

Ep #134: I Don't Want to Stop Drinking



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With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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Ep #134: I Don't Want to Stop Drinking

You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 134.

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, I'm going to tell you something; I took off my puffy coat for you. I know that I am recording this podcast in the middle of the summer, but for those of you who are not aware, I live in San Francisco and it is cold. And I was wearing a puffy coat and wool socks. I'm still wearing the wool socks, but I took off the puffy coat because it would have made too much noise. So, you're welcome. The weather here never ceases to amaze me, but it's also kind of spectacular.

Okay, today we are talking about one single thought, "I don't want to stop drinking." Have you thought this to yourself? I used to think this to myself all of the time; all of the time. And it really was a block for me because I didn't understand what was behind it. And so that's what we're going to be talking about today.

Now, listen, if you want to do a deeper dive on this thought or any of the obstacles that you have right now when it comes to your drinking, I am doing a free series of webinars for the entire month of August and I'm going to be teaching you not just the theory, but how to actually use the think-feel-act cycle.

This is what I hear from you guys over and over again; you love this concept. I did too when I was introduced to it for the first time. It made so much intellectual sense, but I was so hungry to learn, how do I apply it? It sounds great, but how do I actually use it to change my life? So that's what I'm going to be teaching in these webinars. You can ask me anything, any questions that you have about your drinking or urges or how habits work or answering people's questions, whatever it is.

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #134: I Don't Want to Stop Drinking

I really want you to join. Make sure that you reserve your spot. All you have to do is go to rachelhart.com/askrachel and you can reserve a spot there. And, if they don't work for your schedule, when you reserve a spot, you'll be able to get the replays. So, make sure you do that if you want to do a deeper dive into what we're talking about today, or really anything that I'm teaching on this podcast.

So, let's talk about this thought, "I don't want to stop drinking." I hear this all the time from my clients and I used to tell myself the same thing. Now, my goal here is not to convince you that you should want to stop drinking. I have no idea what's right for you.

I definitely want you to see that you can have a life without alcohol that is not a life of being boring and being the buzz-kill and being deprived and missing out all the time – because that's all that I thought was possible. You can have a life that blows your mind. That was something I had never considered.

But even if you decide, you know what, I just don't want to drink the way I am right now, I want to drink a lot less, that really is for you to decide and I think that there can be a lot of different solutions for people out there. I don't think it has to be this black and white thing.

But I will tell you this; please be very careful of not ever trying to use a break to just prove that you don't have to drink. A lot of people will do this. And I think it stems from this fear of, well what would it mean about me if I have to drink?

And so a lot of times, we'll go into a break trying to prove; I'm proving that I'm someone that doesn't have to drink. But for most people, the vast majority of people, this really is a crazy fear because of course you can not drink, even if you are drinking now because you were not born drinking. You were not born with a desire for alcohol. And unless you are physically addicted, unless your body gets sick when you aren't drinking – and that is not the vast majority of people who drink more than they want to – unless that is you, you can always not drink.

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #134: I Don't Want to Stop Drinking

If you are physically addicted, then yeah, your body really needs it. But this is an area that so many people get hung up on. They try to use the break period to prove that they can be someone who doesn't drink. But you already are someone who can prove that.

I mean, I really want you to think about it. It's a little mind-bending. But I really want you to understand that the desire that you have for alcohol is something that you created. And you created that desire, you weren't born with it, and you can change it.

So, what most people are missing – and this piece is really key – that the reason why you are searching for evidence that you can be someone that doesn't drink is because you are always telling yourself the opposite. I was telling myself the opposite all the time, “Oh my god, I need a drink. I feel like I'm missing out when other people are drinking and I'm not. I hate saying no to an urge.”

So we're telling ourselves the opposite all the time and then we're trying to disprove these thoughts with our actions, disprove, “I need a drink,” by not drinking. But here's the problem; when you start to really understand the think-feel-act cycle, you'll see that that doesn't work. You can't disprove thinking with an action. You have to disprove a thought with a thought. You can't out-act your mind.

This is a little more higher level than what I normally talk about on the podcast. So if you're scratching your head right now, I do want you to make sure that you join one of these webinars because I want you guys to learn really how to use this as a tool.

