

Ep #53: Why You Aren't Taking Action



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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 53.

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. Alright, so last week we were talking about compelling reasons, we did compelling reason 2.0, we went deeper into this topic and talked about the right way to use them and the right way to think about your compelling reason. Now, if you haven't already listened to that episode, I want to make sure you go back and listen before you dive in to today's topic.

Just as a reminder, remember, your compelling reason doesn't take action for you. It can't make you do anything, it isn't a cure all for discomfort, and you can't just connect with it once and be done. You have to keep reconnecting with it. Your compelling reason, it's not going to haul you up the mountain, but it will encourage you when you're tired and exhausted and cold and ready to quit. It will remind you why you are climbing towards the summit in the first place, but you still have to take action, you still have to climb.

So this podcast is the follow up portion. So what I mean by that is if you have a compelling reason but you find that you still aren't taking action, you aren't climbing the mountain, or you're kind of climbing the mountain, you're kind of dipping your toe in and out of action, this podcast is going to help you uncover why that is. And the question for you to consider going through is why aren't you taking action, or why are you taking action a little bit and then stopping.

Now, the answer is actually incredibly simple. If you aren't taking action towards your goal, and this is any goal, not just a goal of changing your drinking. If you aren't taking action towards your goal, it's because your

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

Ep #53: Why You Aren't Taking Action

brain is weighing another option. And that option is the option of staying on the ground. It's the option of doing what you're doing and avoiding climbing, and as long as that other option is on the table, as long as it is available, your commitment to taking action will always waiver. You might start and stop, but you're never going to see it through.

So what I want to show you how to do today is how to identify, understand, and ultimately let go of this other option so that you can take action. Now, the way that I like to frame this is to think of an option A and an option B. Now, option A is what you want in your life. It is that goal. It is what is waiting for you at the summit. Option B is the alternative. So it can look like this. Your option A can be being 100% in control of your desire to drink. That can be your option A. Your option B can be to continue drinking in response to your urges.

Now, this is true for any goal you're working towards. So think about it this way. You can have an option A of reaching your goal weight, but your option B is to not exercise or change your eating. You can have an option A of being debt free and paying off all your credit cards, but an option B of keep your spending and saving unchanged, right? Your option B essentially is what your brain is weighing, what your brain is considering instead of taking the action necessary to go after your goal. That is your option B.

Now, I will tell you, most of us, we're not thinking in terms of an option A and an option B. In fact, the choice of an option B, it actually for most people is quite unconscious. And so what I want to help you do is identify what that option B is, identify what you're choosing instead of your goal, your option A, why you're choosing it, how it is currently helping you. Because if you can identify that, you can decide to take it off the table. But until you take it off the table, your brain is always going to waiver when it comes to taking action. It will never fully commit because it knows that it has an out. Instead of climbing the mountain and going after option A, it can just stay down at the bottom, it can stay at the base and not climb.

Now, I'm going to tell you, I've actually watched myself unconsciously pursue option Bs several times in my life. And what would happen is that I

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

Ep #53: Why You Aren't Taking Action

would tell myself that I was desperate to accomplish something, I really, really, really wanted to reach this goal. Yet I would fail to take action over and over and over again. I would fail to get off my butt and climb the mountain. I was stuck in that option B and I had no idea what was going on because frankly, this operates in such an unconscious way for most people.

So one of the examples that I will tell you about, and I have done this several times in my life. It is the example of studying German. So when I was in the 10th grade, I decided that I was going to start studying German. I had to have a language requirement and I picked German. Now, why did I pick German? Because I liked a boy, and he was studying German. Therefore, I believed I should start studying German. This was the logic of my 14-year-old brain at the time. And I'm going to tell you, I was really good at memorizing rules and vocabulary and spelling, and in fact, I've always loved spelling in German because I am such a terrible speller in English. But I am like, a whiz at spelling in German. Like, all the rules just make so much sense to me.

So I was pretty good at the rules and the vocabulary and the spelling, and I always did really well on my written tests. But what I wasn't good at was speaking. But I'll tell you, somehow, I managed to get through high school with pretty much As in German, even though my spoken German was pretty paltry at best. Now, I went off to college and I planned that I was going to spend my junior year of college studying abroad. I had watched my older sister spend a year in Valencia and come back speaking Spanish, and even though I would have denied this at the time, I always wanted to be just like my sister. I always wanted to do what she did.

And so for me it was always just a given that I would also spend a year during college studying a language, and for me, that meant studying in a German speaking country. So I started taking German in college, and of course, it was much, much harder than the level of German in high school that I had. I don't think I had a very rigorous high school teacher, and you know, because it was more than just rules about vocabulary and spelling

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

Ep #53: Why You Aren't Taking Action

and conjugation, they actually wanted me to speak, which was terrifying. I hated speaking German, and you're not going to be surprised by this, the reason was because I couldn't bear to make a mistake.

