

Ep #123: Why Things Get Worse Before They Get Better



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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 123.

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, my friends. So here's the thing; I was on a coaching call with a client recently and this is what she said, which I loved so much that I had to share it with you guys. She said, "I am so glad that I struggled with my drinking so that I could learn this. So that I could learn about my mind and how it works and the think-feel-act cycle and that there are circumstances in the world and that my thoughts about them are optional. I can choose what I want to think about them."

Seriously, can you imagine this? If you are in the place right now where you are struggling with your drinking, can you imagine being glad to have had this struggle? Can you imagine being grateful that you drink more than you want?

I will tell you, for the longest time, I couldn't. I thought that the habit of drinking and the habit of overdrinking that I had was the worst part of me. It was a sign that I was surely broken. It was a sign that something was really wrong, and it was the cause of so many problems in my life. But you know what, now I can totally relate with what this client said because I actually do think about this all the time.

I do think about how having this be my struggle, having this be something that I had to figure out, it was the path that got me here, got me to the life that I have now, which frankly is really amazing. Learning about desire and how to manage it, learning about urges and how to allow them, learning about habits and how they work and the think-feel-act cycle and how the mind works, all of that would not have happened had I not struggled with my drinking for so many years.

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Now that I know how to manage desire and I know how to manage my brain when it's saying, "Oh, just get the quick fix, just do it, you'll feel better. Let's just have immediate gratification." Now that I know how to manage all of that, it is a metaskill that I can use for everything in my life, and that is why I'm so glad that I had to learn this. I'm so glad that this was a struggle that I had to figure out.

I want you to think of it this way. Think of every goal that you have right now outside of figuring out your drinking. So I know that that might be goal number one for you, but think about all the other goals you have as well. Whatever it is. Maybe you want to lose weight, or you want to pursue a different career, maybe you want to write a book, maybe you want to save money.

Whatever it is, the only reason that you haven't accomplished those goals is because of a feeling. It's because of an urge to do something else. An urge to eat the food, to skip the gym, to now send out your résumé and instead go on Facebook, to delay signing up for the new course, to put off writing tonight, to spend the money.

Whatever the urge is, that feeling is what is standing in the way of you accomplishing your goal. And so you have to ask yourself, why did you answer the urge to do something else instead of moving towards your goal? And the reason is simple. It's just because right now, your brain has a lot of practice of saying yes to urges.

Because that's what the habit of drinking is. The habit of overdrinking is feeling the urge and saying yes and feeling the urge and saying yes, and so your brain gets a lot of practice at saying yes to urges. But when you learn how to say no to the urge to drink, without willpower by the way, without gritting your teeth and being really disciplined, when you learn how to do that, to say no to the urge and you do it with curiosity and you do it with compassion, and you just allow it to be there, you don't freak out, guess what?

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You teach your brain the metaskill of learning how to respond differently to every urge that you have. And this is why I talk about how powerful and how transformative this work is. Because yes, you're here, you want to change the habit of drinking. You are sick of overdrinking. You're sick of waking up and thinking, "Why did I have that much? I didn't even want to drink that much."

But being here and learning how to change this habit, learning how to respond to your desires and your urges differently, it is everything when it comes to learning how to go after what you want in life. Because every goal that you have, everything that's standing in the way of it right now is just a feeling. It's an urge to do something else.

The fact that you are learning how to do this with a concentrated reward like alcohol means that everything else after it will be so easy in comparison. That's why I love this work. That's why it was so transformative for me and it's so transformative for my clients, because when you learn how to respond to an urge differently, and not just any urge, but one that your brain knows hey, if you say yes, I'm going to get a big reward.

Much bigger than you get from food, much bigger than you get from Facebook, much bigger than you get from spending money. When you learn how to do that, nothing will stop you. You master this and your life can't help but become bigger and better because you're not going to be ruled by your urges anymore.

The urges can come up, you can have that little part of your brain that says hey, let's do the immediate gratification, but you will not be ruled by that part of you. So I want to talk to you today about why things get worse before they get better, and this is a really common problem, especially for those of you who have taken a break or are taking a break from drinking, whether you've done it before, you're doing it right now, maybe you're just contemplating it.