You have got to change your thoughts. That is not where most people think. That's not where most people focus. They focus on the action part to the exclusion of everything else. So, all of their focus is on say no, say no, say no, say no, but you don't ever understand what's driving either the decision to say no or the decision to say yes.

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #134: I Don't Want to Stop Drinking

And this is why so many people will say, “Yeah, well I took a break from drinking. I didn't drink for a week,” or two weeks or a month or six months, “And then I went right back to the habit. It was like nothing had changed.” And I'm always like, “Yeah, because you didn't change the habit. You just temporarily paused the action of drinking but you did nothing to shift or alter or change the thoughts and feelings that were fueling that were fueling that action. This is what willpower looks like and this is why willpower is such a bummer, guys, because it is super exhausting and it does nothing to require the habit; nothing.

You can't change without actually changing, and that means changing every part of the think-feel-act cycle. They all work together, all three parts. You can't change the habit of drinking without looking at the entire picture.

People want to change the habit of drinking by looking at a calendar. It doesn't work that way. Most of you right now, you're only looking at one tiny sliver, “Did I say yes, or did I say no?” That's it, that's the only place that you're focused on. But without the full picture, without understanding the thought and the feeling that was motivating saying yes or motivating saying no, you can't understand why it is that you said yes or you said no, or how to achieve the outcome that you want.

What do you do? You just grit your teeth harder and you clench your fists tighter hoping that all that tension in your body is going to create change. Well, I have really bad news for you because I tried this for a very long time; it doesn't work.

You are looking at how much you drink right now as if that is the problem. I drink X and I want to drink Y. I drink four drinks and I want to drink one drink. But again, the focus is in the wrong place because you're fixated on the action, but that action, drinking X, drinking four drinks, it doesn't happen in a vacuum. That's not how the think-feel-act cycle works.

It's driven by a thought and a feeling, and that's what the majority of you guys are just totally missing. You're trying to change the action, you're trying to drink less without changing the thought or the feeling. But the

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #134: I Don't Want to Stop Drinking

fastest way to change the thought and the feeling is to remove the action entirely.

The fastest way to change is to take a break from drinking if you do it the right way. Because I know some of you are like, "I did it, it didn't work. My drinking went right back the way it was before." And I hear you and I understand you because I experienced the same thing in my own life.

But there is taking a break from drinking so that you can understand the habit and understand your mind and understand how all of it is working, and there is abstaining from alcohol and staring at a calendar. And those may look the same on the surface. From the outside, people may be like, "Yeah, she's not drinking, he's not drinking, same thing."

No, my friends. One is all about understanding how your mind works and understanding how to coach yourself and understanding the think-feel-act cycle and the other is all about staring at a calendar and learning how to grit your teeth harder and clench your fists tighter. They're not in the same universe. They're so different.

I've talked about abstaining before on this podcast. I talk about why I don't use that word because abstaining literally means the practice of restraining yourself from indulging in something. I want you to really listen to that definition; restraining yourself from indulging in something. When you're restraining, you're holding yourself back. This is the entire premise of just say no campaigns. Just restrain yourself, just hold yourself back.

But, just say no has it totally backwards because it's directing people to focus all on the action without any of the understanding of why you're saying yes in the first place and why it's been difficult to say no. Just say no is completely devoid of the think-feel-act cycle. It's focusing on that action line at the expense of everything else, but that will never change the habit.

I don't abstain from alcohol because I'm not restraining myself from indulging in something because I don't want to indulge in it. And the only way that shift happened – because let me tell you, I definitely wanted to

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #134: I Don't Want to Stop Drinking

indulge in alcohol in the past – the only way that that happened was because I changed my desire. And changing that desire, changing that feeling is only possible when you understand how to use the think-feel-act cycle as a tool.

If you are going to say no to a drink, you have to understand why you're currently saying yes, and why you are saying yes more than you want to because that really is the kicker. If you were just saying yes once, it wouldn't be a problem. But you aren't just saying yes once. You're saying yes over and over and over again and then getting results that you don't like, waking up and thinking, "God, why did I drink that much?" and regretting what you did or what you said or the fact that that bottle of wine then turned into late night pizza.

