

Ep #93: Finishing What You Start



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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 93.

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. Listen, I went for a walk tonight with my family. We've been taking these evening walks because it is the witching hour for my baby. He doesn't want to go to sleep. And I got to tell you, it was just perfect outside. We had a beautiful, beautiful sunset in San Francisco, and the moon was also rising and it was huge and golden in the sky.

We don't often get to see the sunset here because there's so much fog, and it was just perfect. I love nights like these. I feel so happy to have them. Anyway, I just wanted to share that with you guys. But today, we are talking about finishing what you start.

Because listen, if you want to change anything in your life and if you want to change the habit of drinking, you have got to look at your beliefs about your ability to change. That directly impacts whether or not you are actually able to create change.

And so my question for you is this; do you think you are capable of change? Do you think it is possible for you to finish what you start? Because I will tell you, I did not think this was possible for me. In fact, for a very long time in my life, I thought I was a quitter. I would describe myself by saying, "Oh, I never finish anything. I quit everything. I never see things through. I have all these plans, all these ideas that I never complete. I start out really strong and then all these good intentions that I have, they just peter away."

And I thought this about a lot of things, but including trying to figure out my drinking, and it's in part why I was constantly flip-flopping between drinking

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and not drinking. So you know, if you have these kinds of thoughts about yourself, I'm going to tell you that it is really hard to even begin the process of change because when you really believe these thoughts, you essentially fail ahead of time.

Now, what do I mean by that? What do I mean by failing ahead of time? When you fail ahead of time, you don't even take the action of trying. You're so sure that something won't work, you're so sure that you won't see it through, you're so sure that you'll quit that you don't even attempt change.

Now, of course, this is how the think-feel-act cycle works because I want you to consider a thought like, "I never see things through." When you think that, that thought is not going to produce a positive emotion. It produces a negative emotion. You will probably feel defeated. And when you feel defeated, what actions do you take?

Well, I'll tell you because I did this for a very long time myself, I didn't take any action. I didn't even bother because I was so sure that I never see things through. And that's how the think-feel-act cycle is self-reinforcing. Because when you believe that thought, "I never see things through," and you then feel defeated and then that feeling of being defeated or motivates or doesn't motivate any action, guess what your result is?

You don't see things through. You prove that original thought true. Now, if action is what creates any kind of change in life, then you really have to pay attention to how you are feeling and what you are thinking. You cannot put all of your attention on what you are doing. You have to understand what you are feeling and thinking. And that means you have to be incredibly mindful and careful of what is running through your mind.

Now, the hard part for most people when I begin working with them is seeing what's running through your mind, seeing your thoughts about yourself as optional. You don't have to think them. And the reason why this is so hard is because most of us have so much evidence supporting our beliefs about ourselves.

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So when we think, "I quit everything, I never see things through, I have all these plans that I never complete. I start out strong and then my good intentions, they just fall to the wayside," we have all this evidence to support these thoughts. But that's just because it's how the cycle works. Your thoughts are continually proving themselves true. They create feelings and actions, and ultimately, results that reinforce that original thought.

And the other reason is we continually reject evidence that doesn't support what we believe. Not only what we believe in the world but what we believe about ourselves. So you know, people would say to me when I would declare that I was a quitter and I never finished anything, people would say, "You know, you graduated college and you paid off your student loans, and you always do your work assignments on time," and you know what I would do?

I'd say, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, those things don't count. Everybody does those things. They aren't what matters. What matters is this," and then I would give a laundry list of the things that I had quit on, the things that I didn't follow through on. "I never learned German after all those years of studying it. I quit every exercise routine that I start. I never learned the clarinet."

I was terrible at the clarinet. "And then look at all my attempts at trying to figure out my drinking. See? See? I never see anything through." I was so committed to proving that these thoughts I had about myself were true. And of course, evidence existed that I didn't quit everything in life, that there were lots of things that I did see through to the end, that I had plans that I completed and that my good intentions didn't always fall to the wayside.

But for some reason, none of that mattered. I still held so tightly to my belief about myself that I was a quitter. As far as my brain was concerned, that was just a fact. And I bet that you can think of a place in your life where you do this too, where someone - probably someone that you care about offers a piece of evidence that disproves or attempts to disprove a long-held belief that you have about yourself. And what do you do? You brush it away.

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You insist, no really, I'm not that smart. No really, I'm not that successful. I'm not really a good person, I don't think. And let me tell you all the reasons why. And I want to explain why this happens. Because here's the thing; if we have to pay attention to the thoughts that we are having, if we want to actually create change, then we have to also pay attention to why we aren't challenging those thoughts, why these thoughts feel so true.

The reason is this; the reason is because of something called confirmation bias. Confirmation bias is this; you and me and everyone, all humans are constantly searching for evidence in our world to support the beliefs we already have. Basically, it is a reflex to prove our existing thoughts true.

