

Ep #124: How to “Take It or Leave It” with Drinking



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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 124.

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. Today we are going to talk about something that I hear from my clients all the time. All the time. And in fact, I used to think this myself. People would tell me, "Rachel, I just want to be someone who can take it or leave it when it comes to drinking. That's my dream. That's what I really want."

And here's what happens; once I start working with people and once they really understand what it means to take it or leave it, sometimes they discover that's not actually their dream. What they envision what it means to take it or leave it when it comes to alcohol does not square with what they are actually truly wanting.

And so that's why it's so important for you to understand this if you have ever thought this to yourself. It's so important that you figure this out, and that's what I'm going to help you do today. So today, we are going to go over the common misconception that people have about what it means when you take it or leave it, what that phrase, take it or leave it really means when it comes to alcohol, and if you want to adopt a take it or leave it mindset, once you understand what it really means, how to adopt it, and the obstacles that are standing in your way.

So I want to start off first with the misconception because we have to understand always what you're talking about if you're going to understand whether or not it is right for you. I remember very vividly wishing that I had a take it or leave it attitude when it came to drinking because I will tell you, that was not my attitude.

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My attitude was more is better. And you know what, more is better bled into a lot of things in my life. It wasn't just drinking. It was food and approval and attention and money and gold stars. Always more was better. That is what I believed. And you know, the more you pay attention to your brain, the more you start paying attention to how your mind works and the think-feel-act cycle, the more you will start to see thought patterns emerge.

I always remind my clients when they are new to this work and they are for the first time really paying attention to their brain, really listening to their thoughts, and they kind of start to freak out when they're watching their thoughts, and they come to me and they say, "Oh my god, there's too many. This is a lot of hard work. I feel exhausted. There are so many thoughts in my head. I didn't even know they were there, I didn't even know that this radio was on. I didn't even know that it was playing."

And I always say, hey guys, don't worry. Yes, there are a lot of thoughts in your mind. You may be thinking thousands of thoughts every day, but here is the thing; once you start doing this work and trust me, it does not take a long time, once you start doing it, you will notice that there is a theme to the types of thoughts that you think. The types of thoughts boiled down to a handful of basic themes.

And so I discovered, and I show my clients, you don't need to rewrite every single thought in your head if you don't like the results that you're getting in life. You just need to tackle the couple themes that emerge, especially the themes that apply to the decision to drink.

I'll tell you for me, noticing these themes has been so powerful over the years. I've noticed themes around I'm not good enough, I'm always behind, there's never enough, things should be different, and of course, more is better. And once I noticed the pattern, I could watch it play out in all sorts of areas in my life.

And I'll tell you one with more is better that still kind of cracks me up once I realized what was happening. I do this or I used to do this with beauty products. I would get that new fancy retinol cream that says that you should

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put it on once a day and I would immediately think, "I bet two times a day is better." Or I would put the mask on my face when I was pampering myself that would say leave it on for 15 minutes and I would think, "I bet 30 minutes is better."

And I did this for such a long time in my life without ever recognizing it because yeah, I could see that I was doing it with alcohol, yeah, I could see that I was doing it with food, yeah, I saw that I was doing it with approval and gold stars, but all of a sudden I was like, wait, what? My medicine cabinet? What is going on?

That's what happens when you have a really strong belief. It will show up in so many areas of your life and that's what was happening for me. Well, if a little is good, then more should be better. But of course, that's not always the case. And the funny thing about more is better, it sounds like it's a belief that is rooted in abundance, but it's a belief rooted in scarcity.

Because here's the thing; if more is better, then enough is not enough. It's deficient. It's lacking. It's less than. Enough suddenly becomes not good. More is better is an extension of the scarcity mindset and I have watched that mindset try to play out in so many areas of my life.

And with drinking, it was particularly problematic to have this mindset because I was never actually present with how I was feeling when I was drinking. I was never actually present with my current state of intoxication. I was always thinking about the future and hoping to reach some better, newer greater feeling state.

And you know, there's a point that you pass where intoxication stops feeling good and starts feeling terrible. I missed that point a lot because I wasn't even present with where I was. I was just always focused on more is better. So I would run head first into feeling terrible because it was being driven by this belief that yeah, of course I want more. Yeah, of course another one would be great.

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At some point, I realized that more is better, this idea was not helping me when it came to my drinking. And when I realized that, I thought okay, well, if that's the problem, who do I want to be? I guess I want to be someone who can just take it or leave it, and you may have found yourself thinking the same thing, but then you have to really understand what that means.

I thought that to take it or leave it meant you can have two glasses of wine and then you're done. That's what that concept meant to me, and that is where the misconception comes in because here's the thing; when you say I just wish I was someone who could take it or leave it when it comes to drinking, you think that you're talking about quantity, but it has nothing to do with how much you drink.

