

Ep #137: The Worst Advice I Ever Got About Drinking



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 137.

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, hello, hello everybody. Listen, today is a pretty exciting day for me because if you are listening to this podcast on September 3rd, what that means it that my new Take a Break program is officially open. And I really am so excited.

If you have not yet checked it out, what are you waiting for? Go take a look. If you are a woman who has been listening to this podcast and thinking, oh my gosh, this all makes sense. For the first time, I get it. I'm starting to understand why it is that I have this habit around drinking, I'm starting to understand this thing called the think-feel-act cycle. In fact, it's kind of obvious and I can't believe I didn't see it before in my life, I can't believe that nobody explained this to me.

If you can relate with that and you are also struggling to kind of figure out how to put this work into practice, how to fit all the pieces together, then let me tell you, this program is for you. When you take what you hear me talk about on the podcast and you start learning how to take these tools and actually put them into action, practice them, use them in your everyday life, it will completely blow your mind.

So please, if you are interested, go visit rachelhart.com/join. You can learn all about this program there. It's 30 days taking a break from drinking to give your mind and your body a rest so you can use all that energy and direct it towards learning how to manage your mind, manage your urges, change your desire. That's what you can do in 30 days.

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Because honestly, habits do not change themselves, especially not the habit of drinking. You have to take action. You have to start to learn how to do something differently, and that's what this program can do for you.

Okay, so today what I want to talk to you about is actually the worst piece of advice that I ever got around my drinking. Now listen, I have come across a lot of bad advice in my time. In part because I used to kind of be up late at night, Googling things like why can't I drink like everyone else, why do I drink too much, how do I know if something is wrong with me, how do I know if something is wrong with my brain?

And trust me, there is a lot of bad advice out there. But this particular gem is something that I want to talk to you guys about today because I really think it's so pervasive, and my guess is that each and every one of you has encountered this piece of advice at one point or another. So I want to talk to you about it and also explain why it is that it's so harmful.

So before I get into it, let me just back up and explain that this advice that I got about my drinking, it actually came from a friend of mine. And to be totally fair, she really meant well. She was not trying to give me bad advice. In fact, she was really just parroting a message that I think is incredibly pervasive in our society.

But I do remember that when she offered this piece of advice to me, it felt a little bit like she had just driven a knife into my heart. Now, you guys hear me talk about the think-feel-act cycle all the time. You know that other people do not create our feelings. Our thoughts do.

This is what I'm taking to you guys about all the time. So of course, her words, what she said to me, the advice that she gave me, it didn't create my feelings in the moment. I felt so hurt because of what I made those words mean about me. That's what caused me so much pain. But back then when she said this, I didn't know anything about the think-feel-act cycle.

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And so all I remember in that moment is really feeling like she had just stuck a dagger right in my heart. It was so incredibly painful. I also want to talk to you guys and explain that this conversation was actually a really big deal for me because for the most part, I rarely, rarely, rarely ever talked to my friends about my drinking.

That's how much shame I had about it. And this piece I think is really important for all of you listening because it's not like my drinking was the only area in my life where I felt shame. I felt shame in other areas too, but I somehow would still manage to be much more open in other places where I felt shame than I would about my drinking.

So for example, I would have conversations with my friends about my overeating and how I couldn't understand why I had such a weird relationship with food, and how I was never happy with the way my body looked, and I'd beat myself up all the time about the number on the scale. I would talk with my closest friends about how I often felt like I was an imposter at work and I had kind of faked my way into this really good job.

And I would definitely talk about my relationships or lack of relationships, or the fact that I thought that I had so many duds when it came to my significant others. I always felt like all of my friends were kind of on the fast track when it came to their relationships and they were progressing a lot faster than I was.

So I had a lot of areas in my life where I felt shame, whether it was food or my body or work or relationships, but even though I felt that shame, I would still open up. I would still talk to my very closest friends about it. But when it came to drinking, I was really very tight-lipped. And I know that a lot of you are in the same boat.

I know that a lot of you, that the worries and the anxiety that you have around the habit of drinking, it's kind of like a no-go area for a lot of you. It's a part of your life that you're like, nope, I don't talk to anyone about that. And PS, I think it's better that way. I believe that it's better for me not to talk to anyone. That's what I used to think.

