

Ep #82: Change Without Practice



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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Hey guys, before we get started today, I wanted to let you know that I've updated and expanded my free urge meditation. This will help you retrain your brain around the desire to drink. I've now created two different meditations plus additional exercises that you can use with each one of them. So if you want the details on how to grab your copy of both the audio meditations and the workbook, stay tuned until the end of today's episode.

You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 82.

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

Hello everybody. So I was working with a client recently and she was feeling pretty stuck. So what happened is that she had managed to stop her daily habit of drinking wine in the evening. This was a big thing that she had been working on and practicing and she didn't want to have this kind of routine of five o'clock rolls around and she always had a glass of wine.

So she had been really successful in that aspect of our work together, and she was feeling a lot better. Not just physically but emotionally. But she was still stuck around socializing and not drinking. And we kept going back and forth about the idea that well, she needed to practice it. If she was going to learn how to teach her brain to be social without a drink in her hand, she actually had to practice being social without a drink in her hand.

And the practice looked like going out with people and socializing and having a good time, and purposely not drinking solely to watch her brain. You really want to be able to do this work. When you're practicing, it's not just about, okay, I'm going to go out and say no, or I'm going to come home tonight and say no. It really is about can I practice with the goal of watching my brain, see what it comes up with, really tune into how I'm feeling. Because that is how you understand the full think-feel-act cycle.

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That's what we're trying to do here, right? We're trying to bring awareness to our thoughts so that we can see how the cycle is driving our actions. And I will tell you that every time we talked about this, this idea sounded good but every time she came to test it out she would buck. And finally, she said to me, "Ugh, Rachel, can you just tell me what to think? Can you just tell me what to think so I can feel confident and excited when I'm out with people and not drinking?"

And you know, it's funny because this is a really, really common problem. Once you learn about the think-feel-act cycle, once you understand that your thoughts create your feelings, there often is this kind of initial reaction of like, okay, can you just tell me what to think then so I can feel better. Like, let's avoid all this negative emotion, I just want to feel better so just give me the thoughts. But here's the thing: it doesn't work like that. It doesn't work like that for a couple of reasons and that's what I want to talk to you about today.

So here's the thing: you can't teach your brain to show up differently, to think new thoughts, better serving thoughts in different situations without practicing showing up differently. So you can't master how to not feel uptight, not feel bored, not feel like you're missing out when others are drinking in a social situation and you are not if you're not also willing to practice putting yourself in that situation. You have to practice in order to create change.

And you know, I use the bike example all the time because I really do think it is apt. You can read as many books as you want about how to ride a bike. You can listen to all the podcasts and watch all the YouTube videos on proper form and the exact steps that you should take. But listen, until you get your butt on a seat, it's all just hypothetical. Your brain won't know how to do it because it hasn't actually tried doing it. You haven't built those neural pathways yet. You need practice in order to learn.

Now, the problem is a lot of you think that you're practicing when really, you're just confirming a bias that already exists. So your bias is if I go out socially and I don't drink, I'm not going to have any fun. That's what I

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thought for a really long time. So what do we do? We decide, okay fine, I'll try it. I have clients say to me, "Okay, fine, Rachel, I'll do it. I'll do it this once but I'm not going to like it."

Then they go out socially and they test out not drinking while other people are, and they're sure that they will not have a good time and then guess what happens? They don't have a good time and they come back to me and you know, kind of like hands on their hips like, "See, see, I knew I wouldn't enjoy it, I knew it would be terrible."

But I think it's really important to understand that of course you didn't enjoy it. Your brain is not used to enjoying the company of other people or a party or a celebration or hanging out with your best friend without added dopamine from a drink. That's what you have been practicing up until this point. So of course, you're going to feel like something was missing. That's not a problem. The problem is what did you do when that happened.

What did you do when you noticed your brain wanting a reward? What did you do when you noticed all the thoughts, "This isn't fun, I'm not enjoying myself, I'm the odd man out," how did you react? My question is always, "Okay, so did you expect that it would be uncomfortable? Did you welcome the discomfort? Because hey, discomfort is part of learning. Did you tell yourself, hey, of course my brain is reacting this way, nothing's gone wrong. It's just used to getting a certain amount of added on dopamine in these situations it's not getting right now."

