

Ep #101: Why Fixing Your Drinking Won't Make You Happy



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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 101.

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.

Well hello everybody. How are you? I have been wrapping up some last-minute Christmas shopping because we are about to head back east to Connecticut to see my family for Christmas, and I will tell you, this is the first trip that I am making with my baby. He is four and a half months old.

We are doing this because he hasn't met his great-grandmother who is 96. My grandma. And I am so excited to introduce him to her. I love my grandmother so much. I'm so close to her. And I have to tell you, I have watched my brain want to catastrophize about flying home to Connecticut and having this baby with me, having never done this before, and thinking about all the times I have been on a plane with a crying baby and realizing, oh my god, is that going to be me?

But every time it starts to do that, I just keep reminding myself, even if that happens, even if he's unhappy the entire flight and cries the entire flight, I'm doing this because I cannot wait for him to meet his great-grandmother. It is so amazing that he gets to do that. So she is who I will be thinking of regardless of what happens on that flight.

And there's two of them because you cannot fly directly from San Francisco to Connecticut. Anyway, it's the holiday season, and so many of you are thinking about what you want. The things that you would like to have in your life because you believe that they will make you happy. And I'm not just talking about what's in your stocking or what's under the tree. I'm talking about the things that you want in the new year that you think are going to change everything.

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All the things that your brain just tells you, if only I had this then I would feel good. And here's what I want you to know, it's so important. If you do not know how to manage your mind, if you do not know how to use the think-feel-act cycle, something will happen if you get what you want. Your brain won't be satisfied.

I'm sorry, I know this is terrible news. I had to really learn this the hard way. Your brain will not be satisfied. Your brain will just move the goal post to the next thing that it is sure will make you happy. And you know what? You can spend your entire life doing this, your entire life chasing after things that you believe will make you happy, and if you don't learn how to manage your mind, your brain will never catch on. You will never catch on to what you're doing.

And I'll tell you, it is a terrible place to be in and it's why so many people will tell you that happiness and contentment and wellbeing and satisfaction feels so elusive. So today, that's what I want to talk to you about. I want to explain why this happens, what it looks like when your brain keeps moving the goal post to the next thing, the next shiny object, the next thing to fix and what the downside is of doing this continually, and really more importantly, how to learn how to manage your mind so you're not stuck in this never-ending cycle. And of course, how this all connects to drinking because it really does connect to the habit.

You know, so many of us are programmed to believe that happiness exists outside of us. It's not something that is inside of us, it's not something that we create. It is something that we get from our external world. And it's not surprising because we are surrounded by so many messages that you will finally feel happy, you will finally feel content when you get the career or the partner or the house or the body or the money. When you can finally get these things, we are led to believe that then we will be happy.

So here's the fascinating thing; I work with so many women who say, "Rachel, I got the things. I look at my life and I really feel tremendously blessed. I really feel like I have not only everything that I ever wanted, but more than I ever wanted but I'm still not happy," and that is such a

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frustrating place to be in because when you're led to believe that if only you can gather up all these things it will finally make you happy, when you get them and then you're still not content, it's a really, really difficult place to be in.

And so what do they do? They beat themselves up, surprise, surprise, and they say well here I am, I have all these amazing things and I've accomplished all these things and I have a healthy family and I have a partner and a home and a career and I still don't feel good, I still feel terrible, I still feel like I'm not measuring up, like something is lacking.

And now, if some of you listening and thinking kind of like, "Oh boohoo, poor little rich girl," I get it because I used to think that too. I used to have this idea, if only I had that other person's life, I would really appreciate it. I would be the one that would really know how to appreciate all these things.

And there's a reason why so many of us think this because we have these repeated messages that happiness is this thing that exists outside of us and we just need to accumulate the things that will make us happy. So when we think that the facts of our life, the things that we have, what's happening to us and around us creates our emotions, we are constantly in a race to control all those things and try to make sure that everything that's happening in the world is the right thing so that we can finally feel good.

So we go in search of these things, the career, the partner, the house, the body, the money, and really hoping that finally, we will feel okay, finally we will feel good. The problem is that we're paying zero attention to what actually creates true sustainable happiness, and that is the happiness that you create with your thoughts.

