

Ep #77: Transition Time



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With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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Ep #77: Transition Time

You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast, episode 77.

Whether you want to drink less or stop drinking, this podcast will help you change the habit from the inside out. We're challenging conventional wisdom about why people drink and why it can be hard to resist temptation. No labels, no judgment, just practical tools to take control of your desire and stop worrying about your drinking. Now, here's your host Rachel Hart.

Hey guys, we are talking about transition time. We're talking about how pouring a drink can become a marker for the end of the day and help you transition into a different part of the day.

Now, I know a lot of you can probably really connect with this idea, the idea of you come home after a long day's work, and what do you do? You pour yourself a drink. So it's important to understand why this happens and how this can get in the way of change when you want to change the habit of drinking.

But first you really need to understand why it is that we're looking for transition time, why it is that things can become markers of the end of the day so that you can see how you can create different transitions and different markers for yourself.

So for those of who have been listening to the podcast for a while, you know that I live in San Francisco. But when I originally met my husband, both of us were living and working in New York City. And back then, we both had different jobs, but both of those jobs required that we dress pretty formally. And we - when we started dating, we had a joke when we would meet up with each other at one of our apartments, and we started saying to each other, "Day's done, pants off," which was really just our way of joking about how as soon as we walked through the door, both of us wanted to change into something different. We wanted to get out of our more formal work clothes and into something more comfortable.

And that became - the change of clothes became our marker that the day was over. And it's interesting to think about why do we need markers for

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

Ep #77: Transition Time

the day being over and how does transition time fit into this. You know, a marker is just a sign for your brain to switch gears. It's a signal that you might be going from work mode to home mode. It's a sign also that your brain needs to start performing in a different way because the parts of your brain that you use to edit a document or deliver a presentation at work are not the same parts of your brain that you will use when you go home and start wrangling your kids or making dinner or whatever that looks like for you.

And a transition helps us do that. A transition helps us switch gears because a transition is just the process or a period of changing from one state or condition to another. But it's important especially when you are understanding the habit of drinking to understand, well, why do we need that transition, why do we need that marker and how does alcohol become connected to the two.

It's not just because you're moving into a period where you're using different parts of your brain at different points of the day to complete different tasks, but also because of how you feel. You hear me talk about this all the time. How you feel is a very, very important piece of understanding what is driving the habit.

And you know, whenever I start working with clients, I always start out with an assessment that asks them two questions, and these are good questions for you to think about as well. One, on a daily basis, what are your top three most common feelings and two, why do you think you have these feelings on a daily basis?

So it really is worthwhile for you to consider these questions as well. What would your top three most common feelings be? And be really careful here because what I watch people do is they want to answer what they want their top three most common feelings to be, but I want to know what they actually are.

And sometimes this is challenging because your brain might resist acknowledging what you are actually feeling on a regular basis because

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

Ep #77: Transition Time

you have a belief that you shouldn't be feeling this way. But I always remind people, you know, if you want to change how you feel, if you want to start feeling less stress, less anxiety, less boredom, less irritation, less annoyance, whatever it is, you have to acknowledge that you are feeling those emotions in the first place. You can't pretend that you feel better than you actually do. You can't pretend, well I should feel grateful so I'm going to list grateful. Or I should feel more joy or more excitement, so I'm going to list that.

I want you to really think about just what are those top three most common feelings for you. Are you stressed, impatient, irritated, frustrated, annoyed, frazzled? Are you grateful, calm, collected, centered, or content? What would they be for you? This is a really important piece for you to dig into.

And the second part is well, why do you think you have these feelings on a daily basis? Now, if you listen to the podcast, you know that I talk about the think-feel-act cycle, that our thoughts create our emotions and those emotions then drive our actions. Now, that's not how the brain usually understands it before you encounter this work. Most people will say, well the reason I feel the way I do is because look at all these circumstances happening around me. Look at all the things in my life that are making me feel this way. But that's not how the cycle works no matter what is happening. You feel the way you do because of your thoughts, because of your thinking.

Here's the thing: if circumstances - if events in the world created how you felt, then we would all respond the exact same way. But we don't, of course, because we have different thoughts depending on what's happening. This part can be hard for you to wrap your brain around because I'll tell you, it was hard for me too. I was so used to blaming how I felt on everything around me and the idea that I was the cause, my thoughts were the cause of my own negative feelings did not sit well at first. It really didn't.

But at a point when I started really wrestling with this concept, and I had to wrestle with it in my brain, I understood, okay, if I am the one creating how I

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

Ep #77: Transition Time

feel via my thoughts, most of which I was totally unconscious about, but if I'm the one that is creating how I feel, then I can also change how I feel. I don't need to get the entire world to fall into place. I don't need to get everybody to change their behavior. I don't need to get the subways to run on time, I don't need to make this line shorter. I just have to examine my thinking. And that's so much more of an empowered place to be in.

So answering these two questions is really important when considering the why and how of pouring a drink and how that pouring of a drink becomes a marker for the end of the day. And kind of a substitute for truly transitioning, right? Because instead of actually transitioning into a true different feeling state, you're using something, you're putting something in your body to make yourself believe, make your brain believe that it is relaxed when it is not actually relaxed. Or you are feeling happy when you are not actually happy.

