

Ep #126: The Rolodex of Excuses 2.0



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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 126.

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 my friends. We are doing a follow up episode on one of my very favorite episodes. It's episode 78, The Rolodex of Excuses, and this the 2.0 version. Now, if you haven't listened to that episode, I really want to encourage you to go back. I really teach all about the Rolodex of excuses, what it is, and how to work with it, how to not just be at its mercy.

But just as a brief primer for some of you, the Rolodex of excuses are all the justifications your brain flips through to try to prevent you from changing. So you can think of it like one of those old-fashioned Rolodexes sitting on a desk. You flip through all the cards. Your brain is just flipping through excuses until it lands on one that you will believe, so that you'll have a drink.

Because remember, once you have a habit, your brain actually wants to - that lower brain of yours wants to prevent you from changing. It wants to keep the habit, even if it's not serving you. And those excuses, those justifications can sound like anything. I want it, I need it, I need a break, I need to take the edge off, I just want to relax, I feel so uncomfortable, I can't take it anymore, it's been a hard day, a stressful day, a long week. It's always a long week, right?

I deserve it, I've been so good, just this once, one won't hurt, it's healthy, it's Friday, it's a party, it's free. Everyone else is, it doesn't matter, who cares, screw it. You know what it sounds like. You have heard this Rolodex in your head before. You've heard it around drinking, but you've probably heard it around many other things in your life as well.

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Now, here's the thing; a lot of my clients will say, "Well, I understand that it's just an excuse or it's just a justification. It just feels so believable. It just sounds so compelling in the moment." And I always tell them the same thing. Of course it does. Of course it sounds compelling because you have used these thoughts many times in the past.

You have told yourself, I deserve it. You have that had thought. You have believed it, and you have acted on it, and when you acted on it, when you thought, I deserve it, and you poured yourself a drink, guess what happened. Your brain was rewarded with dopamine. That chemical messenger that creates pleasure, your brain was rewarded.

So now your brain is like, a-ha, that's a good thought to think because every time I tell her I deserve it, we deserve it, every time we think that thought, it leads to a reward. So first and foremost, don't be surprised when the thoughts sound compelling. Of course they do. Your brain likes to think them. Your brain knows that it will get a reward.

Now, this doesn't mean that you can't change it. Of course you can because anything that you teach your brain, including the habit of drinking, including the thoughts that fuel that habit, you can teach your brain something new when you bring consciousness to what is happening.

Because here is the thing, guys; you are not just your lower brain. You are not just the part of your brain that cares about rewards and survival and avoiding pain and finding pleasure. You are so much more than that because you have a human brain. You have a prefrontal cortex. You have a part of you that can think about the future and set goals and weigh the pros and cons. You've just been letting that lower brain run the show.

Now, I shared a technique in episode 74 called name and tame, which is a great technique for you to use to try to handle these thoughts. So, if you haven't listened, do go back and make sure you listen to that because today I'm going to be talking about something that's a little bit more advanced.

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That's why we're doing this 2.0 version because as I have worked with clients, I have noticed a particular strain of these permission-giving thoughts that show up, that appear in your Rolodex of excuses that can be a little hard to spot. They can be a little tricky to see at first. And it's pretty simple though. It's excuses and justifications to have a drink based on the work that I am teaching you and using that work against yourself to get a reward.

I love this. I love looking at this because it is always such a deeper level for my clients to start to really understand how their brain works to see that you can take something like what I am teaching you, and if you are not bringing awareness and consciousness and really observing what is happening, you may find your brain using it against yourself, furthering the habit.

But the good news is we're going to intervene with that today. So let's just talk about some of the basic tenants that I teach my clients, and these things or three of them, I really think of these three being what are non-negotiable in this work. The very first thing is that when we start working together, you never beat yourself up, ever.

Now, that doesn't mean that your brain doesn't want to default to do it. That doesn't mean that you don't catch yourself doing it. But you have to make a commitment to stop beating yourself up always, 100% of the time. And listen, we don't do this because it's some sort of kindness. We're not doing it because it's all about just feeling good and being nicer to ourselves.

No, we do it because of what happens when you start beating yourself up. As soon as you start to understand the think-feel-act cycle and the fact that your thoughts create your feelings and your feelings drive your actions, as soon as you understand that, you start to see how beating yourself up works against you.

