

Ep #30: I Don't Do Emotions



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With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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Ep #30: I Don't Do Emotions

You are listening to the *Take a Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 30.

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 guys, how are you? How is your day going? Listen, we are going to start off today's episode by doing things a little differently. I want to start out with an exercise. So pause for a second, and try to think about your happiest memory. It can be anything. It can be the moment that you walked down the aisle, it can be the birth of your child, it can be when you got your acceptance letter into college, or you got news that you got the job you really wanted, or it can even just be a really perfect memory that you have of spending time with the people that you love most in the world. But think of that memory.

Okay, so do you have one in mind? I really want you to take yourself back to that moment. Really see yourself there. Really imagine what was happening around you. Get into it. Now, I bet maybe a little smile crept across your face, right? Isn't it interesting how just thinking about a happy memory can product an emotion? Does that sound familiar?

So for me, when I do this exercise, I think about my wedding. I got married last October and I will tell you it was so much fun. It really was, and I never really spent much time dreaming about my wedding or thinking about my wedding day. It wasn't something that I really thought was all that important. But I will tell you, having all your friends and family in one place dancing and laughing and celebrating, it was way better than I expected. And P.S, because I know some of you out there are wondering, yes there was a lot of booze at my wedding. We had an open bar, and no, I did not drink, and no, I did not for a second feel like I was missing out or deprived.

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And I just want to say, isn't that insane? If you had told me years earlier that I wouldn't drink on my own wedding day, I would have thought, "Well, that's depressing." And instead on the actual day of my wedding, the idea of having a drink, it didn't even cross my mind. It just wasn't even there. My desire was gone, and I will tell you, that still kind of blows my mind.

Anyway, I want you to go back to the memory that you chose, and you were really thinking about it, really trying to put yourself back in that memory, but now whatever that memory is for you, I want you to strip away all of the emotion from it. So strip away all the joy, all the excitement, all the delight, all the love. Whatever it was, whatever emotions you were feeling at the time, strip it all away, get rid of them.

Now what are you left with? Just this flat, unremarkable set of events. No depth, no distinction, just another moment in the tens of millions of moment that make up your life, right? I mean, think about it that way. Emotions are what make our lives technicolor. Without them, everything is just neutral, right? It's just a set of neutral circumstances.

Now, the reason I wanted to start out with this exercise is because a lot of you out there, I keep hearing something really similar. You like the think-feel-act cycle, you really enjoy having a framework that you can use to understand your desire to drink, but you keep telling me the same thing. "I just don't do emotions. They're not really my thing."

But here's the thing. When it comes to the feeling part of the think-feel-act cycle, when it comes to your emotions, and I'm telling you to start observing them and sit with them, you're like, "Nope, no thank you, I would like to skip over that part." You can't do it. Right? Go back to that memory from earlier. You don't want to actually live a life without emotions. You don't actually want a life that is flat and without any depth. You don't want every moment to be the same as the next. No one wants to live a life that is devoid of emotion and just a neutral set of facts.

We want to feel emotions. Even those of you who keep telling me, "I just don't do emotions." You want to feel them. The thing is, when you are

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saying, "I don't do emotions", what you really mean is, "I don't do negative emotions." Do you see this? It is such an important distinction. I have not met anyone ever that wants to erase the happiness, the joy, the excitement, the curiosity, the laughter from their life. But I do know a lot of people who when it comes to negative emotions, they don't want anything to do with them. They want them all gone. And that is what you are saying when you say, "I don't do emotions." What you mean is, "I don't do negative emotions."

And that's what I want to focus on today, because if you are going to not just intellectually understand the think-feel-act cycle, which is fine, intellectually it's an interesting concept, if you are actually going to use it as a tool that you can employ to change your desire to drink, you have to understand what your reluctance is to doing the emotion part of it. What is your reluctance to feeling?

Right? Why are you just open to the good and the positive? Why aren't you open to the entire spectrum of human emotions? Because there is an entire spectrum. And the truth is, no matter what you think right now, if you learn how to use the think-feel-act cycle as a tool and not just a really interesting concept, you will discover something so powerful that you can handle whatever emotion comes your way. It's not a big deal, you don't need to escape from it by pouring yourself a drink.

So I think there are three main reasons why people will say, "I just don't do emotions." One is the belief that certain emotions are wrong. Two, the belief that emotions in general are just these kind of irrational things that don't make sense. Three, the belief that some emotions are just too strong. And I'm going to go through all of these three and explain all of them, but first before we go there, I just want to cover what is an emotion, and why should you care about your emotions if you are trying to change your drinking.

