

Ep #102: How Drinking Prevents You from Creating a Future



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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 102.

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. Happy New Year. We have an amazing 365 days in front of us to do something totally new, totally different, totally amazing with your life. And my question for you is this; are you super psyched to see what, this year, you can create, what you can do? Or are you thinking about all the things that you just want to fix about yourself?

It's such a big distinction to go between creating and fixing. And the way that I often know where people are in this journey is just by asking them, do you have a vision for the life that you want? Do you know what you are headed towards? Or, are you spinning in a place of, "I don't know, I just feel confused, I don't know what I want to do, I don't know what I want to pursue? I don't know what I'm passionate about. I don't know how I want to spend my time; I just have all these things that I want to fix."

And you know what, I've heard this a lot from a lot of you recently because I've been going through applications for my new coaching program, In Pursuit. And one of the questions that I've been asking people is, what do you want to go in pursuit of?

Because the program is really all about, you know, what do you want to pursue? So many people in their application write, "I don't know. And not only that, it's so upsetting and it's so frustrating." And if you are in this space, I feel you because I will tell you, for the longest time, a new year for me was all about, "What can I fix? How can I just fix everything that's wrong?" And also feeling terribly confused about what I wanted in life.

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I really spent so much time being stuck in confusion. And not only was it just uncomfortable for me not to have a clear vision that I was moving towards, it also made me feel really inadequate. Like, how could I not know? How could I not know what I want to do, what I want to pursue, what I feel passionate about, how I want to spend my time?

I was really, really confused by this and felt – I really felt terrible because I'd beat myself up quite a bit. I was talking to someone recently and I asked her, because she was ticking off all the things she wanted to fix about herself, you know, her drinking and her weight and her job and her relationship and her time-management.

And I asked her, if I gave you a piece of paper, do you think you could fill up the entire sheet with things you wanted to fix and things you want to change about yourself. And she immediately said yes. And I remember so clearly being in this exact same place, having this laundry list of brokenness, this laundry list of problems.

And I actually remember writing these lists. I don't know what I thought I was going to do with them, but it felt, somehow, helpful. Maybe if I get it all down on paper and I see my shame staring back at me, maybe then I will change.

Of course, what did that do? It created a lot of negative emotion. And what did I know to do when I encountered negative emotion? Well, I wanted to find something to cover it up and to hide.

And back then, if someone had challenged me to do the opposite, if they had said, "Hey, Rachel, instead of writing a laundry list of what's wrong and broken with you, why don't you write a list of what's correct, what's right, what's complete about you?" I think I just would have stared at them blankly and then stared at the sheet blankly and thought, I have no idea how to do that.

But I want you to know that that can change. If you feel that way, that can change. Being confused about what you want in life, I think, is actually

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worse than knowing what you want and not getting it, because at least when you know what you want and you don't get it, you still have a direction to go in. You still can try other avenues. You still have a vision of what you want.

But when you're confused about what you want, when you're confused about what your vision is, when you keep telling yourself, "I don't know..." that is really not a great place to be. And it's where I was for so long.

The future wasn't something that I looked forward to. It wasn't something that I spent a lot of time dreaming about and thinking about what I could create or who I could become. It was something that kind of terrified me because I didn't know what I wanted to do with my future. I just knew that I didn't want to be where I was and I didn't like who I was.

But if you had asked me about my vision for my life 10 years ago, I would have just spun out on how I didn't know and how it felt terrible not to know and I was so confused and why did everybody else know what they wanted to do and not me?

So because today is the dawn of a new year, I want to talk to you about this piece. I want to talk to you about why it's so hard to dream, why it can be so difficult to create a vision, and why the habit of drinking will make it even harder.

So a couple of weeks ago, I shared something that I call a powerful question with my email subscribers. So if you haven't heard me talk about powerful questions, I talk all about them in episode 48 of the podcast about how questions work in your brain.

So, every Sunday, I share a powerful question with my email list. So it is something that you can use to start to challenge your brain to think about something differently, to have a new perspective. And every Thursday, I actually share a quick tool that you can put into practice.

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So listen, if you're not on the list, you should get on the list because I really want, everyone who subscribes, I really want you to have tools and questions and little tips and tricks that you can use to start learning how to manage your mind.

So if you are interested, just head on over to rachelhart.com/workbook – you can get a free podcast workbook that I help walk you through five of my favorite podcasts, and also, you'll be subscribed to be on regular emails.

But anyway, I was sharing this powerful question. So it was a question that will help you start to think a little bit differently. And the question was this; if success were guaranteed, what would you go in pursuit of this year?

I want you to really think about it. If I could guarantee success, there was no way that you would fail, what would you want to go after? How would you want to spend your time? What would you want to create? What would you want to do?