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This can be a common problem. So you get to that point where you decide, okay, enough is enough, I just need a little break, I just got to have a clear head. I've got to figure some things out. And I know that I can't do it if I'm cleaning up all the time from having too much to drink. I just got to understand why it is that I have so much desire and why I struggle so much to say no to that desire.

This is what happened to me and what happened to me over and over again. So what do you do? You take a break and then initially, you do start to feel better, especially if it's on the heels of a night where you had too much. So you're not drinking and you wake up and you're not so groggy and you have a little more energy in the day, and you notice that you're not so anxious in the morning.

And you don't have to think about not only what you drank last night, but who you texted and what you ate when you were buzzed. You don't spend all night zoned out on the couch with Netflix and a bottle of wine. You're doing different things, so you do start to feel better.

But then here's what happens; I see this with my clients all the time. After a while, it kind of starts to feel worse. And that's where people can freak out because of course, you don't want things to get worse. You want things to get better. That's why you committed to taking a break. You just wanted to have some time and some space to get some clarity.

But now, well, things don't feel as good as they did at first, and I will tell you this is where most people give up. But if you can make it through this period, this is where the magic happens. Because the truth is things have not gotten worse. It may feel like they have, but they haven't.

What's happened is you have just opened your eyes to the actual emotional experience of your life. Things aren't actually worse. You're just noticing how things really are, and the reason that you're able to notice it is because you're not spending all this time turning to a drink to numb how you feel.

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So all the thoughts, all the feelings that were previously kind of pushed down, they were under the surface because you had a built-in distraction, you could just pour yourself a glass of wine, all of those thoughts and all of those feelings, now they're not so much under the surface anymore. Now they're kind of right up at the surface.

You're not coming home and just opening a bottle of wine. When you don't have the distractions there, when you're not numbing yourself all the time, you actually see the true emotional experience of your day-to-day life. And a lot of times it doesn't look good, and that's why we think that things have gotten worse.

Because what would happen, it still wasn't looking good when you were drinking, but you had something to cover it up. You had something that would trick your brain into believing that you were happy, and trick your brain into believing that things were good. Because alcohol gives your brain that dopamine, it gives it that temporary pleasure.

So now that you don't have it, it's like, what's going on? I took this break and I wanted things to be better but now it feels like things are worse. And that's where so many people quit. But things haven't gotten worse. Things have just gotten real. You're seeing the truth of your life, and sometimes the truth of your life is not pretty.

I will tell you, it was not for me. The truth of my life without alcohol was that I was a terrible self-critic. I beat myself up all the time. I held myself to impossible standards that I was always failing to meet, I was constantly thinking about my past and all the opportunities that I had let slip through my fingers. I was desperate for approval and love and attention because I had no idea how to give it to myself.

And to top it off, I had no clue how to handle my emotions. I had no clue what to do when I felt stressed or bored or lonely or anxious or awkward. All I knew was to just pour a drink. And so all of a sudden when I had those emotions but I was in the middle of a break, I felt like I was totally out of my depth.

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And so if this happens, what do you do? What do you do when you see the truth of your life and it doesn't look like what you want it to look like? Do you crawl back into the cave? Do you hide? Do you pull the covers over your head? Do you eat something and drink something and turn on the TV and try to tune out your life?

That's what I did and that's what a lot of you are doing. But guess what the hiding and the searching for immediate gratification does? It doesn't change what's really going on. It doesn't change the truth of your life. It just helps you momentarily pretend that things aren't so bad because you have found things to distract yourself and give you a little bit of pleasure. But that pleasure will always wear off.

And if you don't actually change your life, if you don't actually start creating a life that you enjoy, you will always have the need for more. You will never be satisfied. You will always be going back for another glass of wine or more to eat. You will always be spending. You will always be watching. You will always be trying to fill yourself up because of what you feel on the inside.

So what happens though, we don't really realize that we're doing this until we take a break. We don't realize that the way of coping with things was well, I have all this stress at work but I was able to come home and have wine so it's not that bad. Or, I hate the way I look in the mirror but I had three cupcakes and I got to feel a little bit of pleasure. At least that made me happy. Or, I'm totally unsure of what I'm doing with my life, I don't even know if I'm in the right job, but I spent four hours watching Netflix so at least I was entertained.