Now, for some who have been listening to the podcast, this will be a review, but it never hurts to hear this over and over again, because I am asking you to consider your emotions in a very different way. First, I use the

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word emotion and feeling interchangeably, so the think-feel-act cycle really could just as easily be called the think-have an emotion-act cycle, but it doesn't really roll off the tongue, so we say think-feel-act. But for the purpose of this work, a feeling is an emotion and an emotion is a feeling.

So a feeling or an emotion is a word we use to describe a state of mind that you can sense in your body. And I'm talking about things like happy, sad, bored, anxious, lonely, angry. Notice all of these are single words. When you are using the think-feel-act cycle, you really need to be able to start practicing distinguishing from the thoughts you are thinking and the emotions you are feeling.

So for example, I feel ugly is not an emotion. Ugly is not an internal state of mind, it's a judgment. The thought, "I feel ugly" produces an emotion like shame or embarrassment. But you need to be able to distinguish between the thoughts that you are thinking and the emotions that those thoughts are producing.

Now, remember, understanding how you feel identifying your emotional state is really important if you want to change your drinking because drinking is a quick and easy fix to change how you feel. So if you want to change your drinking, you better be able to identify how you were feeling in the first place. Because the moment that you interrupt the habit cycle, the moment that you say no to your desire to drink, that moment when you don't immediately act on an urge, you are going to feel a little anxious, a little restless, a little discomfort. So right there, you need to be open to the idea of feeling a negative emotion.

But now consider this. Let's say before that desire to drink appeared, you were already feeling a negative emotion, right? You're heading to that party and already feeling a little anxious. You got home from work and were already feeling stressed. Maybe feeling lonely or bored. Well, then you've got a double dose of negative emotions to deal with, because you've got the negative emotion you were starting with and then the negative emotion that you'll feel when you interrupt the habit cycle when you're trying to

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change your drinking and you're sitting with an urge and not responding to it.

But now do not freak out. This is okay, this is why we have the think-feel-act cycle. But not only can you understand your emotions and what really creates them, but more importantly, so you won't be at the mercy of your emotions. You won't be consumed by loneliness or boredom or stress because you have a tool to observe and change how you feel.

Now, some of you have had huge success with this. I know because when you figure it out, you cannot wait to email me, and I get these emails that are basically like, "Oh my god, I get it. I allowed myself to feel what I was feeling, I sat with it, I really observed what was happening in my body. I watched it, I didn't try to have a drink, I didn't push it away, and you know what, eventually it passed. It was mind blowing, I felt so much more in control."

I get so many emails like this, when people discover that a negative emotion, it isn't great, they don't love it, but it's way more tolerable than when they're constantly resisting it. People love sharing this with me. But others of you are still like, "I don't have time to sit with my emotions Rachel, I don't know what kind of life that you think I'm leading, but I do not have a meditation room, I don't even have a spare moment to myself, I'm not really into all this touchy feely stuff, so yes, let's skip this part."

And I want you to know I get it. I really, really do. For a long time, I was in your shoes. Feelings were not my thing. In large part, because I felt unhappy so much of the time, that the idea of sitting and observing my unhappiness felt like torture. Why would I do that? So what did I do? I just kept distracting myself, and not just with drinking. I was really good at keeping myself super busy. I would often be the last one to leave work, I would take regular snack breaks during the day, go across the street to Starbucks and get a coffee, get a cookie, have a cigarette. And then when I finally did decide to go home, I would turn the TV on and it would be on all night.

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At the same time, I would be glued to my Blackberry. And on weekends, if I was really miserable, you know what I would do? I would just go to sleep. I know this sounds crazy but I've always been a champion sleeper, and I discovered early on in my life that sleep was a really good way to slip into unconsciousness. It was a really good way to escape how I was feeling at that moment. But here's the thing. Of course what I really thought the best way, the best way to escape was to pour a drink, right? Give yourself that influx of dopamine that would tell my brain that it was having a good time, when really I wasn't. Really, I was unhappy.

And more often than not, I started to see that pouring a drink to feel better, it was really about just helping me numb myself to my life. And I know some of you are thinking, "Yes that makes sense, but I don't really think that I'm using a drink to escape a negative emotion. I truly just think that it's routine and it's a habit." But I want you to ask yourself this: if you think that you're not using a drink in that way, and you think you're just doing it because it's routine and habit, it's just fun, it's just what your friends do, it's part of date night, it's part of every celebration, what would happen - how would you feel in say, a situation where you went out to dinner and you were the only one at the table who didn't order a drink?