Now, if this sounds kind of trite, I totally get it. But I will tell you, having done this work, having watched myself tell and completely believe, tell myself, "Oh, if I just had this thing, if I could just get this, if I could just find this, I would finally feel good," and then get it and feel good for a little bit and then it slowly wears away. I can tell you how true this is and how I see so many people struggle with this.

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Really, contentment and happiness is something that you create with your thinking. That's how the think-feel-act cycle works. You have a thought that creates an emotion that drives an action. It's not everything you have in your life or the number on the scale or the amount of money in your bank account or the title on your resume. It really is what you think. It really is your thinking.

So I want to explain first how you can see how this connects to the habit of drinking because alcohol is something that we use to try to pretend that we feel good or that we feel better than we actually do. So imagine this; imagine if you were trying to control everything in your life so that you can feel okay.

So you're trying to get the job and find the partner and buy all the things and when that doesn't work, your brain goes to plan B, and plan B is let's pretend. Let's pour ourselves a glass of wine so even though I don't feel great in this moment, I can pretend that I do. So even though I'm not actually a confident person, if I have some alcohol, it will help me pretend that I'm not insecure.

And even though I don't actually enjoy spending time with these people, if I have a couple drinks, alcohol will let me pretend that I have a good time in their company. And even though I don't actually like sitting on the couch all evening or spending time just alone with my thoughts, if I have something to drink, alcohol will let me pretend that I'm actually content, when of course, none of these things are really true.

So we rush around trying to acquire all the things in life that we are so sure will make us happy, and when that doesn't work either, when we don't get it or when we get it and we still feel unsatisfied, what does our brain do? It looks to a quick and easy solution. It looks to let me just give myself that temporary reward to help me pretend that I feel good when really, I don't.

Now, the only problem is all the consequences that come out of relying on a drink to pretend that your life is better than it really is. Because the more that you turn to alcohol to pretend that you like yourself or the people that

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you're with, or what you are doing or that you're not stressed out, the more your brain will want it. And the more you say yes to the urge, the more dependent on it you will become, and then the more consequences you will create for yourself.

Now, I know that some of you are listening and you're thinking to yourself, "Listen, I don't just drink when I feel down or when I'm trying to deal with my negative emotions. My problem is that I'm drinking too much in social settings or my problem is I just don't have that off switch and I just find my brain wanting more and more," and here's what I want you to know.

The exact same principle is at work. Your brain is telling you that the way to feel good is to seek out more, to have another drink. More is better. Another drink equals more fun. Another round equals a better time. So you aren't saying no because you believe if you do, then the fun will stop. It will be boring, you'll feel deprived.

And I want you to see that the exact same thing is happening here. You have that exact same belief, that exact same programming that happiness and enjoyment are created by things that exist outside of you. It's created by saying yes to another drink, another round, finishing off that bottle of wine.

So here's the problem; either way, your brain keeps moving the goal post. Either it's moving the goal post of you get the job of your dreams and then it doesn't take long for your brain to decide that there's actually something really wrong with it, the grass is always greener, or you're moving that goal post because you pour yourself a glass of wine and that feels good and then your brain keeps telling you well, more is better. Another drink will equal more fun, another round will be a better time.

So why not have another? So you move the goal post on your drinking. So whether it is the things that you think you need in life, the things you think you need to acquire so that could be money or a job, a different career, a house, a car, status, a partner, or the things you think you need to fix like your body, your relationship, or everything about yourself, that's what I

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thought for a long time, I need to fix everything about me, or the things that help you temporarily pretend that your life is better than it really is, so that could be alcohol or food or drugs, regardless of what angle you're coming from, your brain is on a mission to find happiness outside of you with all of these examples.

But that is not where happiness exists. It is not how the think-feel-act cycle works. You're not going to find it outside of yourself. This really is the worst news and the best news. Because once you understand that, you can stop being on this incessant chase and you can start looking inside and figuring out what are the thoughts, what are the think-feel-act cycles that are getting in the way of my own wellbeing, my own happiness.

Because no matter what the circumstances of your life are, how you feel is created not by what you have and not by what's happening to you, but what you think about these things. It's created by your thinking. Now listen, I'm a coach, I teach these tools to my clients, I practice the tools of managing my mind on a daily basis, and still I catch my brain trying to move that goal post.