I know this sounds crazy, but stay with me. Your brain right now thinks, oh yeah, if I'm someone who can just take it or leave it, where you focus on is how much you consume. But remember how the think-feel-act cycle works. How much you consume, that action doesn't just appear out of the clear blue sky. It doesn't just happen.

It is driven by how you feel and how you think. So you cannot just pay attention to the quantity. You have to consider the feelings and the thoughts driving the decision to drink. Take it or leave it isn't an issue of quantity. It's an issue of your thoughts and your mindset about alcohol, and this is what so many people miss. I missed this for the longest time.

You have to stop focusing on how much, which is where your brain wants to focus right now and start focusing on the thoughts and feelings connected to the decision to drink because when you fixate on quantity, I promise, you are missing the big picture. A lot of you right now, you're not paying attention to the thoughts or the feelings because you're telling yourself, well, the reason that I drink too much is because I have an addictive personality.

Or the reason that I drink too much is because I've never been good at moderating myself, or the reason that I drink too much is because I just hate being told what to do or I hate being told I can't have something. You

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are talking about your decision to drink as if it is a part of who you are, as if it is baked into your DNA rather than a choice that is connected to a thought and a feeling, and let me tell you this, it is always a choice.

If you don't focus on quantity then, where do you focus? You have to focus on the feeling behind take it or leave it. When you say I want to be someone who can take it or leave it, what you actually mean is this; I want to be someone who feels indifferent to drinking.

Now, I know some of you just heard that and were like, wow, that is not what I meant. I'm not sure that I want to feel indifferent. But I promise you, that's what take it or leave it means. When you say that you want to be able to take it or leave it, what you are saying is alcohol doesn't really matter. You're indifferent to it. You're disinterested in it. You're not enthusiastic about having it or depressed about not having it because it is not important to you.

I want you to really let that sink in because this really opened up my eyes when I understood it for the first time. Take it or leave it means that you feel as uninterested in taking it as you do in leaving it. And this is when a lot of my clients, when I explain this to them, they're like, wow, let's back up here, I'm not sure that that's what I want.

Do you want to feel as uninterested in having a drink as you do in not having a drink? So many of you are like, no thank you, I still want to love it, I still want to look forward to it, I still want to have all my desire for it. I just want to be able to stop.

And the reason is this; because the idea of not having it in your life sounds pretty miserable. That's what I thought for the longest time. God, you're not going to drink? That sounds boring. Sounds like a life not worth living. So you might be thinking to yourself, yeah, I want to take it or leave it, but what you really mean is I want to love alcohol as much as I love it right now because not having it in my life sounds miserable. I just want to drink less.

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And this is where it is so important for you to be honest with yourself about what you truly want. Do you truly want to not want to drink? Do you truly want to not want it? And if you don't, that's okay. Just ask yourself why not. Why do you not want to want it? What are you afraid life would be like if you truly didn't want to drink? If you were truly indifferent to it?

Just think about something that you are indifferent to. I was thinking about this and I came up with parsnips. Now, mom, I'm sorry, I know that you're going to be really disappointed. My mom loves parsnips. She loves when they are in season. She gets so excited. I am indifferent to them.

I'll eat them but if someone said hey, you're never going to have another parsnip in your life, it would not really matter at all to me. I'd be like okay, moving on. I'm not enthusiastic about them, but I also don't hate them and I don't miss them. I'm just kind of meh about parsnips. They're fine.

That really is the key difference because so often we think that not desiring something means that you have to swing the pendulum in the total opposite direction. You have to go from totally loving it to thinking it's the best thing in the world to swinging all the way over to hating it. I used to do this a lot.

If I was trying to stop consuming something, and it wasn't just alcohol, I would tell myself okay, the thing that you should do, you should just remind yourself how bad it is for you. And I would do this with alcohol, I would do it with sugar, I would do it with flour, refined foods. I would just try to focus my brain on well, remember how bad it is for you. It's kind of poison. So unhealthy.

But guess what happens? When you tell yourself you hate something that you don't actually hate, you're not changing your desire. You still want the thing. You're just trying to convince yourself that you don't. And guess what you do? You actually create more desire. I don't care if it's bad for me, I'm just going to have it. I've been so good, I don't care. You give yourself a reason to rebel instead of understanding why you have the desire in the first place, instead of understanding why you want to drink or eat or whatever in the first place.

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When you truly understand why, when you truly understand what is motivating the decision, then there's nothing to rebel against because you aren't trying to convince yourself of anything. You're just understanding how the habit works and how the habit is helping you.

So when you go back to that thing, and I want you to think about what it is for you. It could be an object or an activity. It's parsnips for me. Maybe it's football for you. Think about that thing that you are indifferent to, that you just feel uninterested in. You don't hate it. You're not going around being like, parsnips are the worst, I hate them, I can't believe you're eating that. That's disgusting.

You're also not like, oh my god, parsnips, please, when do I get to have them? Just like yeah, they're this thing, they exist. But here's the thing; when you are indifferent to something, you don't spend time or energy thinking about the thing or engaging with it.