I hated the idea that I was sounding stupid, that I was saying something incorrectly. I was such a perfectionist, I was so fixated on doing everything right that the idea that I was speaking and not making a lot of sense, or not conjugating my verbs correctly, or frankly, maybe not even being understood at all was just so uncomfortable for me. It was so much easier for me just to keep quiet. It was easier to keep quiet than to put myself out there and risk what I thought was the humiliation of sounding dumb.

But still, you know, I had to have a language requirement, and still I was committed to spending my junior year in a foreign country learning a language. And so when my junior year rolled around, I headed off to Austria, and I actually spent ten months living in Vienna, which is still hands down one of my favorite cities in the world. And when I went there, I told myself, "Okay Rachel, this is it. This is your time. You're finally going to learn German." I was so desperate to be able to finally speak with confidence, I had been studying German at this point for five years in school. Five years of my life. And at the point, I felt like I had nothing to show for it, so I told myself, "Okay, this is it. This is when you finally learn German."

But guess what happened? I hid. I hid all the time in Vienna, as much as I could. I would make friends with people who's German was way better than mine so that they could do the heavy lifting in social situations, I would sit at the very back of all my classes and kind of pray the entire time that the teacher wouldn't see me and call on me. I remember I even chose a class called Film Noire, where we watched English language films that were set in Germany and Austria in the 1940s and 50s. So the class discussion about these films, the discussion was in German, but at least in my mind I was like, "Well at least I can understand the film", because the film was in English.

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

Ep #53: Why You Aren't Taking Action

And I also - I created these routines that I would stick to unfailingly. I would go to the same café and the same grocery store and the same shops because I wanted to be familiar as possible with how everything worked, so I could avoid as much as possible having to ask a question. Meanwhile, I cried and cried and cried when I was in Austria because at the same time I knew I was failing. I mean, I was watching myself fail. I knew that I was not learning German the way I wanted to be. Every month would pass with missed opportunities, and I told myself over and over again that I was just desperate, I was desperate to reach this goal of being proficient at German. I had studied it for five years, I would do anything to make it happen.

This was what I was telling myself. But think about it. There I was, living in Austria, surrounded by German speakers, and all I could do was hide because speaking the language would have meant risking discomfort. Speaking the language in my mind, I thought, meant risking embarrassment and humiliation. Everyone would know that I had been a failure for the past five years of my life because my German was so terrible. So it was easier for me to choose instead to hide. I chose to be safe. I chose to figure out how to structure my life, how to get by during those ten months, to avoid having to speak as little German as possible because to me, that was so much better than facing the discomfort of sounding stupid.

And think about it. I was telling myself over and over again, "Rachel, you would do anything to be proficient in this language", but I couldn't take action. I couldn't take the action of speaking. My option A was becoming a proficient speaker in German. That is what I said I wanted. That was my goal. That's what I would tell everyone I was after. But I wasn't doing it. I wasn't taking action. I wasn't speaking because what I was doing unknowingly and unconsciously was holding on to dear life to my option B. My option B was to figure out how to get by without risking the humiliation of speaking, how to structure my life so I could say as little as possible.

Now, here's the thing. Option B was appealing because it was safe. It required no risk. I didn't have to be uncomfortable. I didn't have to step head first into discomfort over and over again. If I was just quiet, if I let

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

Ep #53: Why You Aren't Taking Action

everybody else do the heavy lifting in the conversations, if I hid in class, if I went to the same café over and over again where I knew how to order my couple things, I knew how the menu worked, I would avoid my fear, the fear of the unknown, of opening my mouth and worrying that people were going to think I sounded like an idiot. That was my option B.

Now, I'll tell you, it was an incredibly painful year for me because I had no idea what was wrong with me. I looked at all these people around me who were learning German, and here I was just stuck in place. I mean, it was like I was in cement. That's how it felt. Because I didn't understand the concept of an option A and an option B. What I told myself was, "I guess I'm just not as smart as other people." I would tell myself that language just didn't come easily to me. And then routinely, during the course of those ten months, I would tell myself it was too late, too much time had passed.

I remember actually confiding in my best friend while I was there that January, I remember saying to him that I was so embarrassed I had been living in Vienna for four months and not learning German. And I remember him saying, "Rachel, you still have six months. Like, what are you talking about?" But I couldn't be swayed. I was so convinced that it was too late because when I was telling myself it was too late, it was just another way for me to avoid discomfort. That was my option B. I had already determined that I had missed the boat four months in. I had already decided I was a hopeless case, because deciding I was a hopeless case, telling myself that I wasn't as smart as other people and language just didn't come easily to me and that I had had this terrible foundation in high school, all the things that I told myself, it allowed me to hold on to my option B for dear life. I was unwilling to let go.