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I will tell you this, friends; it is not better that way. The more you hide, the tighter your lips are sealed, the only thing that will happen is the more your shame will grow. Because shame is always about there being something wrong with you, and of course if you never talk to anyone about it, if you never connect, you can't discover that what you are struggling with is something that so many other people are also in the exact same boat. And I'll have to tell you, this is a huge part of why I wrote my book, *Why Can't I Drink Like Everyone Else?*

It is a huge piece of why I started this podcast and why I created this program. Because I know what it's like to be steeped in shame around your drinking, and I know what it's like to feel like you can talk to your friends about anything, but not about this. And I know what happens when you hide. Your shame just snowballs.

Not only that, but when you are hiding, it is so difficult to change any habit. To change anything in your life from a place of shame, once you start to understand the think-feel-act cycle, you start to see that negative thoughts, negative emotions do not result in positive actions and positive results.

And I'll tell you this piece because for a lot of you, I know that it's not just that you don't want other people to know. If you are like how I used to be, you also kind of don't want to know yourself. You don't really want to look, or you're afraid to look closely at what is going on when it comes to this habit because there's a little piece of you that is really kind of terrified about what you might discover.

What you might uncover if you acknowledge the fact that you are drinking more than you want and you don't like it, and you don't know how to change it. It's that fear of oh god, what might this mean about me? And so instead, what I used to do is try to pretend that this part of me didn't exist.

But let me just clear this up right now. If you don't like your drinking, if you find yourself drinking more than you want, if you feel sometimes even like, you're pulled to drink against your will, like I didn't even want that, why did

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that happen? I'm going to tell you this; it means zero about you. It means zero about who you are. It means zero about your character. Zero.

And I know that some of you want to fight me about this. You want to say Rachel, but you don't know the things that I've done. You don't know the things that I've said when I was drinking. You don't know how I've hurt people. You don't know the time that I've wasted. You don't know the mistakes that I've made.

I know you want to fight me on this because that was my argument too. Oh god, I've done some really terrible things. But guess what, you've done some things that you didn't like, you're human. If you lived a life where you never touched a drop of alcohol ever, you would still have moments where you did things that you didn't like and you said thing that you wish you could take back.

You would still have moments where you behaved towards other people in a way that did not reflect your best self. You would still have moments where you would regret how you chose to spend your time and the things that you did. That's true if right now you're drinking more than you want to. It's true right now if you're not drinking. It's true if you've never had a drop of liquor in your life. That's called being human.

You are not always the best version of yourself and that's okay. But don't for a second start to believe this BS that your drinking, this habit means something about who you are as a person. It just means that you're human.

Now, the reason why so many people, why I for such a long time had such intense feelings that the habit and that my drinking was some sort of moral failing is because for so long, and I am talking hundreds and hundreds of years, that is what has been drilled into society. It has been framed as a moral failing, a reflection of someone's character when it truly is not.

So yeah, I didn't want to talk to my friends about my drinking because it felt like I was having a conversation about how something was deeply, deeply wrong with who I was, deeply wrong with me as a person. But there were

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rare occasions that I would open up, and that's what happened when I got this really terrible piece of advice.

I remember so clearly talking with a dear friend of mine. I don't remember the incident other than I'm sure it was some sort of repeat of what I had done in the past. I planned that I would take it easy and then lo and behold, I did not take it easy. I had way too much to drink and then I did something that I really regretted.

It's so fascinating because I remember at the time that the details of the incident were what I thought were so terrible, but of course the only thing that sticks in my mind now is this conversation after the fact. And so I remember really reluctantly opening up to her about it. And really being so terrified that she was going to say something was wrong with me because that's how I felt.

I just didn't understand. I didn't understand why it was so easy for her to just take it or leave it with alcohol, and when it came to me, I just felt like there was a part of my brain that was missing this off switch. I didn't understand why my drinking was so unpredictable. And I remember the advice that she gave me so clearly because honestly, I was so hurt but I kind of also wanted to punch her in the face, and that is not a very kind thing to say.

She truly had good intentions. She truly was trying to be helpful, but this was so painful for me that my instinct was just to kind of both crawl under a rock and also lash out. So this is what she said to me when I confided in her and I said, you know, I just cannot figure this out. I don't know why my drinking is like this. I don't know what's going on with me.

She said, "Just don't drink so much. That's what I do." And I really remember, I was just like, oh, is that what I'm supposed to do? I'm just not supposed to drink so much? Thank you for the tip. Because in my mind I was like, oh my god, you think that I haven't tried that? You think that I haven't examined and worried about my drinking from every possible angle? You think that I haven't written reams and reams and reams of

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pages in my diary trying to figure this out? You think it never occurred to me that the answer was not to have so much?