And when you do, when you're around it, you're not super enthusiastic, but you're not also spending time hating it either. And I want you to ask yourself, do you want to feel this way about alcohol because some of you hear this and you're like, no. That's okay. Let's just understand why. What are you telling yourself life would be like without that intense desire to drink?

I was in this place for a long time. I was in this place of no, I don't want to lose this desire. I just want to be able to stop. Why would I want to lose the desire for something that's amazing? And what I didn't know at the time is that when you stop desiring alcohol so much, you can redirect that energy, you can redirect that desire to something that you really want in life that isn't creating negative results for you. You can put that desire to better use.

Now, some of you hear that and you're like, yeah, that sounds amazing, I want to do that. I'm sick of desiring this thing that's not really creating anything positive for me. So let's talk about how to do it. How to actually create a take it or leave it mindset. It is possible, but you have to know what

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you're getting into first. You have to really be honest with yourself, ask yourself if you truly want it, and if you do, alright then great, let's create it.

And if you're not sure, if you're in that in between state now, that's okay. There are some questions you can just ask yourself to help uncover why you are unsure. What are you afraid life would be like without that desire if you were indifferent to alcohol? Are you worried about your ability to enjoy yourself or to fit in or to cope with the day or to unwind after a stressful event?

How much desire are you directing towards drinking right now and do you feel interested and/or curious or have an idea about where you would redirect that desire? If you don't right now, don't freak out. That's okay. I didn't either. I just knew I had directed a lot of desire to drinking and I wanted to use it for something else.

If you want to have a take it or leave it attitude with alcohol, you have to start by noticing your thoughts. Because when you truly are indifferent to something, when you can take it or leave it, you're not really spending a lot of time thinking about it. You're not spending a lot of time looking forward to it. You aren't dreaming about it, you're not glamorizing it, you're not romanticizing it, you're not talking about it. You're not really thinking about it at all because it's not important to you.

And once you understand that, then you can start to really visualize what you would be doing in different situations if alcohol just wasn't important to you. What would you be doing at the party? What would you be thinking about at the party or at the restaurant or at the bar, or when you meet new people, or when you feel negative emotions? What would you be thinking about instead of oh god, I need to get a glass of wine? What would you be thinking about when you feel stressed or anxious?

Because right now, whether or not you know it, your brain is thinking, oh, I know what will solve this. I know what will make things fun. I know what will help me feel better. I'll just have a drink. But if you are indifferent to alcohol, you wouldn't be thinking, "Don't drink, don't drink, don't drink," because it

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wouldn't even be on your radar. So then you have to really be curious. What would you be thinking about instead?

You got to notice where you are right now. Do you want to actually give up loving to drink? Do you want to give up glamorizing it and romanticizing it? A lot of you talk about drinking like you're having kind of an illicit love affair. I did this too. I'm being so bad but it's so good. I did this all the time.

So truly, do you want to get to that place of indifference? Because then you can start really practicing visualizing yourself, and this is exactly what I would do. I wanted to be someone who didn't want it. I wanted to be someone who wasn't so fixated on when do I get to have the drink? Should we go to the bar yet? Are we placing orders for drinks yet?

So I would practice imagining myself as someone who didn't care about alcohol, and I would think about okay, well how would she spend her evenings? Let me tell you, at first, I had no idea. I had to really spend some time thinking about this.

How would she spend her weekends? How would she socialize? How would she date? How would she relax? How would she meet new people? How would she enjoy fancy meals? What would she be thinking about instead if she wasn't thinking about alcohol?

Now, I do want to offer a word of caution for those of you who are very new to this work and you're about to embark on this. When you first take a break from drinking, you are going to be the opposite of indifferent. You're not going to be thinking about it less. You're going to be thinking about alcohol more because you are teaching your brain how not to want it and you are teaching your brain how the habit is working.

So you are starting to pay attention to a habit that has been previously unconscious. So, what was unconscious you are now creating awareness about, which means you will be thinking about it more. And the first couple months for me when I was taking a break, I was thinking about my drinking all the time.

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Not necessarily wanting it all the time, but I was thinking about what am I going to do at this wedding and what am I going to do on this date and how am I going to handle this birthday and what am I going to say to this person. I was thinking about it a lot. And of course, what I wanted ultimately was to be thinking about it less. I didn't want alcohol to take up so much mental capacity in my brain.

But here's the thing; at first if you want to get to that place of really feeling indifferent about alcohol, being unenthused about it, being uninterested, you're going to have to think about it more so that you can actually teach your brain how to be indifferent to it. But visualizing yourself not wanting it, visualizing yourself and thinking, imagining what would I be thinking about instead, that will start to give you the pathway forward because you can teach yourself how not to want it.

And when you are indifferent to alcohol, you can use all that desire. Think of all the desire that you have right now for a drink. You can put that desire to use for something even better. That is the beauty of having a take it or leave it mindset when it comes to drinking. Alright everybody, that's it for today. 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.

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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.