

Ep #47: Why We Use a Drink to Rebel



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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 47.

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. So here's the thing, you know how I always ask you guys to send me your ideas, your questions, the topics you want to hear me talk about on the podcast. Well, today we are going to talk about a topic that has been my most requested topic thus far, and that is rebellion.

So when it comes to drinking, rebellion is the idea that nobody can tell me what to do. Nobody can tell me to drink less, or take a break, or sit tonight out. Not even me. Right? It is that rebellion in the face of any rule, any restriction, any perceived authority telling you what to do, when of course, that authority is yourself. And let me tell you, I am so familiar with this. For so long in my life I was walking around like, "Listen, I have a right to drink, a right to get drunk if I want to, to get wasted if I want to, you cannot take this away from me, I've earned this." I really had that attitude, and I'll tell you, being able to shake that attitude, being able to change that was crucially important in my own journey.

And here's the thing. It is true. You do have the right to drink and to drink as much as you want, especially if you're of the legal drinking age. You have free will; telling yourself you don't have free will really is a lie. In fact, I did a whole episode on this topic, episode 21, it's called Stop Telling Yourself You Can't Drink, because I think this is one of the biggest things that people get tripped up on. This idea that they can't drink. And when they tell themselves that, you know, what they are more likely to do is to create negative emotions. Emotions like deprivation, embarrassment, jealousy, feeling resentful or bitter or angry or powerless, and these

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emotions will not facilitate the actions that will help you change your drinking.

So if you haven't listened to that episode, I want to encourage you to go back and check out episode 21. But I'm going to dig a little deeper into this issue on today's podcast because the problem is this, even if you acknowledge your free will, you may still feel like you have a split personality when it comes to drinking. You may still feel like there are two parts of you that are at odds with each other. One part of your brain is like, "Look, this isn't working. I don't like how I feel, I don't like wondering what I did last night, what I said last night, I don't like waking up feeling embarrassed or regretful or groggy or hungover, I really don't like the fact that I thought last night was going to be just uneventful and it turned out into a disaster. I just feel like this isn't how my life supposed to go or who I'm supposed to be." I know a lot of you can relate to having that part of your brain. The part of you that's really, truly aware that what you are doing right now is not working.

But now the problem is there's this other part of your brain, and that part is like, "Listen, screw it. In fact, screw everybody. I can do what I want, I'm an adult, I'm entitled to drink, I'm going to drink if I want to, so just leave me alone." Right? And that is the conundrum. What do you do when you have these two parts of your brain that feel like they're at odds with each other?

Well, the answer is this. You can't start to shift the part of your brain, the thoughts you are having that are committed to rebelling, unless you first understand why that part of you, why those thoughts exist at all. You have to understand why they're there in the first place, and that's what we're going to be exploring today. Where all of these rebellious thoughts are coming from, because if you can understand where they're coming from, then you can start to shift them.

Now look, the word rebellion, it's really simple. It just means a refusal to obey rules or an opposition to authority, and you know what, rebellion, it's not necessarily a bad thing. In fact, it's actually a totally normal part of human development. So you can think about it. When you're a kid, your

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parents were in complete control of everything. They were in charge of what you ate, where you went, how you spent your time, when you went to bed, when you woke up, where you lived. Very few decisions are really yours when you're a child. So even before we're teenagers, which is a point in our lives that most people associate with rebellion. Even when we're young kids we're starting to want to make clear that we're not babies anymore. Rebellion is actually a way for kids to develop autonomy. It's a way to say, "Hey, you can't treat me like a child. I can make decisions too." And so it starts when we're a kid and then continues on in our teenage years.

So first it starts as a way to really develop autonomy, but it becomes, rebellion can become a way to experiment with your identity, to figure out who you are. When you rebel against the rules, when you rebel against authority, you're sort of figuring out who you are, where you fit into this world. So listen, rebellion's not necessarily a bad thing, and it makes sense. It's part of human development, it's part of how you developed your autonomy, how you discovered your identity. But rebellion does not always serve you, especially when you are decades out of high school and you are rebelling by drinking as much as you want, as often as you want even when you don't like the consequences. And so that's the rebellion that we're going to be talking about today.

So let's just start by understanding where all of these rebellious thoughts come from, and I want you to first consider all of the messages you got growing up about not being able to drink. Messages like, "That's not for you, you're too young, you can't have any, this is an adult beverage, this is only for grownups", "Alcohol isn't for kids, you're not supposed to, you're not allowed to, you're not old enough, you're not ready, you're not mature, you'll just have to wait", "You're not 21. Can I see some ID please?" Right? There's so many messages that we got for years and years about how we were not old enough to do this specific thing.

Now, all of you had different responses and you got these messages to different degrees and you had different responses to these messages. But

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a lot of you listening found that you know, there was some anticipation around getting to try alcohol for the first time and also hitting your 21st birthday and being old enough to drink it legally. These messages were having an impact on you.