Now, that's okay. It's okay if your brain keeps doing it. What you have to recognize is do you know how to manage it, and that's what most people don't know how to do. So first, you may not even be aware that it's happening and then once you're aware that it's happening, okay, so how do I start to manage it?

I always think when I catch myself doing this, oh, I'm just discovering a deeper layer. I'm just getting to a deeper understanding of myself and how my brain thinks and how to manage it on a deeper level. And you have to do that. You have to manage your mind. You have to really learn these tools or else you will just be constantly chasing happiness outside of you. You will get caught in this trap, and trust me, it is not a good place to be.

So the other day when I caught myself doing this, we actually had a couple days in a row where my baby slept through the night, and it was amazing. He's still very young to be doing this, and truthfully, I have no idea how long

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this will actually even last because if you know anything about babies, they are always talking about sleep regression. So you make a little progress with sleep and then you have a regression.

But it happened for a couple days in a row and I'll tell you that even a couple nights when you are used to waking up several times in the middle of the night to deal with a crying baby is totally transformative. And pretty much since he was born, I have wanted this. I have been thinking, my brain has been thinking, "Oh my god, when are we going to get to the point when he will sleep through the night?"

So I woke up one morning and I realized the baby was still asleep and I actually had to go wake him up to nurse him, which blew my mind. And I did that and my husband came out into the living room probably 30, 35 minutes later and I was so annoyed. I was so annoyed because he had spit up all over me probably five or six times, just spitting up everywhere.

And I was so annoyed and my husband came into the room and I was just like, "When is this baby going to stop spitting up? Every single time I nurse him, it's just all over me. I smell like sour milk, I hate this." I was so annoyed. And so he said, "Listen, just let me take over. Go outside for a walk, it's okay, I'll take it from here."

And so I went outside and what did my brain do? I start immediately Googling like, how long does this last? When is this baby going to stop spitting up? And suddenly as I was walking down this street, it hit me. Oh my god, I just moved the goal post. Because here's the thing, a couple days before you know what I had been Googling incessantly? When is my baby going to sleep through the night?

And then he slept through the night and I found the next problem. I found the next thing that I kept saying if only he would stop doing this then I could feel good. And you know what it was before sleeping through the night? When is breast-feeding going to stop hurting? And before that, how do you get pregnant? When am I finally going to get pregnant?

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Every time I would reach a milestone, something that my brain was so sure, if I finally get pregnant, if finally breast-feeding could not be so difficult, if finally, my baby would sleep through the night, then I would be happy. What did my brain do? It just moved on to the next problem. It just found the next thing that it was sure was standing in the way of happiness. It moved the goal post.

And so that's what I want you to see, that that thing in the moment that you are so sure is going to be the thing that makes you happy, what happens when you get it? What I watched my brain do was it just found a new problem. And it doesn't just happen with babies, guys. I have watched my brain move the goal post over and over and over again in my life.

I have told myself, oh my god, I'm so desperate to have this thing, and then I get it, and then my brain finds a new problem. The next thing that I swear if only I'll get that, then I'll finally feel good. And it's been like this for me, for so many things. If only a boy would like me, if only I could get my first boyfriend, if only I could have my first kiss, if only I could find someone who wanted to spend the rest of my life with me.

And it's been like that with my body. If only I could have clear skin or fill out a bra or no longer have frizzy hair, or reach my goal weight, then I'll finally be happy. And it's happened with my path in life. If only I could get out of this tiny town, if only I could get into my first-choice college, if only I could get a job or a promotion or a raise or pay off my student loans.

And then I did all these things. Guess what? Brain just moved the goal post. And of course, guess what a big thing for me was, and probably for a lot of you, if only I could figure out my drinking. Then I would finally be happy. But you get all these things, and then what does your brain do if you're not managing it? It just moves on to the next problem or the next shiny object that will, of course, bring happiness.

And so you end up constantly on this chase and never feeling fulfilled. And that's certainly what happened for me when I was doing the work to really figure out the habit of drinking. I was so sure if only this wasn't an issue for

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me, if only I could figure this out, if only I didn't desire it so much, then I promise, I promise, I promise, I would be happy.