I didn't realize that none of these things were true. They were all just thoughts keeping me at the time, what I thought, was safe. Safe from discomfort, safe from negative emotions. And so this is what I want you to consider. When it comes to your drinking, what is your option B? What is the option B that you are holding on to? You know what your option A is. You know what your goal is, what you want, what you want to go after,

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

Ep #53: Why You Aren't Taking Action

what's at the summit of that mountain, right? But ask yourself, what is that option B? Because I know this so well, that we will at times swear up and down how we want things to be different. We want this goal, we want to accomplish something. But we find ourselves not taking action over and over and over again, and it doesn't make sense. It doesn't make sense that you could want something so desperately, so badly, and then be stuck in place, not do what needs to be done.

But the reason is because your brain is choosing your option B, and most of the time we have no idea this is even happening. So you need to identify and understand what that option B is, how it is helping you, what you are getting from it, so that you can finally take it off the table. Because if you don't, if you don't do this work, you are always going to hesitate in the face of action because your brain is holding on to an escape route. Your brain is holding on to another course of action, and that is your option B.

So this is what I want all of you guys to do today. I want you to answer the following questions so that you can finally really understand what your option B is. You have got to do this work if you want to be able to take it off the table. And if you are not taking action right now, if you feel stuck, if you desperately want to change your drinking but you are not doing the work, then this is an exercise that you cannot miss doing. It is that important.

Alright, so the first question to ask yourself is what is it that you want that you haven't fully committed to yet. That's your option A. The thing that you want, the thing that you wish for, whatever's at the summit of your mountain, that is your option A. So write that down. The second question is what is the option you're weighing instead of committing to what you want. That's your option B. So if your option A is to change your drinking, if your option A is to take a break from drinking, what is the option you're weighing instead of committing to what you want? That can be not taking a break, always drinking when you feel an urge, drinking in social situations because it's just easier. Write down what your option B is.

Now, the third question is to ask yourself why is your option B appealing. Now listen, do not make the mistake of saying, "It isn't appealing." Because

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

Ep #53: Why You Aren't Taking Action

if it wasn't appealing, you wouldn't be choosing it, right? On the face of it, when you use the example from trying to learn German, I would say it wasn't appealing not to learn German. I wanted to. It wasn't appealing to spend at that point, six years of my life and not be able to be proficient. But here's the thing. It was. Option B was appealing because I didn't have to risk being uncomfortable. I didn't have to come face to face with my fear. I didn't have to worry about being embarrassed or being humiliated. That's what I thought was going to happen when I started speaking. And that's why my option B was appealing, because it was safe. So why is your option B appealing for you?

Question four, what emotions is your option B helping you avoid? Remember, it always comes back to our emotions, it always comes back to those negative emotions that we don't want to feel. So what emotions is your option B helping you avoid? It can be anything. Anxiety, stress, insecurity, awkwardness, loneliness, whatever it is. It can also be positive emotions. It could be helping you avoid being responsible, or being determined, or being capable. But just identify what emotions choosing option B is helping you avoid.

Question five, who will you be if you choose to stay with option B? Who will you be if you choose to stay with option B? This is really important. It's really important to see that your actions are not just the things that you do, but who you are. And so if you choose to keep staying with option B, who will you be? What will that make you? Write that out.

Question six, what would you have to let go of in order to pursue your option A? What do you have to say goodbye to? Is it fear? Is it unwillingness to ever be uncomfortable? Is it an unwillingness to ever be anxious? Is it a belief that if you're not drinking you can't be connected to the group? What would you have to let go of in order to pursue your option A?

Question seven, who would you have to become in order to pursue your option A? I talk about this a lot. The idea that we have to become different people often, right? So who would you have to become in order to go after,

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

Ep #53: Why You Aren't Taking Action

in order to take the action needed to get what you want? And then finally, the last question, question eight, what is appealing about that person? That person who achieves option A, that person who meets her goal, who completes the accomplishment, who climbs to the top of the mountain, what is appealing about her? What is appealing about the person you would have to become in order to achieve option A?

I really want you to spend the time to go through these questions, because it is not enough to just recognize that there is an option B on the table. I mean, that's really the first step, to just be aware that an option B is there and that is why you're not consistently taking action. But you really have to dig deep and understand how it is helping you, what it is helping you avoid, why it's so appealing. Because once you understand that, then you can decide, do you want to keep this on the table? Do you want to keep your option B? Because as long as it's there, as long as that is an option for you, your commitment will waiver. Taking action will be difficult because you always know you have an escape route.

So if you feel stuck, if you feel like, "I don't understand why I have this goal, I really want to change my drinking, I'm finally committed this year to doing it, I want this year to be different from last year", but you're not taking action, you need to do this work. You need to identify your option B and understand how it's helping you.

Okay guys, that is all for today. As always, reach out if you have any questions or you'd like to see me talk about a specific topic on the podcast. Send me an email at podcast@rachelhart.com, and 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

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

Ep #53: Why You Aren't Taking Action

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.