So when you're being told no, no, no, over and over again and then you finally reach the age where you're "old enough to drink", now, I'll just put to aside for a second that your prefrontal cortex will not finish developing until you're 25. But you know, the law in the United States at least is 21, you're old enough to drink. So I want you to just consider getting all of that messaging, for years and years and years getting all of that messaging and how that works if someone once you got to the legal age tried to take alcohol away. Your brain is like, "No, I'm an adult, what are you talking about? I'm entitled to do this. I am of the age."

And the problem is this. Once we're all at the legal drinking age, we don't shed all these thoughts about how adults are entitled to drink, or about how this is an adult beverage. Those thoughts are still very much there, and these "restrictions" can resurface all the thoughts and feelings you had when you weren't yet 21 but wanted to drink and you were thinking, "It's not fair, this is stupid, I'm old enough, I'm going to do it anyway. No one can stop me." Right? All of these thoughts that created resentment and annoyance. And so you have to pay attention, you have to consider all those early messages that you got about drinking and who was allowed to drink and who was entitled to drink and who wasn't.

And you have to consider how those messages may have gotten as young as who knows, three years old, four years old. When you were thinking, "Hey, what's that drink? Can I have some of that?" Those messages about who's entitled, who's allowed, what it means, they don't simply go away. And many times, especially when you decide to change your drinking, they'll start to resurface.

But here's the thing. This is just one place where these rebellious thoughts are coming from, and I think this is an important place because so many people will tell me you know, when they are taking a break that it somehow

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feels childish, it somehow feels like it's not adult, it's not sophisticated, because they got all of these messages about how drinking was something that adults did and you had to be old enough and mature enough. And so it is important to understand this piece, but I think way beyond the early messaging that we get, there is another area that you really need to pay attention to when it comes to why you are currently experiencing rebellion.

What you really need to pay attention to is all the other areas in your life outside of drinking, where you feel like there are all these rules that you are being told to follow or you're being forced to follow. And now listen, if you are a people pleaser or a perfectionist, this is huge for you. If you're a people pleaser or a perfectionist, you are walking around all the time telling yourself that you have to do things. You have to do things perfectly, look perfectly, be perfect, have the perfect body, the perfect family, the perfect home, you have to make sure that everyone likes you, make sure that everyone's needs are taken care of and that everybody is happy. These are the thoughts that are going through the brains of people pleasers and perfectionists. All of these things that you have to do and the ways that you have to be and how you have to act.

Now, here's what I'm going to tell you. The word 'have' sounds really innocent. It sounds like a pretty innocuous word. But when you tell yourself that you have to do something, what you are telling yourself is that you feel forced to do these things, and that never creates a positive emotion. When you tell yourself you have to do something, you are fooling your brain into believing that it doesn't have a choice. And I will tell you, we do this with everything. Have to comes up around work, around family, around kids, around bills, around chores, taking out the trash. And the truth is you are spending your day, all day long, telling yourself you have to do things, that you are forced to do things, when in reality, it's not true.

The truth is, you don't have to take out the trash. You don't have to pay your bills, you don't have to go to work, you don't even have to call your parents. You are not forced to do any of these things. I want you to really consider this. I want you to really think, "Okay, who is making you take out

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the trash? Who is making you pay your bills and go to work and pick up the phone?" Really, no one. No one's making you do that. Now, you may want to do these things, you may want a kitchen that doesn't smell, and you may want money in the bank and you may want to avoid late fees and you may want a relationship with your family. But there is a big distinction between want to and have to.

When you tell yourself that you have to do something, you leave no room for free will, and there's no room there. But when you want to do something or you choose to do something, you are the one sitting in the driver's seat, you are the one with the power. And I'll tell you that before they start working with me, most of my clients discover that they are walking around all day long telling themselves that they have to do things that not only they don't have to do but in reality, when they start to look at it, they discover they actually want to do these things, that there is a desire to do it. But imagine all the negative emotion that you are creating for yourself in the think-feel-act cycle when you're telling yourself over and over and over again with every part of your day that you have to do it.

So the question is this. How does this connect with feeling rebellious about your drinking? You understand now how some early messaging that you got around who is allowed to drink and whether or not you could drink, how that shapes some of the rebellious thoughts that you have, but how does have to, telling yourself that you're forced to do things connect to feeling rebellious about your drinking.

So really just imagine that you're walking around all day long which many of you are, telling yourselves that you have to do things. You have to be perfect, you have to make sure everybody is happy, everybody's needs are tended to, everybody is taken care of, you don't make any mistakes. Right? Imagine the emotions created by those thoughts. Imagine all the powerlessness and all the resentment that would build up because you're telling yourself that you're forced to do all these things, you're telling yourself that you don't have a choice. Listen, it's not surprise that by the

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end of the day you might be seeking relief and rewarding yourself with a drink.

And here's the thing, this is true for people who both at the end of the day turn to a drink as a way to reward themselves and also for those of you out there who may be more just kind of weekend drinkers, and maybe more you know, cutting loose on Friday and Saturday. The same factors are at play, and this is why perfectionists and people pleasers have to really pay attention because they are particularly susceptible. Drinking becomes the one place that perfectionists and people pleasers allow themselves to not have to follow the rules. It's the one place where you get to cut loose, where there are no expectations. It's just all about you. It's me time. Nobody can tell you what to do.