And if you aren't going after that thing, whatever it is for you, why is that? Why aren't you going after it? I'll tell you; the reason is because you're afraid of failing, because if I could guarantee success for whatever you want to do and you're not going after it right now, it's because you're afraid of failing.

Now, I've talked about this on the podcast before; failure does not make you feel anything. Everybody's trying to avoid it all the time, "Oh, I hate failing. I never want to fail at anything. I don't like to put myself in a position where I can fail." But here's the thing; failure does not make you feel anything. That's not how the think-feel-act cycle works.

Failure isn't something that you are; it's a result that you get. And that result does not feel like anything, it does not produce shame or embarrassment or humiliation or hopelessness until you make that result mean something negative about your ability to succeed or something negative about you.

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And here's what I did for the longest time; I made failure mean something's wrong with me, I'm broken, I'm never going to figure this out, I never do anything right, I'm never going to succeed, I'm a screw-up. That's what I made failure mean.

As long as you are making a result mean these things, yeah, you definitely won't want to fail. But it's not failure that's making you feel ashamed and embarrassed and hopeless and humiliated; it's what you're making failure mean.

So I want you to really consider this; the reason you are afraid of going after what you want in life is not because you are afraid of failing, but because you are afraid of how you will feel when you fail. And you think that feeling isn't optional because you've never paid attention to what you make failure mean, you just assume that failure creates your feelings.

Failure doesn't create your feelings; your thoughts about failure do. So you're not going after the life you want because your brain is anticipating and trying to avoid a negative emotion. So think about that, especially for those of you who have been listening to me talk about the things that we do to avoid and cover up negative emotions.

How does it connect to your drinking? Well, when we pour a drink, is a quick and easy, albeit temporary, fix to change how you feel, which most often is a negative emotion. I'm stressed out, so I pour a drink. I'm anxious, so I pour a drink. I'm lonely, so I pour a drink. I feel awkward, so I pour a drink. I'm bored, so I pour a drink.

And for all of you that are saying, "That's not what I do, Rachel. I'm not just drinking when I'm feeling a negative emotion. I just drink to have a good time and then I go a little overboard..." here's what I want you to consider. What is getting in the way of a good time if you're not drinking? What would you be feeling if you were at the bar or the restaurant or the party or the baseball game or the vacation and everyone around you was drinking but you?

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Would you feel annoyed or restricted or deprived or like you were missing out? If that's the case, then guess what – when you're pouring a drink, what you're trying to avoid is a negative emotion. The habit of drinking is a habit that, at its root, is all about moving away from negative emotions.

It is a habit of avoiding discomfort. Your brain learns that a negative emotion is a problem and that it can cover it up temporarily with a drink. The problem is, the more you teach your brain that you need a drink to cover up how you feel, the less capable you become at handling negative emotions and the more the consequences start to mount.

So think about why you aren't going after what you want in life, because you are anticipating a negative emotion if you fail. So guess what – the same problem is at the root of both of these things; both the habit of drinking and why you are not pursuing what you want out of life.

Your brain thinks, if I fail, I'll feel bad, so I should avoid failing. And if I don't drink, I'll feel deprived, so I should avoid not drinking. And if I feel stressed or bored or lonely or awkward or anxious, I don't want to sit with it. I want to cover this up, so I'll just go have a drink.

So do you see the connection? The habit of drinking and not going after what you want in life boils down to the very same thing; avoiding a negative emotion. But I want you to know, this isn't the only way that drinking disconnects you from your dreams, because the habit is all about a habit of searching out immediate gratification. I want it, so I must have it.

That's what your brain ends up focusing on because there is this sense, for so many people that I work with, and I had this sense for a long time too, if I want something, if I have this urge for something and I don't answer it, if I don't say yes to it then I feel terrible. It would be unthinkable. It would be so uncomfortable.

That was the story that I had about letting my urges, my desires, my wants go unanswered. I hated wanting something and not having it, but that was

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simply because I had taught my brain, over and over again, oh you have an urge, go fulfill it. If you desire something, go get it.

But what I was doing with this story, and what so many of you are doing when you tell yourself it's terrible, it feels horrible to want something and not get it, you're turning discomfort into chaos. Listen, if you're having an urge, it's really not a big deal. It is a little bit of restlessness.

Once you stop telling yourself the story about how bad it is and you start actually feeling what it feels like in your body, noticing the sensations, it's really not that bad. But that's not how your brain is treating an urge right now.

So what you do is you start conditioning your brain to seek out immediate gratification, immediate false pleasures, instead of actually doing the work to create lasting wellbeing, because remember that drinking is all about consuming. It's not about creating wellbeing, it's about consuming a false pleasure to help you pretend that you're enjoying yourself, when in actuality, if you weren't drinking, you wouldn't be feeling that great.

Drinking is easy. It takes very little energy, very little effort, and the thing is that your brain will prioritize things that provide easy pleasures, unless you learn how to manage your brain, unless you learn how to talk back to that toddler who is insistent that it wants what it wants.

