

Ep #69: Believing New Things



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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 69.

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. What is happening? What are you doing? What are you thinking about? Are you drinking? Listen, today, we are going to talk about the fact that if you are going to change a habit like drinking, but frankly any habit, why you need to create new evidence to support new beliefs.

This is so important, this evidence piece because not having evidence will hold you back. This can be around anything, right. New beliefs like, I don't need to be drinking to go out on the dance floor and have fun. I don't need to have a drink when everyone else is. I am someone who can have fun without alcohol.

Now, I know for a lot of you, hearing me say those ideas, you're like, "I don't know, Rachel, I'm not so sure those apply to me." But it's because you don't yet have evidence in support of them.

Now listen, your brain is always looking for evidence to prove your thoughts true, always. Why is this? Because that is how the brain keeps believing the thoughts that it already thinks. It scans the environment for evidence to support the thoughts that are already there. And this can be with anything.

A thought like, "Mankind is inherently evil." Your brain will find tons of evidence for that. It will look to war, it will look to strife, it will look to murder, it will look for the capacity for hate. It will find lots of evidence to support that.

Now, on the other hand, if you have a thought like mankind is inherently good, your brain will also scan for evidence to prove this thought true. It will

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look to random acts of kindness, how people respond when natural disasters occur, the capacity to love, the capacity to forgive. Whatever the belief is, the brain will look for evidence to prove it true. And the same is true for all of your thoughts about drinking.

My friends want me to drink. I'm more fun with a drink. I can't meet guys if I'm not drinking. Whatever thoughts you have about alcohol, your brain will be on a mission to prove those thoughts true because, guess what, it keeps the habit going. Depending on what your brain believes, you will find evidence to support that belief.

So I always talk about it like your thoughts are lenses through which you see the world. I talk about the expression of rose-colored glasses. So have you heard this expression before? Oh, she's wearing rose-colored glasses.

What it means, literally, when you see the world through rose-colored glasses, everything looks pretty good. And your thoughts work the same way. It's like believing the thought that mankind is inherently evil; that's the lens through which you see the world. And when you see the world through that lens, you'll find lots of evidence to prove that thought true in your environment, right; all the terrible things that humans do, all the ways in which we hate each other.

Every thought works this way, so it works this way with all your thoughts about drinking. Have the thought, everybody drinks. It's like the lens through which you see the world, and your brain will find lots and lots of evidence to support it.

Dating and not drinking is impossible – I had that one for a long time. So I had that thought as a lens through which I would see the world and I would find tons and tons of evidence.

It's normal to drink – I hear this one so much from my clients. Put on those glasses with it's normal to drink lenses, guess what, your brain's going to find tons of evidence in support of it. And this is why your thoughts feel true.

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People will say to me, “Yeah, I know you say that our thoughts are optional, but it just feels so true.” Well of course it feels true, because your brain has been on a mission to find evidence to support the thought. Your brain is always scanning to find evidence to prove it true. Why does the brain do this? Because it’s efficient.

Remember, I talk about this, your brain likes to save energy. It likes to find ways to be efficient and it is so much more efficient to look around your world and look for evidence that will support the thoughts you already think, you already believe, rather than to go out into your world and look for evidence that will disprove the thoughts that you think, disprove what you already believe. It takes energy to challenge and question your beliefs.

But here’s the thing, this is what thought work is. This is the benefit of having something like the think-feel-act cycle. You can see what your current thoughts are producing in the cycle, you can decide if you want to keep them. You can say, like, “Hey, is this thought helping me? Is it helping me to think that drinking is normal and not drinking is abnormal?” You can see how you feel when you think it, how you act when you feel that way and you can decide, do I want to keep it?

And if it’s not serving you, then you can decide that you want to challenge your thoughts on purpose. This is what thought work looks like, being open to challenging and questioning all of your beliefs about the world, other people, you, drinking alcohol, it doesn’t matter; it’s just that willingness to be open to it.

I always think of thoughts like – they’re just sentences in our mind that we can hold up for inspection. We can just look at them and see what they create. How does it work in that think-feel-act cycle? How do I feel when I think it? How do I act when I feel that way? What results do I keep getting the more I think that thought?

But you have to be willing to look at everything from that place of, “I’m open to inspecting you. I’m open to questioning you. I’m open to the fact that you might not be serving me and I maybe should start to think something new.”

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In order to challenge thoughts like, “I’m just no fun without a drink. I can’t go on a date without a drink or date night with my husband will be weird if he’s drinking and I have a seltzer.” You need to find evidence. You need to find evidence that those thoughts may not be true.