And I will tell you that this was a huge, huge thing for me to understand because I was walking around all the time really fixated on being a perfectionist. I mean, I remember a point in my life when I thought being a perfectionist was actually an advantage. I actually saw it as a good thing that I liked to tout. And so just all day long I was so focused, everything, from the moment I got up, looking in the mirror, how I showed up at work, you know, how I showed up for my boss, paying all my bills on time, I was really, really fixated on doing everything perfectly, and drinking was the only place in my life where I said, "Hey Rachel, you don't have any rules. No rules apply, you can do whatever you want to do. You can drink as much as you want, you can behave however you want. No rules apply."

And so, for someone that was walking around all day long telling herself, "Be perfect, be perfect, be perfect, be perfect", this was the only place in my life, drinking was the only place where I could actually cut loose and have a little bit of freedom. There were no rules. It was just my time to do whatever I wanted.

So listen, changing your language, and I talk about this all the time, changing your language from "I can't drink" to "I'm choosing not to drink tonight" is so important, but what is even more important than that is understanding how what you are thinking during the day is contributing not

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only to the negative emotions that then you're looking for relief from, but whether or not you have all these thoughts about how you have to be perfect and you have to make everybody happy. And you're thinking this all day long about everything that you have to do, and then drinking often becomes that only space where we allow a little free will, where we tell ourselves, "No, I can do whatever I want. This is my time." And who wants to lose me time? Especially when you spend your entire day not having any.

When you find yourself rebelling when you're an adult, it is because you feel like you are forced to do things when in reality, you have free will. In reality, you have a huge difference between have to, want to, and choose to. It is not the same thing to say, "I have to take out the trash" to "I want to take out the trash, I'm choosing to take out the trash". Right? One is just saturated in being disempowered, and the other one you're running the show.

So what I want you to do today to start to uncover what you are telling yourself during the day to see if that is impacting why you are feeling rebellious around your drinking is a really great exercise. All you need to do is this. You're going to grab a sheet of paper and at the top I want you to write, "What I am telling myself I have to do". Remember, 'have', that word, it sounds innocent, it sounds innocuous but when you tell yourself you have to do something, what you are telling yourself is that you feel forced. You're forced to do it, and that is never going to generate a positive emotion.

So what I want you to do is on that sheet of paper, write down everything, everything, every thought, every belief you have, what your brain is telling you that you have to do, and it can be anything, big or small. It can be, "I have to clean the house", "I have to take out the trash", "I have to do the dishes", "I have to make dinner", "I have to do grocery shopping", "I have to do laundry", "I have to help the kids with their homework", "I have to go to work", "I have to pay bills", "I have to call my parents", "I have to go home for the holidays", "I have to go to my niece's recital", "I have to exercise", "I have to eat better", "I have to make sure everybody's needs are met", "I

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have to make sure my boss is happy", whatever it is, I want you to really spend some time writing down everything that you are telling yourself you have to do. Get it all down on that sheet of paper.

Once you have done that, what I want you to do is go over that list and for everything you've written down, really ask yourself, "Okay, am I truly forced? Am I truly being forced to do this or do I have a choice? Do I have free will? Is anybody actually making me do this?" And if you see that what you're telling yourself you have to do is actually something that either you are choosing to do because you like the ultimate outcome, or you want to do, because maybe you don't like the consequences of not doing it, then I want you to cross it off the list. Go through with every single thing and ask yourself that question.

So many of you are using your drinking as a way to rebel because your thoughts all day long are creating this environment where your entire day feels like you don't have any control. Your entire day is about making sure everybody else is happy and everybody else is taken care of that you're never making a mistake and you're doing everything perfectly. And when you're doing that all day long, when you're telling yourself that you have to do all these things, you're creating all this negative emotion and drinking becomes the area of your life, whether you know it yet, where you're trying to exert some control. Even though - I mean, here is the crazy thing. Even though for so many of you this area where you're trying to exert control by saying, "Hey, I can drink as much as I want. Nobody can tell me how much to drink. I'm going to have this if I want to have this, you're not the boss of me." Even right in that moment when you say you're not the boss of me, you're talking about you. You're talking about yourself.

What is so crazy is that while you're doing that, so many of you are racking up all these negative consequences for yourself. If drinking feels like the only place where you can cut lose, where you can be free of your expectations of yourself or what you believe are other people's expectations of you, if it's the only place where you are taking time for yourself, then of course you are going to rebel in the face of losing that

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space. Of course that's going to happen, of course you have two parts of your brain that feel like they're at odds with each other.

But the answer is this. The answer is to understand how your perfectionist, how your people pleasing, how telling yourself that you have to do all the things that you're doing in your life is actually a recipe for creating rebellion.

Alright, so I want all of you to make sure that you do today's exercise, and let me know how it goes. Let me know what you discover. If you have any questions, any ideas, any comments, you can always email me at podcast@rachelhart.com. Otherwise, I will see you guys 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.

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