I talk about this in episode 64, all about your urges, all about how that lower brain, that part of your brain that only cares about getting pleasure, avoiding pain, and doing it as easy and efficiently as possible, it's like a toddler. It doesn't care about tomorrow. It doesn't care about your goals. It doesn't care about your future. It only cares about the immediate moment; what it wants right now. And if it doesn't get it, it will throw a tantrum.

Now, the good news is, you don't just have a lower-brain. You have a higher-brain. You have a more evolved human brain. You have that prefrontal cortex that can start to manage your urges. It can start to manage the toddler.

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When your brain is totally focused on the immediate moment and totally focused on avoiding negative emotion, and totally focused on immediate gratification, you're not thinking about the future. You're not thinking about what you want beyond the desire that you have right now.

And that is how the habit of drinking will disconnect you from your dreams and from your vision, because instead of thinking about tomorrow or next week or next month, you're thinking all about what you want right now in this moment and what will happen if you don't get it, which you have a story that it will be terrible and unbearable.

I actually talk about this a lot, the idea that discomfort is just a normal part of the human experience. But there are different types of discomfort. You can choose the discomfort of saying no to an urge, that discomfort of wanting something in the immediate moment and not rewarding your brain so that you don't have to deal with the discomfort of all the negative consequences that come from the habit of drinking.

And not just the habit of drinking, but they can come from the habit of overeating or overspending or overworking or spending all of your time in front of a screen. So you can choose that initial immediate discomfort of saying no to an urge because you want to create long-term comfort for yourself instead of all those negative consequences.

Or you can do the opposite. You can say no, I need immediate comfort right now, I need that immediate gratification, and then what I'm going to create for myself is long-term discomfort, because when you keep turning to things outside of you to feel better, guess what's going to happen; your consequences are going to start mounting.

You're not going to be focused on what you want in the future. In fact, the dreams that you have, maybe you won't even be able to connect to them. And if you are able to connect, they will go unrealized because your brain is so focused on, I must have immediate comfort at the expense of myself. That's when you create long-term discomfort for yourself.

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So it's your choice. If discomfort is part of the human experience, which one do you want to choose? Do you want to choose discomfort in the immediate moment which you know will lead to what you want in the long-term, or do you want to choose discomfort in the long-term because you're so insistent on, I can't handle this urge, I hate saying no, I hate feeling restricted, I hate feeling deprived?

That's what so many of you are doing. You are choosing immediate comfort that is temporary that creates consequences at the expense of yourself. When all of your energy is going towards, how can I feel better right now, what will cover up this feeling, what will make me feel less anxious or less awkward or less lonely or less bored or less deprived – when that's where all your energy is going, you won't dream big.

You will stay small because your focus is on that glass of wine, it's not on your future. And this was what was so frustrating for me. I spent probably over a decade fixated on the habit of drinking and building my social life around when I was going to drink and thinking about when do we get to go to the bar and spending time getting drunk and then recovering from the night before, and then feeling regret and shame about what happened, and then worrying about that habit and worrying that something was wrong with me.

I spent all this mental energy there. It took up so much space in my brain. So guess what – I didn't know what my future looked like. I didn't know what I wanted it to look like because my brain was so consumed with the habit of drinking. It was so consumed with how do I find immediate gratification right now, how do I cover up my negative emotions right now, and then dealing with all the consequences I was creating for myself.

That really is what happens. And this is why it's so hard to dream and for those of you who are thinking to yourself, "I don't know what I want, I don't know what my purpose is, I don't know what will fulfill me..." because you're afraid of how you will feel if it doesn't happen. You are afraid that failure is something that has to be avoided at all costs, which it doesn't, that's the good news. And the habit of drinking is making it even more

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difficult to connect with that dream or that vision because you are constantly teaching yourself that you aren't enough to cope with a negative emotion, that you need a drink to cover up how you feel, that the most important thing is that immediate gratification.

So that's what I really want you to think about today when you have a brand-new year in front of you. Are you thinking about what you can create? Are you thinking about how this year can be different, how you can grow and evolve, or are you confused about what you want? Are you focused on everything that you need to fix?

And if you are, you have to consider the ways in which, number one, you are afraid of failing, because you believe that failure is what causes negative emotions – that's never the case – and number two, how the habit of drinking has you choosing short-term comfort at your own expense.

Because while you may be able to temporarily cover up how you feel in the moment, whatever you are feeling, that underlying emotion doesn't change. It doesn't go away and you don't become more capable of dealing with how you feel. In fact, you become less able to cope with those emotions.

So think about this today. I really do want you to consider, if success were guaranteed, what would you go in pursuit of this year? And if you're not going in pursuit of that, why is it? Alright, everybody, that's it for this week. I will 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.

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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.