I was so angry. Honestly, I remember being like, god, she must think that I'm an idiot if she thinks that that has never occurred to me before. Just don't drink so much. But listen, I'm not sharing this with you to blame her because I don't think that her offering that piece of advice was her fault. I think that she was just parroting a message that we get from society all of the time, and the message is so simple but it's so wrong.

The message is there are normal drinkers who never struggle, and there are alcoholics. It's black and white. Either you can control how much you drink with zero problem or you can't. And not being able to control how much you drink is a matter of two things. One, either it's a lack of willpower, or two, something is wrong with your brain. You have a disease.

So you got to try harder, and if trying harder doesn't work, then you got to admit that you're powerless and that you're an alcoholic, and PS, the only solution is to never touch alcohol again. That's what we are told. That's what is drilled into our head over and over again. Just don't drink so much, and if you can't do that, then admit that you have a serious problem.

But listen people, what we're missing here is the fact that we're not having any conversation about why it is we are drinking in the first place. Why it is that we are saying yes. And let me tell you, the reason why my friend was saying yes to a drink and the reason why I was saying yes to a drink, they may have looked like the same thing was going on at the surface, but they could not have been further apart.

No one explains how rewards like alcohol work in the brain, or the brain's reward system. No one explains or teaches us how habits form or the pretty crucial piece of information that human beings actually have the capability to change their own habits on purpose. We can direct our brain to do different things, except no one tells us how to do it.

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No one ever explains that drinking never just happens. That there's always a decision, and oh by the way, nothing we do in life just happens. There's always a thought and a feeling connected to it. We don't know this because no one explains the think-feel-act cycle.

No one even has conversations about hey, you know what, it's not just food that has been supersized in the last 30 years. It's also alcohol and the portion sizes that we drink. No one explains that alcohol is more abundant, more plentiful, and really, relatively cheap for most people than it has ever been before. Even if you're buying the good stuff.

We don't have a conversation about any of this. So we do something like we look at the obesity epidemic in the US and we have conversations around hey, what's going on? Why is there this epidemic? Why are people consuming too much? But never once have we considered that the exact same problem of over-consumption with food might be applicable to the over-consumption of alcohol.

And we certainly don't talk about the fact that we are now living in a reward saturated environment where we have to manage our minds so much more than we did even 10 years ago or 20 years ago. Because rewards are everywhere. But no one tells us how to do the managing of our mind. And then the worst part of it is that we treat drinking and drinking too much and habits that people develop around alcohol as if it is a separate issue that has nothing to do with other habits of over-consumption.

Especially the habit of eating more than you want. When the fact of the matter is 98% of the women that I work with struggle with food, not just with alcohol. And you know what, for most of them, they started struggling with food at a much younger age. That was actually the first struggle. That is not the conversation that we're ever having, and honestly, I want to change that. We have to change that. You have to change it.

And if nobody is talking about this around you, you have to start having this conversation with yourself. Because I will tell you, this piece of advice that so many people get, just don't drink so much, is like giving someone a

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prescription and then not telling them where they can fill it or how they can fill it. It's like oh here, the solution is just take this pill, but I'm not going to tell you how to get the pill.

That's what we do when we expect people to just modify your behavior and not explain to anyone what creates someone's behavior in the first place. It's the think-feel-act cycle. Your actions are created by the thoughts you are thinking and how you are feeling. That's what's fueling your decisions. All decisions, including the decision to drink.

You don't just pick up a drink out of the clear blue sky. You felt desire or entitlement or justified or deserving, or unable to handle how you are feeling. Telling yourself that you're in need of taking the edge off. And the reason why you have those feelings is because of what is happening in your mind.

This is what I thought for the longest time. Oh my god, why was I dealt this terrible brain? Why did I get this defective brain that didn't have an off switch? I thought my brain was the problem. My brain was the solution and so is yours. I know some of you are listening right now and you are thinking it makes sense, Rachel, I get it. But sometimes I just don't even notice a thought. I don't even feel an urge. It happens so fast. It truly is just like my drinking happens.

The reason why this is, the reason why it may seem or feel automatic, it may seem or feel like there wasn't a choice is because habits are unconscious. That's how they work. It is your brain's ability to move the think-feel-act cycle to your unconscious so that you don't have to have conscious thought or feeling about what is happening.