And so drawing a line in the sand isn't about being nice. It's not a kindness. It's about creating success for yourself. Now, you may have thought that being mean to yourself is the thing that can whip you into shape. I thought

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that for a very long time. Maybe if I was just a little harsher, more disciplined. I always called it disciplined.

But disciplined was really just code for me being mean to myself. Maybe then I would finally figure it all out. But when you tell yourself, "I'm a screw up, something's wrong with me," whatever it is, whatever your language is about beating yourself up, those thoughts invariably create shame. That is the feeling created by the thoughts that are beating you up.

And that shame, that feeling, it doesn't just stay there. It leads to an action. That's how the think-feel-act cycle works, and what are the actions that result from shaming yourself? More self-recrimination, hiding, isolating, not asking for help, burying your head in the sand, but also - and this is a big one - looking for relief.

And what kind of relief do we most often turn to? Oh, something that will create temporary pleasure, that will temporarily numb how we're feeling. Beating yourself up is fuel for the habit of drinking. Beating yourself up is fuel for the habit of overeating. It adds fuel to the fire. It perpetuates a think-feel-act cycle that actually has you doing the very thing that you don't want to do.

Just think about it. The habit of drinking is all about a habit that is grounded in wanting to change your emotional state, wanting to change how you feel. So when you beat yourself up with thoughts like I'm such a screw up, something's wrong with me, and you create shame, you're creating a negative emotion that you don't like to feel.

And guess how you have taught your brain to cope with negative emotions? Pour a drink, numb how you feel. So drawing a line in the sand when it comes to not beating yourself up is something that you do to create success. Sometimes that you do because beating yourself up actually gets in the way of change. People so often think this is all about just being nicer and kinder. Sure, it is nicer and kinder, but it's because it helps you get the result that you want. So that's number one.

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Number two, when you're doing this work, when you work with me, your commitment is always learning. No matter what happens. We do not bury our heads in the sand. You do not hide from results that you don't like. You learn from your mistakes and you do this by putting on your scientist hat and looking at what happened through the eyes of a scientist.

Okay, so you drank last night when you told yourself you wouldn't. You don't beat yourself up and act like it didn't happen, but you also don't refuse to look. You do the opposite. You look. You look from the perspective of someone who is curious, who wants to understand. Not from the perspective of negative judgment.

And if you want to know why you aren't learning from your mistakes, why you aren't committed to learning, why you don't want to think about what happened last night, it's because you haven't yet learned how to separate out the facts of what happened from your judgment of what happened, and this is the very foundational piece of using the think-feel-act cycle.

We have thoughts about circumstances, neutral things, facts. Those neutral things, those circumstances, those facts don't create our feelings. It's what we make those facts mean. What we make the circumstances mean, that's where all our judgment and opinion comes in. Because the fact is maybe you drank a bottle of wine last night. Okay, that's just a fact. It doesn't mean anything about you as a person.

It's not a sign of your self-worth. It has nothing to do with your ability to change. It has nothing to do with who you are. It has nothing to do with the core of you or has nothing to do with your brain or being a sign that it's broken. And listen, I don't care if you've done it a thousand times in the past. It's just a fact.

Okay, so you drank a bottle of wine last night. Let's look at it. Let's understand what happened. If you don't want to look, if you're trying to avoid acknowledging what has happened last night, it's because your brain has this knee-jerk, it wants to automatically make it mean something usually pretty terrible about you because I did this all the time.

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I'm so undisciplined, I'm lacking willpower, something is wrong with me, I'm never going to figure it out, I'm a drunk, I'm a lush, I'm a failure, I'm a screw up. That's what my brain wanted to make it mean every time I woke up after a night of drinking way too much, or drinking when I promised myself that I wouldn't.

But no matter what happens, you have got to be committed to going back and learning from it. Your brain isn't just going to magically change overnight. It will change when you bring consciousness and awareness to the habit cycle and what is going on. And in order to do that, in order to learn from what happened, you have got to be a ninja at separating out the facts from what happened from your judgment. From what you're making it mean.

And if you are racing to say okay, okay, listen, tomorrow is another day, let's not look at last night, let's just focus on moving forward, it's because you have so much negative thinking and negative feelings wrapped up in the events of last night and what you think it means about you. You have got to untangle this.

And so we go through a whole process to really learn how to be learners. You have to learn from every mistake. That is tenant number two. It's a skill that sets you up for life. Because there is the math of your life, how many bottles you drank, how much you ate, how much money is in your bank account, how much you weight, how big your house is, how much you make at your job. That's all the math. That's all just facts, the numbers.