That's what you're doing all the time, and that's what a break puts into such stark clarity for you to see. The reality of your life and what isn't working. I would wake up from a night of drinking too much and I would say, "No more. I'm so sick of this. I'm so sick of the shame and the humiliation and the regret."

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And I would not drink and it would last for a while, and I'd feel physically better and I'd love not waking up hungover and I'd really enjoy not having to worry about what I did or said the night before, and I appreciated having more energy, but then I had to deal with the truth of my life, that I hated my body and I wasn't sure that my career path was even something that I wanted to do and that even though I was able to pay my bills, I could never keep money in my savings account, and that even when I was in a relationship, I never actually believed that the guy I was with really wanted to be with me.

And I was so sure that I had wasted so many opportunities in life and that I was way too far behind in comparison to all my peers and I would never catch up, and I would never actually be someone or do anything meaningful with my life. That was the truth of my life and I saw it, and of course I wanted to hide. Of course, I wanted to just go back to drinking.

And that's what I did so many times because when you see that and you don't know how to change it, it's like, well maybe having a couple drinks doesn't sound like such a bad idea. You can do that. You can create that momentary relief and that momentary pleasure that will always wear off and it will always leave you wanting, or you can choose the opposite.

You can move towards discomfort because the reality of your life right now is uncomfortable. You can move towards discomfort because discomfort is the path. The only way out is through. You have got to cross the swamplands of your soul. There's just no two ways about it.

And the way that you do that is you learn how to manage your mind. You learn why it is that you feel the way you do. You learn why it is that you beat yourself up. And why you're constantly catastrophizing and looking to the past. You learn why it is that you don't give yourself approval, and it's so simple. It's always just a thought. You just have to learn how the think-feel-act cycle works.

I didn't know that for so long, so I didn't know what to do every time I saw the reality of my life. I just went back into hiding and back to drinking. But

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here's the thing; when you move towards discomfort, when you cross those swamplands, when you get to the other side and you learn how to manage your mind, when you're no longer afraid of setting big goals, when you know how to handle any emotion, when you approve of yourself and you are kind to yourself, and most of all, you never have to worry about your drinking again, it's everything.

It's so amazing to be on the other side, to never have to wake up and think, "Why did I do that?" That, my friends, is freedom. It doesn't get worse before it gets better. It just gets real before it gets better. Don't let the reality freak you out. The veil is lifted when you take a break. That's why it's so powerful. That's why it is so incredibly powerful to give yourself some time and space without alcohol.

You don't have to swear it off forever. But just long enough so you can actually take a look at your life and decide, hey, is this the life that I want? You truly cannot change what you can't see, and you certainly cannot change what isn't working in your life if you are devoting all this mental energy to cleaning up from the night before.

So for all of you that are in this place, who are feeling like, things have gotten worse, I wanted them to get better, listen, I am so with you. You're seeing the reality of your life right now and I don't want you to be freaked out by it. There is a path. The path is learning how to manage your mind. Really getting that instruction manual and reading it and figuring out how to use it to your benefit, which nobody ever has shown you how to do.

And for all of you who are worried about taking the plunge, you're worried about what taking a break could mean, trust me, it is so worth it. Because what if everything that you have accomplished up until today, and I mean everything, what if all of that is just scratching the surface of what you are capable of? What if you haven't even come close to unleashing your potential? And the only thing that is standing in the way right now is deciding to take a break from drinking.

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Let your struggle with drinking, let it be the stepping stone to a better life. Let it be the thing that you can look back on and say, "God, I'm glad I struggled with that, because had I not, I don't know that I ever would have figured out any of this. I don't know if I ever would have figured out how to actually use my mind and be in charge of it instead of it using me."

Let it be the thing that you look back on and think, "I'm so happy that drinking too much was something I had to figure out because it meant I had to figure out my mind. It meant I had to figure out my thoughts and my emotions. And when I did that, that's when my life exploded, and I wouldn't trade that for the world."

Alright, that's it for today guys. I'll see you next week.

Hey guys, if you're finding this podcast helpful, and I really hope you are, I would love if you would 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

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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.