It helps you to see why you are searching for that way to transition from how you feel and why alcohol has become your go-to method. Most of you feel like you're at the mercy of your feelings because you believe that your feelings are created by external circumstances. And if you're at the mercy of something, there's no way to change how you feel. You're totally disempowered unless you can corral and control the world to work the way you want it to.

So when you acknowledge your top three feelings on a daily basis, ask yourself, am I looking to stay in these feelings or are these feelings that truthfully, I want to transition away from? Because if you were feeling a lot of positive emotion, would you want or need to transition away from your current state?

Now listen, this is true for everyone. It doesn't just happen for people who work at a nine to five job at the office. It's true for people who work from home, like me, I work from home. It's true for people who stay at home with their children, people who are out of work, people who are retired. No matter how you spend your day, whether or not you're going to an office or

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

Ep #77: Transition Time

not, regardless of what you're doing, what really matters is how you are feeling.

The need to find something like a drink to help you move away, transition away is always based on how you're feeling. And not only that, but your own ability to change your feeling state on your own.

Now, most of you don't know how to do that. I didn't know how to do that for a very long time. And so what happens is we turn to things like pouring a drink, which is such an easy and quick way to cover up a negative emotional state, as a way to transition away from how we're feeling.

The problem is you're teaching your brain something in the process. It's not just that you are trying to cover up how you're feeling. You're teaching your brain one, that negative emotions are a problem that need to be solved, and two, that solving those negative emotions requires something outside of you, something that can cover up how you feel rather than the work that I show you, which is all it requires is something inside of you.

Now listen, there's nothing wrong with cracking open a beer or pouring a glass of wine at the end of the day. You know, the choice to drink is truly neutral. But the point is to ask yourself, do I like the results I am getting? Do I like feeling the pull to drink something at the end of the day because my brain has come to expect a reward? Do I feel like I can't unwind unless I have that drink? Do I like feeling that the day isn't over until I go to the fridge and grab something?

That's up to you to decide. But I'll tell you what happens for my clients. What happens is that they decide, you know what, I don't like that pattern, I don't like this habit, I don't like having a drink being something that I feel like I need at the end of the day otherwise I'm left incomplete. They want to change. They don't want to walk in the door and make a beeline to the fridge.

If you want to interrupt the habit of drinking, you have to forgo using a drink at the end of the day to change how you're feeling. And for a lot of my

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

Ep #77: Transition Time

clients, this is frustrating because when they answer those two assessment questions, that very first question, what are your top three feelings, invariably, they're experiencing a lot of negative emotion. And this is where most people freak out. But you don't need to freak out.

Most people freak out because they realize, okay, so I don't like the habit, I don't like feeling the only way to resolve how I feel at the end of the day, the only way to resolve my stress and anxiety, my exhaustion, my burnout, whatever it is, is to have a drink. I don't like feeling like I need a drink to signal that the day is over somehow, I want to change this habit. But I'm also feeling really stressed and really overwhelmed and so what am I supposed to do? Now you want me to feel worse if I don't have that drink. Now maybe I'm also going to add deprivation on top of everything else because I'm not giving my brain the reward it expects and wants.

And here's what I always tell them. Well, the bad news is yes. Yes, you are going to have to go through a period where you are going to have to meet that desire and allow it to go unanswered, but that is also the good news because when you start to do that, when you start to really understand, okay what is the underlying emotion here that I'm trying to move away from, that's when you have the ability to start to change it. You can't change it if you're always covering it up.

Because the reason you are turning to a drink is because your brain believes it can't handle a certain emotion, that certain emotions are problems that need to be fixed immediately. And the more you attempt to fix how you feel with a drink, two things will happen. One, the less tolerance you will have for any negative emotion. And two, the more desire you will create in your brain to change how you feel with a drink.

So think about it this way. You already have all this negative emotion created by all the thoughts running through your mind during the day. But now you've layered on top of that negative emotion the urge to drink something to solve how you're feeling. And then the restlessness you feel when your brain doesn't get the reward from the alcohol.

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

Ep #77: Transition Time

So do you see? You're doing nothing to solve that original problem. In fact, you're making it worse. The original problem is how you have been thinking during the day. That is the original problem, that is the root cause. But now on top of that, you have the problem of feeling like you need a drink to resolve how you're feeling and then all the consequences that come with having a regular habit of drinking in the evening.

So yes, you will have to feel what you are feeling at the end of the day in order to change this cycle. But that is not a problem. In fact, the only way it stays a problem is if you continue to tell yourself, "Well, I just can't handle it, I got to have a drink. I just can't handle this stress, I just can't handle feeling overwhelmed. The only way I can deal with it is by having a drink."

Guess what will happen? The habit will grow stronger and stronger. Your tolerance for negative emotion will decrease and decrease. So the question is how do you go about change if you know that you don't want to be stuck in this place where you're always using a drink to transition away from how you feel and as a marker for the end of the day, otherwise it feels incomplete to you?