But, you also need to create that evidence. So it’s not just the willingness to scan for new evidence, it is the wiliness to create new evidence that disproves the original thought. Now, this is really difficult because you must have a willingness to be wrong about what you believe. You must be willing to do something that your brain, right now, is like, that’s impossible. That will not work.

You can’t go on a first date and not drink; forget it. The guy’s going to think you have a problem. He’s going to assume that something’s wrong with you. The date will be over before it begins. Your brain wants to tell you it’s impossible so it can keep that thought.

You have to decide that you are willing to challenge it and see if you can create new evidence. Now listen, most people are terrified of this part, and I get it, I was too. It makes sense because whatever the brain thinks is impossible, right – it thinks, like, if you do it, something really bad is going to happen. And of course, what is that really bad thing? It’s always a negative emotion.

I’ve talked to you about this before on the podcast. I’ve heard someone say, you know, most people will change almost everything in their life in an attempt to feel better. And so you’ll go about changing how you look and getting a new job and buying a new house and moving to a new town and finding a new spouse – whatever it is, we’re willing to change so much in our life in an attempt to feel better.

But when it comes to questioning your thoughts and changing your thoughts, most people freak-out. Most people are like, “I can’t change that. that’s just who I am. That’s just the way I think. That’s not up for discussion.” We hold so tightly to our thoughts, and the irony is, of course, that the only thing that will actually help you feel better is changing your

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thinking because if you're not feeling good right now, it's because of the thoughts that you are thinking about yourself, about the world, about drinking, about the habit.

Whatever it is, that's what's creating the problem. All the other stuff, how you look, your job, your house, where you live, your spouse, listen, changing it may momentarily make you feel better because, guess what, you'll have some momentary new thoughts to think, but it will never sustain you in the long run and you know this.

How many times have you thought to yourself, "Oh if only I could just get a new job. If only I didn't have to live in this tiny apartment. If only I could move back to my hometown or away from my hometown. If only I had a partner, then I would finally feel better." But then have you ever had this experience of getting that thing you wanted so desperately, getting the new job, getting the bigger apartment, getting the partner, moving to the city and you feel good for a while, and then the same old feelings of being discontent return.

And it freaks people out because it's like, I thought that was the thing that was going to make me feel better. The reason why you don't feel better is because you haven't changed your thoughts. you must be willing to look at all your thoughts, to question them. You must be willing to be wrong about the world, about yourself, about how things work, about drinking, about the habit, about alcohol, about everything Otherwise, you will be stuck trying to change circumstances in your life over and over again and it is a hamster wheel that you do not want to be on.

Being willing to look at and question your own thoughts and being willing to be wrong will allow you to create new evidence. And let me tell you, part of this is just about repeated exposure. I know that sounds crazy, but it really is true.

I've talked about on the podcast before about how the first wedding I went to and I didn't drink at was really hard, right. I remember just being on the plane over just being like, "I don't think I can do this." In fact, I really

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seriously contemplated not going to this wedding at all because I was so convinced that it would be a disaster.

And I talk about getting on the dance floor and dancing sober; that was no joke for me. My brain was like, Okay, get on the dance floor, Rachel, because that's what the other people are doing. That seems to be what we're doing right now." But the actual dancing was so weird. I felt so awkward, so uncomfortable, because I was so used to, "Oh if I'm dancing in front of other people, I'm drinking." That's the way I do it.

And here's the thing, that first wedding was difficult, but I came out of it and I had a little bit of new evidence because I was like, oh, I survived. I didn't die. My brain was sure I was going to die but I didn't. I'm still here. Now here's the thing, I kept doing it.

So my brain went from that first wedding to be like, "Okay, I guess this can happen. This is survivable. I won't die." But with repeated exposure – and every time I had the evidence of the wedding before, like, "You did this once before, you can do it again." I started having fun. Low and behold, I started enjoying myself because every time it was easier to challenge the thought that a wedding would be a disaster, it won't be any fun if I'm not drinking, because I had new evidence to support the thought that maybe it won't, maybe it will be okay, maybe it could even be fun.

Listen, what I love about the tools that I teach you guys and the think-feel-act cycle is that all of the tools that you learn to change your drinking are the exact tools that you can apply to anything in life. That is why this work is so powerful. And I've talked before about how I have used these tools, the exact tools that I used around changing my drinking and taking a break and no longer having desire to drink.

I have used the exact same tools for my business. And guess what – in my business, I have seen over and over again how a willingness to create new evidence, a willingness to be wrong, a willingness to keep exposing myself to something my brain is like, "This is terrible, don't do it," builds new evidence and creates something new for me.