You have to understand why it is that you're saying yes over and over. It has nothing to do with who you are. It has nothing to do with there being something wrong with your brain. It has everything to do with the think-feel-act cycle, which trust me, is playing out. Even if you can't see it, it is there.

Most people will take a break from drinking whether it is a dry January or Lent or they're doing a cleanse, or maybe they've just had it up to here, and they will focus entirely on abstaining. They will focus entirely on, "Just say no, just restrain myself, just hold myself back." And they will willpower their way through a time period.

And you know what happens? They will learn zero about how the habit works. Sure, they might learn that they can do it. They might learn that they feel physically better, but they don't learn why they want to do it. And you have to learn the real want. And I promise you, it is not just, "I just really like to drink. I just really like a fancy cocktail." It is so much deeper than that.

Most people end up taking a break from drinking and they treat it like a crash diet. Their entire fixation is only about restriction. You know, that's what crash diets are; when you see people with food and they're obsessively counting calories or they're saying, I'm just not eating these certain kinds of foods or I'm not eating at these certain times.

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #134: I Don't Want to Stop Drinking

And you know what a crash diet looks like. It is just all restriction. And it can last for a while. You might even lose some weight. Maybe you've done a crash diet before. I know I have. And you lose some weight, but then what happens? What happens with a crash diet, people? You eventually give in and you gain all the weight back and then some.

And that is exactly what you are doing when you focus on abstaining, when you focus on just say no, when you focus on restraining yourself from indulging when it comes to alcohol. You are basically on a crash diet. You know that crash diets don't work with food, so it's not going to work with drinking.

The reason why crash diets don't work with food and changing your relationship with food, they fail miserably, is because they never help you understand what's happening in your brain that is causing you to overeat. They never actually get you past, "Well I just really love Doritos. I just really love pizza. I just really love Ben & Jerry's."

So food just becomes the enemy when you're on a crash diet until you can't take it anymore, and then food becomes your relief. And trust me, it is the exact same process that people are doing with alcohol and what I did with alcohol; when you demonize it and you say, "It's so bad, it's poison, it's terrible, I hate it," as a way to try to steal yourself and bolster yourself into saying no.

So you use all that energy and attention on willpower. And what happens? Eventually you're like, "I can't take it anymore. I just need a little relief." And then what do you do? You binge. If you want to understand the habit, you have to use the break period differently. You have to understand how the habit is working in your brain. It is so much more than, "I just really love rosé."

You have to understand how alcohol is helping you. This is something that I focus on with people a lot. I always used to think about how alcohol was hurting me, "I don't like the consequences and I don't like the weight gain

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #134: I Don't Want to Stop Drinking

and I don't like the hangovers and I don't like the regret and I don't like how I show up and how I act with my friends or act with my boyfriend," all that.

I was always focusing on how alcohol was hurting me, but the fact of the matter, it was helping me, but I could never see that. and until I understood how it was helping me – and here's a little hint, it was helping me avoid how I felt in the moment – until I understood that, I could never sustainably change my relationship with it.

Now, the thing that I find incredibly fascinating is that humanity has used breaks from consuming certain things for basically all of human history. Fasting, taking a break, is one of the most ancient traditions out there. It is practiced in some form or another by virtually every culture and religion on earth.

The ancient Greeks championed fasting as a way to heal the mind and heal the body. And during the middle ages, communities would take breaks from eating as a way to commemorate famines or plagues or wars. Taking a break from consuming certain items, from putting certain things in your body plays a role in so many spiritual practices and so many religions, including Judaism, Christianity, Islam. It is a part of human history.

So the thing to really consider then is, well why? Why have humans practiced periods of taking breaks for as long as we have recorded history? And the reason is so simple; because when you consciously limit what you put in your body, you have the opportunity to strip away the outer layers of yourself.

You have the opportunity to get to a deeper state, a deeper understanding. It's the opportunity to go from telling yourself, "I just really love wine, I just really love drinking," to understanding, "Oh, when I say yes, it's helping me avoid this deeper restlessness that I might have about my life." That's the opportunity, but again, you have to do it the right way.

Humans have recognized forever that by removing the draws of the physical world, by removing false pleasures and instant gratification, that

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #134: I Don't Want to Stop Drinking

you can start to return to a more focused and more purposeful life. But not only that; you can start to recognize the dependence that you've unconsciously created and developed for certain things.