Because listen, your brain is still switching gears at the end of the day. It still probably has to work on a whole new set of tasks, and your brain needs time to do that. It needs a transition regardless of how you're feeling. So you have to find new markers and new ways to transition.

When your work day wraps up, can you build in time to pause and reflect instead of jumping to the next task? So I have a couple ideas that I want to walk you through that can give you a sense for how you can start to consider how you're feeling, your desire to transition away from it, and what you have previously used as a marker, as a way to transition, how to create something different.

So the first is this: just checking in with how you are feeling before you move on to that next part of your day. Ask yourself, what emotion do I feel right now and why am I feeling it? Notice how your brain is going to want to find the circumstance. It's going to want to point to something in your

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

Ep #77: Transition Time

external environment for the reason why. But instead, you can always ask yourself what am I thinking that is making me feel this way.

Now, you can do this at any point. You can do this when you're wrapping up at the office, whether that office is off site or whether it's in your home. You can do this before that time when you are starting the evening activities, before the time when you're maybe picking up your kids from school or meeting them after school or before you start making dinner. It's just a brief pause to check in with yourself and say how am I feeling right now? What is that emotion? Can I name it?

So often we just skip over this part. I have so many people that just say, "I don't know how I feel, I just feel ugh, I just feel meh, I just feel off." You need to be able to really pinpoint that emotion because again, you want to start to build out how that think-feel-act cycle is working. Unless you can name the emotion, you're going to have trouble finding the thought creating it.

Second, because most of you will notice that you are feeling a negative emotion, which your brain currently thinks is a sign that something has gone wrong, I want you to consider what have you been doing today and what have you accomplished? I want you to try to redirect your brain. So you may notice, "Ugh, I'm stressed, I'm overwhelmed, I'm anxious, I'm frustrated, I'm angry, I'm annoyed." Okay, that's fine, good information to know. But can you also consider what have you done? What have you accomplished? Big and small.

So often we blow right past this. We just move from one task to the next. And so you would be surprised how often in your life your brain rarely looks backwards to say, "Hey, let me take a look at what I did today. Let me look at everything I achieved, everything that I have accomplished."

That really can help make a difference. Can you spend just a little bit of time allowing your brain to acknowledge the work that you did instead of jumping to all the work that is outstanding? And really be wary of your brain if it wants to say, "Nothing. I didn't do anything today or I should have done

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

Ep #77: Transition Time

more." Just see if you can allow your brain to be the non-judgmental observer of what you did, what you accomplished.

The third piece is this: reflect on where you are going and how you want to feel when you get there. And you can do this even if your day is spent at home. I do this. My office is at home but I can still reflect on, alright, when I leave my office and I enter the rest of my house, that's where I'm going, that's where I do non-work-related things, how do I want to feel when I get there?

What are you about to shift into? Is it time with your partner? Time with your kids? Time with yourself? Is it fueling and nourishing yourself? Is it winding down? Is it an activity that you enjoy? What are you about to shift into? Where are you going and how do you want to feel when you get there?

Finally, the fourth thing you can ask yourself is okay, so can I create a new kind of transition ritual? So I work at home and I notice that when I would finish up in my office and I would just walk into the living room and flop onto the couch, it didn't feel particularly great. And it had nothing to do with me looking for something to drink. Wasn't even drinking at that point or looking for something to eat.

It was just that that getting out of my office, closing the door, and going straight to the couch somehow wasn't helping me transition in a way that felt productive. There was no time for me to assess how was I feeling or reflecting on what I did. I simply went from my workday to my down time in a split second totally mindlessly.

And when I noticed that it didn't feel good, I noticed also that I wasn't giving my brain any time to switch gears. So one thing I started doing was wrapping up my time in the office and then heading outside for a really short walk. And sometimes this walk is as short as walking around our block, which probably takes five minutes. It's not a long walk. But it was something to help me transition. Something to help me let my brain wander

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

Ep #77: Transition Time

a little bit, to reflect on my day, to decompress, and to just help switch gears.

So you can find any sort of number of different activities to help do this. Maybe you can do a little bit of stretching, maybe you can do some deep breathing. Maybe it's a little yoga or exercise or maybe it's even just a healthy snack or a big glass of water. Really thinking about what can it be. You know, I have some clients who will tell me they'll pull into their driveway and they don't immediately go in. They spend a couple minutes in the car just collecting themselves, just giving their brain a little bit of space, a little bit of a different transition rather than what they would normally do, which is make a beeline for the fridge and go straight to getting a drink.

So here's what I want you to take away. Transition time is always important but it is especially necessary if you are feeling negative emotions. Otherwise, what happens is that transition period becomes a period of looking for relief, which is why so many people use a drink as a way to transition, use a drink as a way to kind of cover up how they're feeling and mark that the day is over.

But what I hope you see is that you can start to manage this time with purpose. You can create relief for yourself and you don't have to be stuck in the habit of just pouring a drink. You can start to teach your brain something different, and not only that, but really uncover what is it that you are feeling at the end of the day because until you acknowledge that, we can't change it.

So I hope this episode has given you some food for thought when it comes to your transition time and markers for the end of the day. As always, if you'd like me to talk about anything on the podcast, you can always reach out 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

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

Ep #77: Transition Time

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.