Now remember, I talk a lot about how the brain likes to find easy ways to do things. It prioritizes anything that saves energy. And guess what confirmation bias does? It saves energy. Because instead of having to question your beliefs or challenge your beliefs or consider whether or not they actually are true, your brain just searches for evidence to prove what you already believe about the world, about other people, and about yourself.

And once you understand the think-feel-act cycle, you see how these things work together. The cycle is always reinforcing itself. The results that you are creating are always proving that original thought true. And you can see how this then connects to confirmation bias, because you're always searching for evidence in the world to support the beliefs that you already have.

So let's look again at this thought. "I never see things through." You feel defeated when you think that. When you feel defeated, you fail ahead of time. You don't even bother taking action. And as a result, you don't see things through. So you're actually creating more evidence that proves the original thought. You make that thought stronger.

Once you understand how confirmation bias works, once you understand that your brain is always scanning the world around it to prove what it already believes to be true, you can see how important it is to be really

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careful about what you are thinking. Because if you are thinking, "I'm a screw up," you are going to scan your life for all the evidence you can find to prove that thought true.

If you think you were dealt a crappy hand in life, guess what? The same thing is going to happen. You are going to scan your past, you are going to scan the present, you are going to look to everything that's happening and see how it is evidence that this belief that you were dealt a crappy hand in life is true.

It saves your brain energy and it is how the think-feel-act cycle reinforces itself. But now, there's good news because it also works with positive thoughts. If you believe that you are capable of figuring things out, guess what? You will take actions that produce evidence that prove this thought to be true. You will scan your world to find evidence of how you have figured things out.

And if you believe that the challenges you encounter in life have something to teach you, the same is true. Your brain will go on a mission to scan the environment for the lessons that you learned and how challenges actually help you rather than hurt you.

So just to recap, if you want to change anything in your life, you have to pay attention to what you think about your capability to change. That's number one. And number two, if you notice a lot of negative thoughts there, you have to be aware that confirmation bias exists and your brain instead of challenging those thoughts, because that would take energy, your brain will automatically look to prove those thoughts true unless you direct it to do something else.

So here are all these thoughts I had about myself. "I quit everything, I never see things through, I have all these plans that I never complete, I start out strong and then my good intentions just fall to the wayside," and I had all this evidence to back up these thoughts. Of course, at the time, I knew nothing about confirmation bias. I didn't know that my brain was

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programmed to search out proof for my beliefs. I didn't know that it was doing that because it was just looking to save energy.

These thoughts just felt true. They just felt like reality so how could I possibly change them, and that's what people say to me all the time. Well, my thoughts just feel true. How can I change what feels true? And I'll tell you how; you have to be willing to be wrong about yourself. And that is really hard for a lot of people. It was very hard for me for a long time.

Because most people hate being wrong. We hate being wrong about anything, much less ourselves. We immediately get our backs up when someone suggests that we're wrong. We want to be right. Being right feels good. And I'll tell you the crazy thing, we want to be right about ourselves even if what we want to be right about are incredibly painful thoughts about how we're a screw up, how we never succeed, how we're always quitting, how we can't figure anything out.

We want to be right, even though it's painful. It's so crazy. And this is what would happen with my drinking. I was so frustrated, I really wanted to change, but I also really believed, it just felt true, the thoughts that I was doomed to struggle forever and I was totally alone in my suffering.

I really held on to those thoughts. And I thought that these thoughts, I was doomed to struggle forever, I was totally alone in my habit of drinking too much, I thought that the only way to change these thoughts, to no longer think them was to create new evidence, to stop struggling, to no longer be alone.

And it kind of still boggles my mind that that's not how the think-feel-act cycle works. You can't create new results in life if you don't first start practicing new thoughts. Isn't that crazy? Because if your thoughts create your feelings, which drive your actions, and the actions you take in the world give you results, then the only way to create a result that you want is to have new thoughts.

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We all have it backwards. We think that the only way we can change what we think about ourselves is to create something different, but you actually have to think something new about yourself before you can create that new result. So what does that mean? I couldn't change my drinking until I started to change my thinking about myself.

I had to start chipping away at these beliefs that I had. I had to start finding a way to believe that yeah, maybe I could see this through, yeah, maybe change was possible, maybe I wasn't a quitter. I had to change those thoughts first.

It really still kind of blows my mind that all the change that we want in our lives starts with the thinking that we have. And if you aren't getting the results you want in your life, it's because you have thoughts that are standing in the way.

Now, I will tell you, this is really hopeful because if it's thoughts that are standing in your way, your thoughts are always optional. You can examine them. You can see what those thoughts produce in the think-feel-act cycle. You can question them. You can challenge them. You can come up with new ones to practice and think.

You can go from having the belief, "I'll never figure out my drinking," to thoughts like, "I'm in the process of figuring out my drinking. I am in the process of becoming someone who has it figured out. There is evidence that I can learn new things and learn a new way to solve how I feel. I am further along in understanding why I drink and why I desire alcohol than I was a month ago."