Most people aren't doing that. Most people I find when I challenge them to practice these skills is that they go out and they don't enjoy themselves and they tell themselves that something has gone wrong and they use it as proof that they will never succeed.

But you really have to pay attention to where did your thoughts go in the moment. Did you focus on how your thoughts were creating all the negative emotions you were feeling, or did you focus on how not drinking the contents of your glass were creating your negative feelings? That is an

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important distinction because we know it is not the contents of your glass. It's what you think about the contents of your glass.

It really is like getting on a bike for the very first time after having always used training wheels, and then taking those training wheels off and freaking out that it's wobbly. Of course it's wobbly, your brain only knows how to use training wheels up until this point. It has to learn something different and practice is not a onetime thing. You don't do it once and then say, "Well, I tried." And practice is also not something that happens without a little discomfort because your brain is trying to figure this out. You have to try again and again. Your brain needs repetition in order to learn something new.

Now, a lot of you really resist the idea of repetition. You want your practice, if you're willing at all to do it, you want your practice to be one and done. "Well, I tried, right? I tried not drinking and I hated it so there. I have no choice but to go back to drinking, I have no choice but to be ruled by this habit."

I talk about this a lot with my experience attending weddings. You know, the first wedding that I went to and I didn't drink, I've talked about this on the podcast before. It was incredibly hard. It really was. It was incredibly hard. Now, I survived, but it was very challenging for my brain because my brain was like, what are we doing at a wedding and not drinking? What are we doing on a dance floor and not drinking? What are we doing with all these people from college and not drinking? Right? My brain was just freaking out.

But here's the thing: I didn't make that mean, oh, well I tried and it was difficult and I didn't enjoy myself so obviously I can never learn this skill. No, I knew that it would take practice. And the next wedding I went to was a little bit easier, and the one after that was even a little bit easier, and finally, I got to a point where I went to my own wedding and I could not have cared less whether or not I was drinking. In fact, there was an open bar and it just didn't even register with me because I wasn't longing for a drink. I wasn't

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feeling like I was missing out. I wasn't telling myself that I couldn't get on the dance floor without a buzz. I was just having a blast.

But if I had stopped after that first attempt, if I had stopped after practicing once or if I had said, "Well, just tell me the thoughts to think. Tell me the thoughts to think so I can feel confident and I can stop feeling awkward," well, I never would have gotten to that point.

Now, a lot of you are not even practicing, and I get it. For a long time, I had to also deal with the fact that I didn't want to practice. I wanted to hide. I wanted to stay in my apartment and hide. That felt easier and more comfortable. Of course, it's not sustainable. It's not sustainable to only be able not to drink if you can seclude yourself from the world.

So what happens when you're not practicing is what you are likely doing is catastrophizing. You are imagining how everything will go wrong. And again, what I have to say to this is of course. Of course your brain is imagining everything that will go wrong. It wants to keep the habit. The habit is easy, the habit is efficient. The habit gives your brain a really nice reward of dopamine. And I'll tell you, that lower brain where the habit resides, that's what it cares about. Being efficient, finding pleasure, and avoiding pain.

It doesn't care how you feel about the next day. It doesn't care about the fact that if you keep doing this you'll never be able to go out on the dance floor and dance unless you've been drinking. Or you'll never be able to have a good time socializing if you're not drinking and other people are. Your lower brain just cares about the immediacy of let me get that reward.

So my question for you is what will it take for you to go out there and practice? What I want you to consider is that as a very first step, you have to believe that practice is supposed to be challenging. It is supposed to be difficult. This is not a problem. If it was easy, then your brain would have nothing to learn. The neural pathways would already be there. It is supposed to challenge you. That's okay. That's not a problem.

