail in other sensations that were also happening in my body, but that were a little bit more subtle. So I noticed that I really wanted to clench my thighs together, I really felt like my inner thighs were just - it was like they were being pulled together. And I also felt this really strange tingling sensation in my feet, and as I watched that, I noticed that it was slowly starting to travel up to my calves. And it was weird, I never noticed either of these sensations before when I felt fear.

And then I kept doing it, I kept paying attention, I kept noticing what was happening in my body, and it wasn't until almost the very end that I realized, hey, you're not breathing. I probably was breathing, but I was taking such shallow breaths that I was barely getting any oxygen in. So I did that, I kept noticing what was happening in my body, and I just kept asking myself, are these sensations tolerable? And you know what, they were. As I looked out the window and as we travelled around these hairpin turns and passed the sheer drop-offs, I realized that what I was feeling was tolerable, but also over and over again I just kept reminding myself, I kept silently saying to myself, I am willing to feel whatever is happening in my body right now. I am willing to feel these sensations.

I must have said that phrase 30 times as we were travelling down the mountain, but you know what, it really helped. It really helped to keep me focus and to keep my eyes open and also to pay attention to what was happening. And I'll tell you, the result was so much better because I wasn't turning my discomfort, I wasn't turning my fear into chaos. I was just being present with it. I allowed myself to feel it, and everything I was feeling in my

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #26: Turning Discomfort into Chaos

body turned out to be tolerable. I didn't love it, I wouldn't choose to have my heart pounding or my stomach flipping or this strange kind of inner tension nor tension in my inner thighs or the tingly sensation in my feet, but it was tolerable. I could handle it.

And the way I was able to handle it was by using focus. I focused on my discomfort, I focused on what was happening in my body, instead of reacting or resisting or distracting, or everything that I had done on the way up to the overlook. And this is what you have to do with your discomfort around not drinking. Instead of reacting or resisting or distracting, you have to use your focus to allow that discomfort. You have to watch it, you have to be present with it, you have to observe it and allow it.

Only then can you ask yourself, okay, is what I'm feeling - is this urge to drink, is it tolerable? Can I tolerate what I'm feeling or do I need to give in? Do I need to make the decision to have a drink because it's so intolerable? And most of you right now aren't doing that, right? And just because you're not practiced at it. What you're doing instead, you're turning the discomfort of not drinking because there is discomfort there, you're turning that discomfort into chaos. You are telling yourself this is impossible, it won't work these urges are unbearable, everyone is judging me, I'm going to be bored, my life is never going to be fun again, right? You have all of these thoughts that are turning the discomfort that you are feeling into chaos, and so it's no wonder that you're really struggling with your urges.

So what I want to offer to you is why not do something different? Why not instead just let your discomfort be discomfort? Why not let the urge be an urge that you are willing to feel? It is so much more manageable that way, and not only that, not only is it more manageable, not only do you not feel exhausted at the end of it, but there is a reward waiting for you. There is, and for me going down that mountain, instead of closing my eyes, I got to experience the view. I got to take it all in.

Now, I was still afraid. I still had discomfort, but I also got to see this amazing scene unfold, that I hadn't been able to witness on the way up the mountain, and I will tell you, this is so kind of cliché, but it actually

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #26: Turning Discomfort into Chaos

happened. On the way down, there was this spectacular that I would have missed, had my eyes been closed. But not only that, once I made it down, oh my god, I was so proud of myself. I really was, I kept saying to my husband, you know, I kept my eyes open the entire time, I didn't close them once, I watched my fear and my fear didn't win.

I mean, I really felt great. It felt great to come out on top, to realize that I really was stronger than I thought I was. And the thing is, I know that you're not necessarily doing this work because you want to be able to go up and down a mountain pass, but there is a reward waiting for you too. When you allow the urge to drink to be there and not act on it, what you are doing is you are not fueling the habit cycle. You are starting to slowly shift the habit, and it's a habit that isn't serving you, right? So there is a reward in that. You are building this muscle memory of not being at the mercy of an urge to drink, of not feeling like you're drinking against your will or you don't even know how it happened, or you only meant to have two glasses and somehow it turned into four. That is a reward waiting for you.

When you accept discomfort and you don't escalate it into chaos, only then can you start taking meaningful action towards your goal. Chaos keeps you stuck. Focus, that's the opposite, focus moves you forward. Allowing the discomfort of not drinking, allowing the discomfort of an urge will help you retrain your brain. In fact, it is the only way to retrain your brain. And here's the thing, if you can learn how to do this with your drinking, you can apply this skill to anything.

I will tell you, I have watched my life expand beyond my wildest dreams since I started learning these tools and took a break from drinking because now I have these tools at my disposal to help me solve any problem that comes my way. So I hope that you will really think today about areas in your life, maybe not just your response to urges, where you might be escalating discomfort into chaos and how you can use focus to change that. You can use focus to let discomfort be discomfort, let an urge be an urge.

Ep #26: Turning Discomfort into Chaos

Alright, please keep the emails coming, I really love hearing from you guys. You can always drop me a line at podcast@rachelhart.com, and I will see you all next week.

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 and download it now.

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.

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart