

Ep #44: Planning for the Holidays



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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 44.

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 everybody. If you are in the US, if you are listening in the United States, this is Thanksgiving week. Yes, it is my favorite holiday, I love Thanksgiving. We get to sit down and be with our family and be grateful for everything we have in life and be thankful and get into a ton of arguments.

Right? I mean, I really do love Thanksgiving, but you know, the holidays, it tends to be a time where we're very excited for the holiday season, and we're also a little apprehensive because you put all the family in the room together and sometimes you don't leave the room unscathed. And I have so many people that I work with who will say, "I cannot imagine not being able to drink or taking a break during the holidays. How would I possibly deal with my family? What would I do? That would just be torture." Right? "I have to have a glass of wine" or "I have to have a beer if I'm going to make it through the holidays."

So what I want to offer to you is that of course the decision to drink is always yours and you can certainly rely on a drink as your way to deal with family stress and tension and arguments during the holidays, or you can try something different, and if you right now are taking a break, trying something different is going to be incredibly important. So what most people do in preparation for the holidays is they sit back and they think, "I really hope that this year is different. I really, really hope that this year is not a repeat of what has happened in the past." And then the holidays happen, and normally, things turn out to be the same.

So why is that? Why does that happen? Why do so many of us sit back and be like, "I really hope this year is different. Please let it be different" and

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then it's the same. Now, the reason that it happens is because there is a very big difference, a huge difference in fact, between hoping and planning for a different outcome. Now, I want you to think about this. Hoping for a different outcome and planning for a different outcome. When it comes to the holidays, how often have you been in the first camp? How often have you been hoping? Really hope it goes differently versus how often have you been planning? How often have you been taking action for a different outcome? That is a very different camp to be in; planning versus hoping.

Hoping, it's kind of like dreaming, right? Dreaming that something different will happen, or wishing for a different outcome, and the problem with this is that hoping and dreaming and wishing, they're all super passive. Now, you may feel like you're taking action because you are looking into the future in your mind and thinking thoughts where you hope that it could be different or you dream it could be different, but you're not really taking action. Like, what are you actually doing other than just crossing your fingers? You're really just spending that split second of a moment every time you think of the holidays and thinking to yourself, "I hope this year is different" and then you move on. Right? And then you go about your day.

The other problem is that hoping and dreaming and wishing, they're all safe. They're super comfortable. There's no risk involved because you're not really doing anything. You're just crossing your fingers and hoping, "Gosh, I hope my habits don't kick in."

Now, planning is different. Planning is active. It requires action. If you are making a plan, you have to on purpose identify obstacles and on purpose identify solutions and then try those solutions out and see if they work. And most importantly, you're also working towards a concrete result. Right? Planning is very, very different than hoping, and so that's what we're going to talk about today, how to plan for the holidays so that you can have a different experience.

Now, I don't know about you, but ever since I left home for college and then came back for the first time, and for me that very first time was my very first Thanksgiving after I had left for college. I returned and I felt like I just

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immediately switched into high school mode, right? Like high school Rachel just came right back, but now here's the thing. It happened all throughout college, and then it kept happening in my early twenties, and then my mid-twenties, and then my late twenties, and then a little bit into my thirties, and it's like, "Wait, what's going on here? Why is it every time that I step foot into my parent's home that I revert into being a teenager? What is going on?" And I know a lot of you can relate to this.

The reason this happens, the reason that you revert into being a more childlike version of yourself - actually you know what, I wish it was childlike. It's not childlike. It is teenager-like, because childlike would be better. But it's really like thirteen-year-old version of me. Thirteen-year-old version of Rachel was very cranky, and very short with people, and very sarcastic, right? The reason why this happens is because your brain likes habits, and growing up, all of us develop habits connected to how we interact with our siblings and our parents and our relatives because we're around them all the time. So we practice building these habits, we do the repetition over and over and over again, right?

And remember, your brain loves habits. Your brain just thinks, "Yes, this is super efficient. I can just go into autopilot mode. Habits are great." Because remember, your brain doesn't care if a habit is good or bad, it doesn't care if the habit is giving you a positive result or a negative result. It just cares about being efficient. So you go home, and you're around your family, you might even not be going home, you might just be in a totally different place but around your family, and your brain's like, "I know what to do, I know how we act around these people, this is perfect" and the habit is activated, and you are back to being your teenage self.

And this is why planning is important, because if you want to do something different, especially if it has to do with habits, you have to take action. You cannot sit back and hope that something is going to change. You cannot sit back and hope that your drinking is going to change, and you cannot sit back and hope that your holidays are going to be different. So that's what

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we're going to talk about today. I'm going to walk you through a plan that you can use.

Now listen, do not make the mistake of listening to this once and trying to do this in your head. If you want to actually use this plan, you are going to have to go back probably, unless you're you know, at your desk right now with paper and pen in front of you, you're going to have to go back and write out answers to all of these questions. You're going to have to put it down on paper. Do not make the mistake of doing this in your head. This is your brain just saying, "I get it, let's be efficient. It takes energy to write. I've got to find the pad, I've got to find the pen."