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So two of those things, when it comes to my business, are my voice and how I look in photos. So how many of you out there think, “I hate the way my voice sounds.” I thought this for the longest time too, which is kind of funny because here I am recording podcast. But I think so many people think that their voice sounds really weird, especially when they are listening to a recording of it.

Now, listen, in all likelihood, unless you have a podcast, the last time you heard your voice played back to you was when you made a ten second voicemail greeting. We don’t hear it all the often. But even in that short sample, my guess is you probably thought that your voice had kind of like a tinny high-pitched quality. It just didn’t really sound like you. It sounds so weird, right.

But there is a really simple reason behind it, because when someone else is speaking to you, the sound waves emitted travel through the air into your ear and are translated by your brain into sound. But when you speak, when you hear yourself, the sound waves you emit travel to your ear and are also filtered through your body.

So the voice you hear when you speak is deeper and more resonant because it is filtered through your chest cavity and your skull. So your internal acoustics are actually creating a deeper, richer sound. But, we don’t hear that sound on a recording because a recording can’t capture it. And so ultimately, the way you sound on a recording is the way you sound to everyone else, but you never hear the way you sound to everyone else because the sound waves that you hear from your own voice are being filtered through your own body and creating a deeper richer sound.

That’s why we think, like, “Oh is that my voice,” when you hear it on a recording, because it’s not being filtered through your body. So here’s what happens for most people. We hear a recording of our voice and we’re like, “Oh god, I sound so weird. I would never do a podcast.” That’s what I thought for a long time. Like, “Oh god, is that how I sound? I hope I don’t sound like that. that doesn’t sound like me.”

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But this is where being willing to create new evidence and repeated exposure comes in. Listen, this is what the podcast taught me because I am recording my voice all the time and I am listening to my voice all the time as opposed to once every year when I would record a new ten second voicemail for my phone; if even that. We hear recordings of our voice so infrequently.

So I kept hearing my voice over and over and over on recordings and it started to become my new norm. But I had to get over the belief that my voice sounded really weird on recordings in order to create that evidence. If I held on to that belief, “It just sounds so weird on a recording. It doesn’t sound like me,” I wouldn’t have been able to go ahead and create the evidence and do the work of recording podcasts. That’s why you need to be willing to be wrong.

And guess what, exposure is on your side. Exposure is the thing that helped. The more I heard it, the more I was like, “Oh, I guess that sounds like me.” Because my brain became more and more familiar with it. The exact same thing happens with photos.

So I actually remember that my best friend in college, she got to a point where she wouldn’t even show me the photos that she would take. This, of course, was back when you would take photos and then you would have the film developed at CVS and you’d have to go pick them up so you’d look through your photos. She got to the point where she wouldn’t even show me the photos she had taken because I was always like, “I look terrible. I hate the way I look in photos. Why do I look that way? Why do cameras capture me in such a weird way?”

So listen, if you are in the same boat, if you look at pictures of myself and you’re like, “I hate the way I look in photos,” it is just due to something called the mirror exposure effect. Again, it has everything to do with exposure. And all the mirror exposure effect is that repeated exposure of something leads to more positive feelings about it.

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So think about this – when it comes to the perception of how you look, what's the most repeated exposure that you have? Well, it's mirrors. That is where people see themselves most often, looking into a mirror. Most of us look in a mirror at least once a day, if not more. That's a lot of exposure over the course of a lifetime.

But here's the problem, mirrors flip our image, right. So when we see a picture or a video of ourselves, we think the image looks slightly off. What we don't realize is because we are not seeing a flipped image of our self. It's why, when you hold up writing in a mirror, it shows up backwards; it's flipping the image.

So once again, what happens is that mirrors, seeing our reflection in mirrors, has conditioned us to the unique perspective of ourselves. That's not how most people see us. Most people aren't looking at us in mirrors, they're just looking at us so they're not seeing the image flipped.

But we have been conditioned to prefer an image that has been flipped, and so when we see it captured on film, we're like, god I look weird. Something looks off. Now again, guess what, when I started doing my business, I had to start taking a lot of photos of myself to use for promotional materials. The more I saw photos of myself, the more I saw a video of myself, the more I was like, I think I look okay.

As opposed to in college when my best friend was like, "I won't even show you photos because you're so crazy about how you look terrible." I was always like, "I don't want to see a photo."

Now here's the problem – most of you guys do not want to create new evidence for yourself; not just about how you sound and how you look, but around drinking. You are so committed to your beliefs – "Listen, my voice sounds terrible on recordings. I never look good in pictures. I can't be fun without a drink." You're so committed to these beliefs and you have so much evidence for them that you would rather hold on to these beliefs than challenge them even though there's really no upside in thinking the only way that you can be fun is to have a drink, right, or that if you don't drink,

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you must have something wrong with you. There is no upside to thinking this.