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But you cannot just think a thought, "Oh, I'm going to have a blast without a drink," and then go out and have a blast because your brain won't believe it. It's too big of a jump. If you remember the podcast that I did all about bridge thoughts, we can't just slap on positive thinking and think that that is going to work in the think-feel-act cycle. Because our thoughts have to be believable. If they're not believable, well, they won't create a real emotion for us.

So the idea that you can just say, "Give me the thoughts, Rachel, tell me what to think, tell me how to feel confident," it won't work like that. Yes, you can start to slightly shift your thinking, yes, you can get yourself to a place where you start to feel better, but a big piece of this is your willingness to put yourself in situations where your brain would rather hide.

Because what will happen is if all of your thoughts are always focused on let's avoid negative emotion, you are going to run into a roadblock. Because not only are negative emotions part of life, but discomfort is part of learning. Discomfort is part of growing and evolving.

And so I really want you guys to think this week, where are the areas where you need practice when it comes to changing your drinking? It's different for everybody. It might be when you come home from work, it might be socializing, it might be spending time with certain people, it might be family events, it might be celebrations, it might be when you feel certain negative emotions. Really pinpoint for yourself what are those areas where you really need some practice in order to make meaningful change with the habit.

Because you don't want to be in the situation that my client was in. So she was feeling really good about having changed that daily evening drinking habit. She's feeling really positive about that, but then she was just completely hiding from the social aspect, from socializing with people, from going out with her friends. That she didn't want to deal with. You really want to be able to show your brain that it doesn't matter what situation you're in, you can handle it.

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So where do you need to practice and what are you doing right now to make that happen? Are you sitting on the sidelines? Are you catastrophizing? Are you thinking about how terrible it will be? Because guess what, the more you sit on the sidelines, the more you think about how terrible it will be, it'll just create a lot of negative emotion that will keep you in the exact same place you are right now.

Are you telling yourself, well, I'd like to but I just - I need to feel more confident before I can take action? Because that doesn't work. And in fact, that's not how we gain confidence. The way that we gain confidence is from doing something that is difficult, that is hard, that is challenging over and over again and teaching our brain that it is not as bad as we anticipated. Our brain wants to say, "You're going to die. It's going to be miserable, it's going to be terrible." That's what my brain did with that very first wedding. "Don't even go. It just will be too much."

And here's the thing: it was challenging, I did have negative emotions, but it also was not as bad as my brain had predicted. I want you to know also whatever the area is for you where you need more practice, are you only willing to get on that bike once? Have you said, "Okay, I'll try it but I'm not going to like it," and you felt a little wobbly and then you threw in the towel? Because that is not practice. That is attempting something once and attempting something once will not teach your brain anything new.

The difference is are you committed to practicing again and again until your brain can master the skill of enjoying itself without a drink? Now, the good news is that your brain previously had this skill. We did not all start drinking immediately. It was something that we taught our brain as a way to outsource fun, a way to outsource connection, a way to outsource enjoyment. But you now can help your brain learn something new.

So my question for you this week is what do you need to practice when it comes to your drinking? Not drinking when you get home, not drinking when you cook dinner, when you visit family, when you're at a party, and how is your brain throwing up roadblocks? Because you're sure that it won't be enjoyable, or you want to wait to take action until you can feel really

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confident. This is where you need to devote your work right now because you cannot create sustainable, meaningful, lasting change if you are unwilling to practice. Change requires practice. That will be uncomfortable, but you can do it. It's how we master any new skill.

Alright everybody, if you have any questions, shoot me an email at podcast@rachelhart.com. Otherwise, I will see you next week.

Hey guys, if you're finding this podcast helpful, and I really hope you are, I would love if you head on over to iTunes and leave a review. And as a special thank you, I've updated and expanded my free urge meditation giveaway. I've created two audio meditations plus a brand new workbook that will teach you a different way to respond to the urge to drink. The meditations are super simple. All it takes is five minutes and a pair of headphones. And each one now comes with a follow-up exercise in the workbook to help you dig deeper and really retrain your brain when it comes to the habit of drinking. So after you leave a review on iTunes, all you need to do is head on over to rachelhart.com/urge, input your information, and I'll make sure you get a copy of both meditations plus the workbook in your inbox.

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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