So, taking a break, done the right way, challenges your brain to start functioning differently. You have to show up differently if you aren't going to rely on alcohol or food or Netflix or shopping to take the edge off of how you feel.

When you start to interrupt how you are showing up in life, you make it possible to consider why it is you're showing up this way. Taking a break is actually a way to facilitate introspection. You can get this supercharged clarity about your thoughts and your emotions if you aren't just fixated on the calendar, if you aren't just fixated on saying no and willpower.

And that's why I talk about I could have these very long breaks in my life and I just felt unhappy. I just felt deprived because I wasn't doing anything but gritting my teeth. I wasn't using the period of saying no as a way to facilitate introspection. I was just trying to run from my desire because I had no idea what created it.

But when you use a break to understand all of this, then you create space to make an informed decision about the choices that you want to make moving forward. You can start to really think about that at a deeper level. How do you want alcohol in your life? What do you want it to look like? What are situations where you would feel good about drinking and situations where you would not feel good about drinking?

Most people don't think about that. They're just so fixated on the number, the number of drinks and then the number of days. So if you say, "Well I'm just going to abstain for a month," what do you do? You spend 30 days just counting days. Day one and then day two and then day 14 and then day 25 – you're not learning anything except that you can count.

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #134: I Don't Want to Stop Drinking

And you're telling yourself, "I'm learning that I can be someone who doesn't drink." But you already can be someone that doesn't drink. That's already built in.

This is what I think is so powerful; when done the right way, you learn how to transform what has become a reflex, that reflex of feeling the urge and drinking, I want more so I have more, which is what drinking becomes when it becomes wired as a habit into your brain. You can transform that reflex into a considered choice that you feel good about.

And that's what can happen. You might discover that you still want alcohol in your life. You just want it in your life in a different way. Or, you might discover, like me, that your life is just supercharged without it.

I talk about this, how sometimes I, like, feel like it's in Technicolor. I had no idea it was in black and white. I didn't know I was watching the black and white movie before.

If you don't want to stop drinking, which I get and there's nothing wrong with that, please do not discount the power of a break done the right way. I really cannot stress this enough. If you are someone who has said no to alcohol before and then you went right back to where the habit was, you picked up right where you left off, please do not discount the power of taking a break if you do it the right way because you cannot change a habit by just saying no, using willpower, isolating, avoiding. None of that will show you the think-feel-act cycle that is driving the habit.

And you can't change the habit, ultimately, if you say, "Well I'm not drinking. Oh, but I just happen to be overeating every night. I just happen to have replaced alcohol with food." That won't work either. You've just taken the exact same mechanism and put in a different substance. So you won't get long-term change there.

And you cannot change the habit if you treat not drinking as if, "Oh, I'm being so good," because when you tell yourself that you're being so good because you're not drinking or so good because of what you ate today or

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #134: I Don't Want to Stop Drinking

so good because you weren't on your phone or you weren't spending money, whatever it is, guess what happens. If you aren't learning how to manage your emotions, if you aren't learning how to manage your mind, when it starts to build up and when it becomes too much, then guess what happens; drinking or eating or shopping, whatever it is, becomes a way to rebel. It becomes a way to get instant, albeit temporary relief.

Shame is never a successful motivator and that's what you're doing if you treat the action of not drinking as being good and drinking as being bad. Taking a break can be a crash diet that teaches you nothing except how to restrict and does nothing to change the habit so you go right back to your old ways. Or, it can be the thing where you learn how to manage your mind and allow your urges and master the think-feel-act cycle and figure out how to use your brain for a higher purpose, figure out how to use your higher brain that cares about your future to manage your lower brain that only cares about immediate gratification. It can be the steppingstone to the life that you have been dreaming about.

So, if you want to dive deeper into this –and I know I talked about a little bit more complex issues today – I hope that you will join me for the Ask Rachel webinar. They're free all this month. When you sign up, when you reserve a spot, you will be able to join me live, ask any and every question that you want completely anonymously. And if you can't attend live, you will have the ability, if you register, to access the replays.

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

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

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #134: I Don't Want to Stop Drinking

truly powered to take it or leave it. Head on over to RachelHart.com/join and start your transformation today.