Or you went out for date night and your husband had a drink and you didn't? How would you feel? Maybe a little insecure, maybe a little bored, maybe deprived or defensive or judged? And if that's the case, then you need to pay attention to the negative emotion that you're trying to avoid. Right? So whether you are trying to move away from the negative emotion you are currently feeling or whether you are trying to avoid the negative emotion you think you may feel if you don't drink, you have to pay attention to your negative emotions if you want to change your drinking.

So let's look at the first belief that I think holds people back and when they say, "I don't do emotions." The first belief is certain emotions are wrong. This comes up when people will say to me things like, "I just feel like good people don't get angry" or "I really should be above this petty jealousy" or "I

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don't know, it just seems weak to admit to being sad" or "Everyone expects me to be happy."

The truth is, emotions are just emotions. No emotion is wrong, including the negative ones. And the only reason that you think an emotion is wrong is because you have so much judgment tied up in what it means to feel some of them. You think some emotions are a sign that you're weak or immoral or needy. But there's nothing wrong with any emotion, and not only that, nothing has gone wrong when you feel a negative emotion.

All it means is that the think-feel-act cycle is at work. There is no emotion you shouldn't have or shouldn't feel, and there is no emotion out there that anyone is immune from, unless you are a sociopath. Every emotion you feel has a job. It is giving you clues as to what you are thinking, how you are assessing and judging what is either happening around you right now or what has happened in the past.

Why you are angry, why you are jealous, why you are sad. And once you are willing to look at it, you can start to find the cause, which is always your thoughts. But if you tell yourself that an emotion is wrong right out of the gate, you'll just fight feeling it. You will just resist it all the time instead of being able to understand what's behind it. Nothing has gone wrong when you have a negative emotion. Nothing. But you are telling yourself the opposite.

When you feel certain negative emotions, you have gotten in the habit of believing that you have a problem. You shouldn't feel this way, and not only that, it needs to be immediately fixed. Now, here's the thing. You can strive to be more compassionate, more loving, more joyful. You can strive to have more positive emotions, but you don't do that by being unwilling to acknowledge what you're truly feeling in the first place. You don't do that by saying, "I just don't do anger. I don't do sadness." That's not how you do it.

You do it by being willing to experience everything and being open to everything and know that your emotions are just giving you clues to what

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you're thinking, and then use the think-feel-act cycle. So this brings me to the second point.

That is the belief that some emotions are irrational, and maybe some of you out there think all emotions are irrational. So we'll tell ourselves emotions don't make any sense. They're illogical. This person is having a disproportionate response to what is happening. And I think that so many people feel this way because no one has ever given us a framework to understand where our emotions come from.

They just seem like this mysterious force that appears at will or out of the blue sometimes, and not only that, but without a framework to understand why you feel emotions, it can be really challenging to understand why someone else is reacting the way they are.

A lot of times we look at somebody else's emotional response and it doesn't line up with our own response and we just think, "Wow, they're being crazy. What's going on here?" So you see this all the time, especially in relationships, right? Where people are having different emotional responses to the same set of events. I mean, I'll just say, walk into a kitchen anywhere and see dishes in the sink and you know that there is a different set of emotional responses that people are having about those dishes.

One person is so annoyed, and the other person is like, "Dishes? I didn't notice." And the thing that happens is that each person is perplexed by the other person and their emotional response and we don't understand why don't they feel the way I do? Why don't they agree? Why aren't they also annoyed, right? And if you're the one annoyed, you're really not understanding why your spouse is so blasé.

And so the other person's emotions will seem irrational because they don't match up with what you are experiencing. But when you understand the think-feel-act cycle and you realize that it's not the dishes in the sink that are creating how you feel, it's each person's unique thoughts about the

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dishes. Suddenly, everyone's individual emotional response starts to make a lot more sense.

You know what? I also think that even our own emotional responses at times can feel irrational because so many of us are so disconnected from our thinking. So I don't know if you've ever had the experience of breaking something, maybe you dropped a glass or you knocked something over that really wasn't all that important but you burst into tears. I know that's happened to a lot of you out there, it's happened to me.