And then there's the drama, and separating out the math from the drama, the data points from your story about those data points is everything. Tenant number three and what I teach is you have got to get off the treadmill of perfection. This quest for being perfect. The look perfect, do perfect, be perfect mentality, and this is so important because the quest for perfection is what has so many of you desperate for relief at the end of the day.

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It's what has so many of you walking in the door after a day of just trying to exist in this world and trying to do everything perfectly and never make any mistakes and never let anybody down has you saying, god, just pour me a glass of wine. I just need to feel better. Telling yourself that if you look perfectly and you do everything right and you do everything correctly, that you will finally feel good is a lie, and it's a lie that is used to sell you things.

Oh, if you lose weight, you're going to be happy. If you have the perfectly organized house, you're going to be happy. If you have the perfect family and the perfect job and the perfect everything, then you'll be happy. It is how we are marketed to by this stuff to look better, have a better home, have a better job, whatever, and then you'll feel better. It doesn't work that way.

Because guess what, you get to take your brain everywhere you go. If you have a brain that is full of a bunch of negative thoughts about your body, which for a very long time that was yours truly, even if you lose the weight, you haven't changed your underlying thoughts. You just move onto hating something else about yourself.

And so if you have a brain full of negative thoughts about what it means about you as a human, that you have this habit around drinking and you don't like it and you're struggling to change it, if you're making it mean something terrible about you, listen, even if you get to the point where you're not drinking, guess what's going to happen?

You take all those terrible thoughts that you have about yourself and your brain just finds a new place to apply them. It's called moving the goalpost. Believing that happiness is just if you finally get to this place in the future, whatever your current goalpost is.

I talked about my own struggles with this. God, if only I didn't wake up and feel like crap after a night of drinking too much and regret the things that I did or said, then I would be happy. If only I got to my magic number on the scale and could see that, then I would be happy. If only I got the promotion or the raise at work, if only I got the partner, then I would feel good.

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And you know what happens? You get the thing and then all of a sudden, your brain's like, huh, I'm still kind of unhappy. I wonder why? I guess I must have been wrong. I guess it wasn't not having to worry about my drinking. I guess it wasn't the number on the scale. I guess it wasn't the job or the money. It must have been this other thing. This other thing that I need to fix.

Your brain just moves the goalpost. It finds something else that is wrong with you until you start to teach it to think new, better thoughts. And that in fact, nothing is wrong with you. The quest for perfection is all about changing the circumstance so that you can feel better, but that doesn't work because that's not what creates how you feel.

It's not the circumstance-feel-act cycle. It's the think-feel-act cycle. You have got to change your thoughts if you want to feel better. So how does this work when it comes to not drinking? In terms of how do we square this idea of okay, I'm going to let go of perfectionism but I also want to take a break from drinking. How do you square those two things?

And the answer is really simple but hard to implement at first. You have to disentangle your decision not to drink from your worth. That is the key. Because if you are trying to build up your worth by getting days under your belt, trust me, you are in for some trouble. You have got to start to see and practice and believe even if it feels far away right now, that you are a good person, no matter what, that you are 100% worthy, you are 100% deserving of love no matter what.

That this isn't about trying to get a certain number of days of not drinking to prove that these things are true because they're already true. You don't need to collect days as proof of your goodness because you know what, the reverse isn't true. Drinking is not proof of your badness. The problem is that we have been sold this BS that if you drink more than you want, if you struggle with overdrinking, if you struggle changing the habit, it's because something is wrong with you.

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You must have some sort of defect of character or a shortcoming, or you really should do a moral inventory and figure out all the places where you aren't measuring up. And all I can say is no, no, no, no, no. This is so unbelievably incorrect. Because the reason why you drink too much is simple. No one has ever shown you or told you or taught you or given you one iota of information about how to manage your mind.

Especially how to manage your mind with very concentrated rewards like alcohol. No one has ever taught you how habits work or how to cope with your negative emotions. No one has ever explained what you should do when you feel an urge. And I'm not just talking about the urge to drink. I'm talking about the urge to do anything. The only thing we've been told is you have to fight it off and grit your teeth and resist it.

So we have zero information about how the brain works, how habits work, how alcohol works in the brain, why it is we develop habits, why it is we cope with our emotions in certain ways, why it is we turn to things to try to numb how we feel. We're given zero information about any of this and then we're introduced to this modern world that is filled to the brim with easy, accessible rewards that your lower brain is primed, it is just primed to think is the most important thing, when in fact, they don't matter at all.