But the brain is like, “But I have so much evidence in support of it, I don’t want to challenge it.” The lesson here really is this – that repeated exposure alone, that willingness to challenge your beliefs and expose yourself to something new, like me going to weddings over and over again and not drinking, can create new evidence for your brain, but only if you are willing to be wrong.

I see this happen over and over and over again for my clients. They’re so committed to a belief, they’re so committed to holding on to all the evidence that they have that what they think about drinking, what they think about the habit, what they think about life if they’re not drinking is true, that they’re unwilling to change.

And that’s what you need to start being willing to question. You know, I actually had this recently with a client talking about urges. So, most people are like, “Being deprived is terrible. Urges never go away. It’s just terrible to feel the urge to drink and to not reward it. It just lasts forever.” And one of my clients said to me recently, she said, “You know, I heard you say all the time on the podcast that an urge would eventually go away, but I didn’t really believe you.”

And I know she’s not the only one out there. I know there are others out there that are listening right now that are, like, I don’t really think that’s true. And she said, “I didn’t believe you because it wasn’t my experience.” But the reason it wasn’t her experience is because she would feel the urge and she would start in this talk about how it was terrible and it was unbearable and it was never going to go away. And so what would she do? She would give in and she would have a drink. She was never able to create the evidence for herself that the urge would eventually go away on its own because she wasn’t willing to challenge the beliefs and the thoughts that she already had and the evidence that she already had, the urges were terrible; they didn’t go away, they lasted forever.

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But when we started working together and we started using thought work to challenge and change the habit, she, on purpose, started to challenge this belief. She purposefully allowed an urge to be there by courting deprivation. She went into it willingly. She said, “Okay, I’m going to allow myself to feel deprived and see what happens.” And what did she discover after doing this over and over? Urges do eventually go away on their own.

Sometimes, they would go away incredibly quickly, but she couldn’t discover that unless she was willing to challenge that original belief that urges never go away; they last forever, they’re unbearable.

She was so convinced of that belief that she would never get herself to the point of watching it pass; she would always have a drink because she couldn’t take it. She had to be willing to change her original thought so she could create new evidence for herself. And now, when an urge appears, she has all this evidence to be like, “You know what, I think this is going away. It’s gone away before. I’ve watched it go away before. It didn’t last all night. I didn’t wake up with the urge. Eventually it passes so I just need to wait for it to pass.”

She created new evidence for herself that is helping her change the habit simply by being willing to be wrong, by allowing for deprivation, to want a drink and not say yes. But she had to do this work in order to teach her brain that an urge isn’t an emergency. It’s not going to hurt her. It’s totally harmless and it will go away.

And this is a skill that you have to be willing to do with all of your thoughts if you want to change your drinking. You have to be willing to question them. You have to be willing to challenge them. You have to be willing to set aside all the evidence that your brain has in support of your thoughts that weddings won’t be fun and parties will be boring and you can’t meet people, you can’t go on dates. It will be terrible if you come home from work and don’t have a drink.

You have to be willing to set aside all those thoughts and all the evidence that you have, evidence that you have only because your brain really wants

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to be efficient. It really just wants to believe what it already thinks, so it's always scanning for evidence in support of those thoughts.

You have to be willing to do what your brain is telling you is impossible, what won't work. Otherwise your brain will just keep creating evidence for all the thoughts that are keeping you in the habit cycle of drinking unless you challenge it on purpose. This is how you change the habit. You are willing to be wrong so that you can get new evidence and find that a new way forward is possible, otherwise you will be stuck with the beliefs that maybe you created 20 years ago; maybe you created even longer ago than that and have been proving true ever since.

That's what I did. When I was 17 I created a belief that I wasn't any fun without a drink in my hand and I just kept believing it. I kept scanning for evidence that that was true over and over and over again until I was willing to challenge it, until I was willing to question it, until I was willing to do what my brain said would be impossible and started to create new evidence.

And part of that new evidence just came because I was willing to have exposure to not drinking and trying to be fun. And low and behold, I don't believe that anymore. Whatever thoughts you have about drinking, you have about the habit, you can get to this place as well. You can drop all of them if you are willing to challenge them, create new evidence and do it again and again.

Alright everybody, I love this topic, it's so fascinating to me. But anyway, if you want to hear me talk about anything on the podcast, if you have specific questions or want to hear me talk about certain issues, just drop me a line at podcast@rachelhart.com. Otherwise, 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

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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.