And what I think is happening, it feels irrational, it feels like this disproportionate response, why am I having such a strong emotional response to something that's not a big deal? But the reason is because so many of us are so disconnected with how we're feeling and what we're thinking, that how we're feeling and our emotions are just building up and building up and building up until it spills over into something that was seemingly small.

So it's that idea of carrying around all day long, "God, I'm screwing everything up. I'm screwing everything up", but being kind of disconnected, not fully aware of this thought. And then you're carrying it around all day and you come home from work and you break the glass and it just - it's like you unleash an emotion that doesn't make any sense compared to what you were doing.

And this really brings me to the final reason why I think a lot of people will say, "I don't do emotions", and it's the belief that certain emotions are just too strong. It's so common to think of holding our emotions at bay, right? We have to hold our emotions at bay, otherwise we're going to open up the floodgates, and if we open up the floodgates, then our emotions are going to take us over. And you'll hear lots of language when it comes to our emotions, like being overwhelmed or submerged, or succumbing to how we're feeling.

It's this idea that if we step into the pool, we might drown. So the question is why do so many of us have such resistance to feeling how we feel? And I

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think it goes back to what we learned, or actually more importantly, what we didn't learn as kids. If nobody teaches you what an emotion is, or how it affects your body when you're little, the physical manifestations of an emotion, right?

Everything that's happening in your body, your heart rate changing, your muscles tensing, your breathing changing, things happening in your digestive system, pressure or tenseness, or tightness, whatever it is that you're feeling, whatever it's happening in our body, it can be kind of frightening if you're little. Like what is this? What's going on?

Think about it. As a kid, you would feel an emotion and you have no idea what is happening to you or why you feel the way you do. And someone may have said you know, "It's okay, you're just sad or you're angry", but no one really explained it beyond that. Nobody ever told you, "Hey, you know what, nothing's gone wrong, all those changes in your body are totally normal, that's what it feels like. You'll feel different emotions in your body and sometimes it can be uncomfortable but the emotion can't hurt you."

I mean no one explains that part. The emotion can't hurt you. It will pass, especially if you don't resist it. It will go away. And so many of us actually have the opposite experience. We have the experience of growing up and we're specifically told to hold in how we're feeling, right? "Don't cry, stop behaving that way. Stop having that feeling."

Or, we saw adults around us who were struggling with their own emotions and then we modeled our behavior accordingly. Here's the thing, sitting with your emotion does not require a lot of time, it does not require a meditation room, it doesn't require anything more than just being open to asking yourself, "What am I feeling? What emotion do I think I am experiencing? And what is happening in my body?"

That's it. And it sounds like a pretty small thing, but I'll tell you that for a lot of you, this is really challenging, and it is challenging because you have this belief about yourself that you don't do emotions, that emotions aren't your thing. But you can do this. You can ask yourself, "What am I feeling? And

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what is happening in my body?" You can start to learn how to observe your emotions, and you can do it anywhere.

You don't need to be sitting cross-legged on a cushion. This practice, it will be challenging if you are used to resisting your emotions, and especially if you are used to getting a quick and easy fix to change how you feel. It will be challenging. But it is totally possible. It is something that you can practice, you can build this muscle. You can just keep asking yourself, "Alright, I'm feeling tense, where exactly? Is it my shoulders? Is it my jaw? Am I clenching anything? What are my hands doing? How am I breathing? What's happening to my heart rate? Do I feel pressure anywhere? Do I feel tightness anywhere? Am I upright? Am I slouched? What is my body doing?"

And the reason that you do this is because if you can start to observe what is happening while you are experiencing an emotion, you can start to work with it. You can start to have some distance and you can start to ask yourself, "Okay, I may not like how I feel right now, but is this tolerable? Do I need to immediately solve it? Do I need to immediately move away from it and cover it up and numb myself?"

Because that is the habit you are in, especially when you are using pouring a drink to either change the current emotion that you are feeling, or avoid the emotion you think you will feel if you don't drink. Your emotions are so tied up in why this becomes a habit, but they are also the way out. They are also the way that you start to unlearn this habit. So be open to your emotions, be willing to experience all of them.

You don't want to live in a life without emotions, you don't want to live in a life where everything is just neutral, but you have to be open to both the good and the bad. You have to be open to both the positive and the negative, and when you are, trust me, it will change everything.

Alright everybody, thanks for listening. Keep sending me those emails, and I'll tell you, if you figure this out, I know you're going to want to shoot me one. So it's podcast@rachelhart.com. Otherwise, I'll catch you next week.

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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.