You can create these new thoughts for you to think. So when you catch yourself thinking, "I'll never figure it out," you can say, wait a minute, what happens when I think that thought? How do I feel? How do I act? Oh, that's not helpful. I'm failing ahead of time. Maybe I should start shifting that thought to something that's more helpful.

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And that's why I think the cycle is so powerful because it's not just a matter of, oh, I should think nicer thoughts about myself. It's not about being nice to yourself. It's about understanding what your thoughts are producing for you, the results that you are getting from your thinking.

The think-feel-act cycle really gives you a road map to your mind, to show you what your mind is creating for you, the results that you are getting because of the thoughts that you have. And suddenly, changing your thoughts, changing your mindset, all of a sudden, it's not about being nice to yourself. It's about creating the kind of life that you want.

And I kind of love thinking about how the biggest obstacle in my way to achieve anything is just my mind, is just whatever thoughts I have in there that are standing in my way. Because my thoughts are optional. I know that. I believe that. I know that I can always challenge them.

I'll tell you this; you know, I was watching my baby struggle the other day, and it really hit home. So he is almost three months old and we have been doing something called tummy time. So for those of you who are not parents out there, I was totally unfamiliar with what tummy time is. You basically put the baby on his stomach so that he can work on strengthening his neck and his trunk and his shoulder muscles.

It's essentially exercising. The ability to really learn how to lift your head on. And I will tell you, when I put my baby in this position, he hates it. He grunts and he cries and gets all red in the face. But the thing that I love and the thing that has kind of blown my mind is that he still keeps trying to lift his head. He still keeps pushing himself up, and it is such a perfect, perfect lesson.

Because I was watching him to tummy time the other day and it occurred to me, oh my god, all of us, all humans, we are born with grit. We have this resolve, we have this desire to grow and evolve and strengthen ourselves, and it is actually hardwired in us. Because think about it. None of us remember having to lift our heads, learning how to do that, or how to roll over, or crawl, or stand, or walk, or run.

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But yet, we watch as babies have to practice and learn these things all the time, and you know what, it's really hard. This is not the work of sunshine and rainbows and daisies. This is hard, strenuous, frustrating work. But my baby keeps persisting, and you know what, he's not unique. I persisted. You persisted. Humans persist to learn new things. We have this grit that is hardwired inside of us.

I had it, you have it. We all have it. We are all built this way. We are all built with this innate resolve and persistence in the face of challenges. And so my question then is why does it feel so hard to access it now? And the only reason it does is because of the thoughts that are getting in your way.

The only reason it feels hard to access this grit, this resolve, this persistence, this ability to keep taking action over and over again until you figure it out, until you get it right is because of the negative beliefs that you have about yourself, and because you are continually unknowingly using confirmation bias to scan the world to prove these negative thoughts true.

And this only happens because nobody ever sits us down and teaches us about the think-feel-act cycle and how it works, and that the more we think negative thoughts, the more we are producing negative results that prove those thoughts true.

And not only that, nobody ever sits us down and says, "You know what, all the thoughts you have about yourself, they're optional. You don't have to think them. You can question them. You can challenge them. You can practice something new on purpose. You can learn how to manage your mind instead of having it be on default thinking."

So here's the thing; the next time you catch yourself thinking, "Oh, I quit everything, I never see things through, I have all these plans that I never complete. I start out strong always and then my good intentions, they just peter away," do me a favor. Consider that you are wrong. Be open to the idea that these are thoughts that are optional.

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Put them in the think-feel-act cycle and see how they are creating feelings and actions that only reinforce those thoughts. Just be willing to be wrong because if you are willing to do that, it will change everything.

Alright everybody, I will see you next week.

Hey guys, if you're finding this podcast helpful, and I really hope you are, I would love if you head on over to iTunes and leave a review. And as a special thank you, I've updated and expanded my free urge meditation giveaway. I've created two audio meditations plus a brand-new workbook that will teach you a different way to respond to the urge to drink. The meditations are super simple. All it takes is five minutes and a pair of headphones. And each one now comes with a follow-up exercise in the workbook to help you dig deeper and really retrain your brain when it comes to the habit of drinking. So after you leave a review on iTunes, all you need to do is head on over to rachelhart.com/urge, input your information, and I'll make sure you get a copy of both meditations plus the workbook in your inbox.

Okay, listen up, changing your drinking is so much easier than you think. Whether you want to drink less or not at all, you don't need more rules or willpower. You need a logical framework that helps you understand and, more importantly, change the habit from the inside out. It starts with my 30-day challenge. Besides the obvious health benefits, taking a break from drinking is the fastest way to figure out what's really behind your desire. This radically different approach helps you succeed by dropping the perfectionism and judgment that blocks change. Decide what works best 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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