Now, it's there. You just can't see it right now. Now, the good news is you actually have the ability to take an unconscious habit and bring it to your consciousness. You can actually teach your brain how to show you the things right now that it's like no, we're better just keeping it in the unconscious. That's what a break can do for you.

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And only humans can do this. Only humans can actually bring things from their unconscious to their conscious with self-inquiry. The only problem is that no one has ever shown you how. No one teaches you this in school. We're just handed this incredibly powerful brain with zero instructions. But the human brain is so powerful that you can change your habits on purpose, including the habit of drinking.

Animals can't do that. They can't change habits without human intervention, but you can. Except all we are told is just don't drink so much. It's infuriating. There is no worse piece of advice that you can give someone. You need to understand why you are drinking, what's behind the behavior if you want to change it.

Oh and by the way, the same is true for everything in your life. When people say oh, just don't eat so much, don't spend so much, don't watch so much TV, don't procrastinate so much, well, okay but how? That's what I was always so frustrated about. The how is simple. You have to see for yourself the thought and the feeling driving any action that you want to change.

You have to ask yourself okay, what was I thinking? How was I feeling when I said yes to that drink? And your brain is going to put up a little bit of a fight. It's going to say I don't know; I can't remember, it was too fast. And that's where most people stop. Most people kind of just end the story there.

But when you understand how habits work, when you understand that your lower brain doesn't want you to know, it wants to keep the habit, it wants to keep getting the reward even the reward and the habit aren't serving you because your lower brain only cares about the immediate moment, it doesn't care about your future, you understand why it will put up barriers like that.

I don't know, it happened too fast. And when you believe that, you feel confused, and when you feel confused, what do most people do? They kind of quit and throw up their hands. And then you'll never know. You'll never

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know unless you challenge that thought, unless you challenge your brain wanting to say I don't know, it was too fast.

This is what thought work looks like, and this is why it is so powerful to work with a coach and not just do it on your own. Because your brain will try to throw up road blocks. And sometimes you need help seeing the road block and strategizing a way to get around it.

Listen, ideally we would all be taught how to do this in school, right along with algebra and grammar. But we aren't. So you need to learn how to do this. And I think as a society, we have to start understanding that telling people oh, just don't drink so much, or just don't do anything is a terrible, terrible piece of advice that frankly is impossible to follow.

So here's the thing. I want to explain to you really quickly how you can get started doing this on your own. Think back to the last time you said yes to a drink when you didn't want to. Get really specific. Really remember a specific time, a specific moment when this happened. Go back in time and try to ask yourself how was I feeling in that moment? What was I thinking before I said yes?

Now, your brain will probably want to say that it doesn't know. Do not get stuck there. Do not believe it. Simply keep asking your brain, well, what if I did know? If I had to take a guess, then what do I think I would be thinking or feeling in that moment?

Maybe it's a thought like I want it, I deserve it, everyone else is, I've been so good, who cares, it's free. You have to start doing the work of collecting data on how your brain is unfolding in the moment so that you can start to change this unfolding, so that you can actually learn how to say no.

Because truly, it is a skill. And then you have to practice it over and over again but it really does start with this question. What was I thinking? What was I feeling in the moment? And it starts with your insistence on coming up with an answer.

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Now, a lot of people will say to me sometimes, but what if I'm wrong, Rachel? What if I take a guess and I'm not right? Well, I'll tell you this. When you take a guess, at least you have the possibility for insight. The possibility for understanding. When you just stop at I don't know, you have no possibility for insight, no possibility for understanding.

Now, I will tell you that it is easier when you have someone who can help guide you. And if you want someone to help you with that, I really cannot encourage you enough to join the Take a Break program because that's what we're going to be doing in there. It's a 30-day break from drinking but it really is something that can change your life forever because it's about skill building. It's about really finally understanding what is behind the habit.

I promise, it is not I just really love to drink wine. I promise it is not oh, I'm just someone who doesn't have very much willpower. You have to decide that you are going to prioritize teaching what they should have taught you in school, which is the skill of managing your mind, managing your own emotional wellbeing, understanding how habits are formed and understanding how to change them.

Okay, so that it is for today my friends. I will see you 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 truly powered to take it or leave it. Head on over to RachelHart.com/join and start your transformation today.

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