But until I did the work to learn how to manage my mind, how to manage my thinking, happiness remained elusive. The reason, if you do not feel happy or content or fulfilled right now, is because of what you're thinking. Because you can look at your life and you can believe that what you have and who you are is amazing, or you can look at your life, the exact same set of circumstances and believe that what you have and who you are is lacking.

How you feel about your life and about yourself has everything to do with your thoughts. That's where your work needs to be. Not on fixing the next problem or acquiring the next thing. If you don't learn how to manage your mind, if you don't start to truly practice this skill of noticing the thoughts that are standing in the way between you and your wellbeing, you will be stuck constantly chasing this moving goal post.

And I know some of you might be thinking, "Well listen, if that's the case Rachel, if it really is just all about our thinking, then why would I change anything? Why not just spend all my time working on changing my thoughts?" and this is what I believe. You can change your actions because simply you don't like the results that you are getting.

So if you're overdrinking or overeating or over-spending or over-working or if you're spending hours and hours in front of screens, you can change those actions simply because you don't like the consequences. And on the other side, you can choose to go after big goals. Write the book, run the marathon, start a business, whatever you want to do because you want to stretch and see what you're capable of. You want to grow and you want to evolve as a human.

But as soon as you do either of these things and you tell yourself okay, if I finally fix the habit, if I finally get the accomplishment, and then I'll be happy, then you are going to be in trouble. Because it really is learning how

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to manage your mind, learning how to see the thoughts standing in the way between you and happiness.

So you have to constantly be on the lookout for the circumstances your brain is pointing to and promising, if only that were to happen, or if only this were to stop, or if only I were to get this thing, or if only this person were to change, or if only my drinking would be different, then I would finally feel good. You have to constantly be on the lookout for that.

And so here's the exercise I want you to do. Whatever it is, whatever your brain is telling yourself that if you got this thing, you would be happy, and it could be the number on the scale, it could be changing careers, it could be a relationship, it can be changing your drinking, it can be starting a business. Whatever it is, I want you to identify that and then ask yourself if I had this thing, what would I think about myself and what would I think about my life?

I want you to really pay attention to what your answers are. Would you be telling yourself, "I'm finally good enough, I finally feel worthy, I finally feel like I'm not broken, I finally feel complete, I finally feel like I've made it," whatever those thoughts are that you would tell yourself when you finally got the thing, you have to start finding evidence to prove these thoughts true now.

How are you good enough now? How are you worthy right now? How are you complete right now? How have you made it right now? You have to start seeing those thoughts and finding evidence to prove them true. Especially at this time of year when we're thinking so much about the things that we want, and the things that we believe if only we had would make us happy, you have got to pay attention to really understand what is truly getting in the way.

And this is what I promise you is so true of the habit of drinking. Changing the habit, you can get to a place where you feel physically better, you're not dealing with hangovers, you're not dealing with regret. But if you aren't doing the underlying work, if you aren't doing the work to have a life that

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feels amazing, to have wellbeing and contentment, to know how to manage your mind when you feel anxious or lonely or awkward or bored or angry, if you are not doing that underlying work with the think-feel-act cycle, your brain will just move the goal post.

It will find something else that you need to fix or you need to change or you need to acquire in order to feel good. And it will leave you exhausted. But when you do this work to learn how to manage your mind, to learn how the think-feel-act cycle is actually something you can use to feel better, that can change everything.

So I hope that you will think about that today, especially as this year is drawing to a close and when you're thinking about what you want in 2019. Change your actions because you don't like the results you're getting. Go after big goals because you want to stretch and evolve and see what you're capable of.

But don't do these things because you're telling yourself, "Then I'll finally be happy." If you do, I promise, that's when you'll get into trouble. Alright everybody, that's all for this week. Talk to you soon.

Have you changed your drinking but still feel like something is missing in life? Then you are ready to go in pursuit of a life that blows your mind. I am accepting applications now for an exclusive year-long coaching program that will give you the blueprint to let go of insecurity, anxiety, self-doubt, and to once and for all stop feeling like you need to fix yourself because it is so worth it to create a life that is way bigger and way better than what's in your glass. If you're interested, head on over to rachelhart.com/inpursuit to apply.

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.

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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.