We're not living in a world anymore where you're thinking about your survival day in and day out. Listen, I know that some of you want to argue this. I know that you want to sit me down and say, "Rachel, if you knew the things that I have done when I was drinking or when I was drunk, if you knew it, then you would understand why I feel this way about myself and why it's so difficult for me to believe that I'm worthy and lovable and deserving because I've done some bad things." That's what you want to tell me.

And I want you to know this; I don't care. You cannot persuade me. You are not a bad person, even if you regret things that you have done while you were drinking. Even if you have said things that you wish you hadn't. Even if you have done things that you wish you hadn't, your worthiness

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never went away. Those moments did not erase your deservedness of love.

You are a human. Humans do things that we don't like sometimes. We do things that we regret sometimes. We show up in ways that we wake up the next morning and think, huh, I wish I hadn't shown up like that. And you know what? We do that when we're drunk and we do it when we're sober.

The fact of the matter is if you are trying to outrun all the hateful thoughts you have about yourself, by attempting to be perfect, you are going to be in a boatload of trouble because it's not possible to be perfect. And thank god because listen, if it was, god, we'd have nothing to learn. You are a human and humans are imperfect and they are messy and they are flawed. And because of this, we're also amazing and lovable and inspiring.

We aren't all the good things because we don't have the "bad things." We are the good things because we are both. We are both the dark and the light. So you've got to drop the perfectionism quest. You've got to drop this as your only route to feeling good about yourself because the fact of the matter is the way to feel good about yourself is to start changing the thoughts that you think about yourself.

And changing the thoughts about what makes you worthy and what makes you deserving and what it means that you overdrink or drink more than you want. What it means when you wake up feeling regretful about what happened last night.

These are the tenants of what I teach. And it is why this work is sustainable for people. Never beat yourself up ever. You commit to always learning, no matter what. You drop the perfectionism as a way to like yourself and feel good about yourself. If you learn how to do this when you're changing the habit of drinking, oh lord, I promise, it will change everything for you because you don't just have these things come up for you after a night of one too many. It comes up in your life all the time. It did for me.

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So here's what happens. This is what I teach. Now, that lower brain of yours, it still has the Rolodex of excuses and the fact is it is adding and testing out new entries all the time. And so what my clients have come to see is that it starts testing out entries around what I teach to see if it will work, to see if you can be convinced or persuaded to say yes to that drink.

Maybe if I couch it and the language and the words that Rachel's talking about, maybe that will be more persuasive. But just remember, that lower brain of yours, it cares about three things. Find pleasure, avoid pain, and do so as efficiently as possible. That's what it cares about.

It doesn't care about what I'm teaching. It cares actually about avoiding change, staying the same, taking the path of least resistance. And so here's what it will sound like and this is what I want you to pay really close attention to so you can really be onto yourself.

A permission-giving thought that tries to use the work that I teach might sound like you can have a drink because remember, it's not about being perfect. Or, it's okay for me to drink right now because I'm not going to beat myself up about it. Or, this will just be a blip. I promise that I will learn from it later, tomorrow I'll learn from it.

You can see how these are just excuses. They really are no different from it's been a long week, everybody else is, I deserve it, I want it, it's free. They're all just trying to get a reward, even though they're couched in the language that I use.

So the question is what do you do when you are doing this work and you start to notice that your brain is doing this? It's starting to test out excuses that sound kind and compassionate. It's very, very simple to nip this in the bud. You have just got to ask yourself what is really going on. Am I really being kind? Am I really offering a kindness to myself in this moment or is this just about looking for any excuse to have a drink?

Am I really extending compassion to myself in this moment or is it just about rewarding my brain? Am I really interested in learning from what is

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happening? Am I really going to learn more? Or am I just finding any way to give into the urge? That's it. You just have to be curious with yourself and know that your brain is always looking for new entries to put in that Rolodex. It doesn't mean anything has gone wrong. It's exactly what your brain was supposed to be doing.

But when you ask yourself these questions, am I really being kind? Is this really compassionate? Am I really trying to learn here? You will always deep down know the answer to these questions. Do not be fooled. Do not be confused. Do not use the concepts of self-love and acceptance and curiosity against yourself.

It's just that Rolodex in your brain flipping through excuses, flipping through justifications to see if you will bite. But you're onto it. Alright, that's it for today. Rolodex of excuses 2.0. I'll see you guys 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.

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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.