Do not do it in your head because writing it down gives you distance. It allows you to observe the plan. Once you see it on paper, you can look at it, you can re-write it, you can change it, you can ask yourself, "Will it work?" When you're trying to do this all in your head, very difficult to do. In fact, impossible to do.

Then, once you have a plan, listen, that's not enough. One of the things I'm going to talk to you today is about how you can visualize how you want things to go before you actually go there. And I'll tell you that for a long time, I dismissed visualization, and I thought, "I don't know, I don't think that's for me. That's not really my thing."

And it's really interesting because most of us know that visualizing is key in elite level sports. Athletes use it all the time, but a lot of non-elite athletes, just regular Joes like you and me, we don't use it and why is that? And I think a long time I just thought like, "I don't know, that seems silly" or "It seems kind of unproductive" but here's the thing. Visualizing is just rehearsing something in your brain and remember, habits need repetition. So the more you can rehearse something, the better. And so that's going to be a second piece to ensuring that you not only have a plan, but you're practicing ahead of time for how you want things to be different.

You have lots of repetition of interaction with your family members. Not only over the course of your life, but over holidays. So think about how many

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years you have practiced the same interactions over and over and over again. That's what we're trying to interrupt here. Visualizing is basically like flexing a new muscle before you get there. It's your brain rehearsing having a different interaction with your mother, having a different interaction with your dad, or your siblings, or your mother in law, father in law. It's practicing something different, it's flexing that new muscle before you get there.

So I want you to notice as we go through the questions that all of these questions are focusing on you and not your family members, because this is about making a plan for you. When you use the think-feel-act cycle, you are focusing on how that cycle is working for you. The only person that you can control, the only cycle that you can control and work to learn how to do that is your own.

Now, most of the time, especially when we're thinking about the holidays, this is not where our focus is. Our focus is often on "I really hope that others are going to be different", right? "I really hope that my sister or my brother is not going to you know, start problems with me because she always starts problems" or "I really hope that my mother in law, she's going to keep her opinions to herself", right? That's where our focus so often is. It's on how we want other people to be different and behave differently.

But listen, these things are entirely out of your control. You are not in charge of their think-feel-act cycle. You cannot control how they act, but you can work to change how you act, how you feel and what you are thinking. You can work to create new habits for you.

So there are two parts of this exercise. If you're not in a place right now where you can write everything down and answer the questions, that's okay. I want you to go back and listen to this podcast again and sit down and take time. Make sure you write this out. The first part is going to be focused on how to handle obstacles, and the second part is going to be preparing for how you want to feel on purpose.

So we're going to be planning for obstacles and also preparing for how you want to feel on purpose. So the very first part on how you want to show up

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during the holidays, there are three questions and they're really focused on this first piece, on obstacles. What I want you to do is write down your top three obstacles during the holidays. What are you already worried is going to happen? Maybe it's that your brother in law is going to bring up politics, maybe it is that you and your sister are going to get snippy with each other, maybe it's that people are going to comment about your cooking.

Whatever it is, pay attention to what your brain is already worried about. You might have more than three, but for now, focus on your top three. What are the top three obstacles that you think are going to get in the way of having the kind of holiday that you want? Write those down.

Now, the second question is I want you to identify what hasn't worked in the past when you encountered these obstacles. What has not worked? If someone made a comment about your cooking, was snapping at them, did that not work in the past? Did bottling it up inside and silently stewing, did that not work in the past? What didn't work when you previously encountered these obstacles? I want you for each of them to really think about - really think, what did you do that wasn't successful? Because you have to identify what wasn't successful if you want to figure out how to do something different.

Now, the third question is I want you for each of these obstacles to think, "How would the best version of myself handle these obstacles differently? The best version of me, what would she or he do differently? How would they handle them differently? Who do you want to be in those moments?"

Now, because here's the thing I want you to really consider. I want you to go into this holiday planning that nothing will change, that these obstacles will be there, that your brother in law who wanted to talk politics last year is going to want to talk politics again. So think about - we're not hoping that everything changes and we don't have to deal with these obstacles. We're thinking about how will I show up differently? How will the best version of myself handle these obstacles differently when they do show up?

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So write that down for each of the three obstacles. What would you do differently? And you can just think about it like, what could you do in the moment when faced with the obstacle that would make you feel proud later? Now, here is the thing. This is where the visualizing comes in. You have to practice doing this. You have to actually practice thinking of the obstacle coming up, imagining that obstacle, imagining that scenario, and then imagining, visualizing doing the different thing. You need to rehearse this in your head.

This might feel awkward and foreign and uncomfortable for you, especially if you've never visualized before, but think of it this way. Your brain is just getting extra practice, right? It's just rehearsing the moment ahead of time, and the more that you can do that, the more that you have a couple minutes to spare in the lead up to the holidays and think, "Okay, so these are the obstacles, here's how the best version of myself would handle them. Now let me just practice visualizing that happen."

It doesn't take very long, right? You can practice for a minute thinking of those three obstacles and how you would handle it differently, what you would say, how you would act, how you would respond, what you would do. But just don't neglect this piece because you want to give your brain that rehearsal time ahead of time.

So that's the first part of the exercise. The first part is handling obstacles, but the second part, and this is my favorite part, is preparing how you want to feel on purpose. Thinking about how do you want to feel over the holidays. So many of us, we want to feel all these amazing emotions. It's a time for family to be together and to celebrate and to come together and to be grateful and to share traditions, and most of us go into it just kind of hoping that these feelings are going to appear, hoping that we're going to feel this way.

But what I want you to do, because you now know about the think-feel-act cycle, you know that you can start to practice generating these emotions on purpose. You can plan ahead of time how you want to feel. so the very first question is, just identify how do you want to feel during this holiday. Come

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up with your top emotion. Maybe it is relaxed, present, grateful, joyful, enthusiastic, connected, loved, curious, whatever it is, how do you want to feel? Pick that top emotion.

Once you've done that, what I want you to do is pick a question that you can use to try to generate that emotion. Now, questions are incredibly powerful. When we give our brain a question, it's like giving our brain a task. The brain wants to answer it. It wants to find an answer, and if you can use powerful questions, you can send your brain on a mission to find an answer - which is just a thought by the way - find a thought and an answer that's going to serve you.

And so your question could be something like, "How can I practice more love right now?" if love was your top emotion that you wanted to feel during the holiday. "How can I find more gratitude in this situation?" "What would curiosity do right now?" "What would joy do right now?" "How can I create more connection in this moment?" So all of these are powerful questions. All of these questions, what you're doing is you're taking that top emotion that you've identified, the one that you want to feel on purpose during the holiday, and then you're picking a powerful question that you can use to help put your brain on a mission.

So you can modify any of the questions that I offered up as examples here, but the idea is having a question by your side that you can use in the moment. It's a very, very powerful tool that you can use. So select the question you want to practice, and here's the thing. Start practicing it ahead of time, and the best way to do this is to start writing it. I don't know if you've ever seen The Simpsons and the opening to The Simpsons where they have Bart writing on the board, and he's always writing something like he will not do, he will not do, over and over again.

Listen, repetition is key. So I want you to think of that. Even if you were to take a sticky note and write it five times, or to even fill up a sheet of notebook paper, but start practicing it because what you want to do is you want to build the muscle memory. You want to have that question essentially in your pocket in the moment. So if you just think about it once,

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"Okay, I'll think how can I practice more love right now?", you're not going to remember it in the heat of the moment.

What I want you to do is practice it now, practice it ahead of time everyday. You could write out the question ten times every day into the lead up of the holiday and so that question, the more you write it down, the more you will remember it, the more it will be a thought that you can use when you're in the moment. This is how you train your brain to do something different. You have to take action.

Notice both parts of the plan, in addition to writing it out, which is action in itself, you're visualizing and you're practicing a new thought. You have to take action if you want to train your brain to do something different. You cannot sit back and hope and cross your fingers and dream of how the holidays should be amazing and magical, and then what will happen when you do that, it will just be a repeat from last year.

Plan for obstacles and visualize something different. Visualize how you will act differently and prepare for how you want to feel on purpose by using a powerful question to help bring your brain back, to help give your brain answers in the moment, thoughts in the moment that are going to be helpful because if you run into one of your obstacles and you're immediately thinking to yourself, "How can I find more gratitude right now?" "How can I practice love?" "What would curiosity do?" "How can I create connection in this moment?" That is such a better thought to be thinking than what your habitual, automatic brain will come up with. I promise. What it will habitually and automatically come up with will be negative.

Holidays do not have to be recreations of your habits. You can use these skills to interrupt your habits and create something new. Where I want your focus to be is here. Allow everyone, everyone in your life to just be who they are. Expect that they're going to be the exact same as they were last year. Focus on you. Focus on changing you, how you can show up differently, how you can use a different think-feel-act cycle, how you can interrupt your habits. Focus there and I promise that you will have a very different holiday.

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Alright, enjoy everybody and I will see you next week.

Hey guys, if you want to go over to iTunes and leave a review about the podcast if you're enjoying it, I would love it. But not only that; I am giving everyone who does a free urge meditation. I will tell you, this meditation, it is super simple. All it takes is five minutes and a pair of headphones. If you are having an urge and you want a different way to handle it, just pop those headphones in, find a place where you can sit down undisturbed and teach your brain, retrain your brain a very simple method to make urges more tolerable. All you need to do is head on over to rachelhart.com/urge and input your information there.

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.