

**Ep #94: Proof Ahead of Time:  
How Long it Takes to Change Your Drinking**



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**Rachel Hart**

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## Ep #94: Proof Ahead of Time: How Long it Takes to Change Your Drinking

You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 94.

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.

Hey everybody, how are you doing? I'm really good. I'm cold. I'm often cold in San Francisco. It is the plight of living in California where everybody thinks it's warm all the time, but not here. It's foggy. At least it's foggy this morning.

Alright, so today we are talking about two questions that I get asked all the time from people. All the time. "How long did it take you to change your desire?" And, "What exact steps should I take to create change?" When people are contemplating changing their drinking, I cannot tell you how often they ask me these questions.

And I want you to understand what is behind them because it is not what you think. What is behind these questions is one, wanting proof that it will work, that change will happen, that success is possible before taking action, that's the first thing that's behind these questions. And the other is this belief that a program or a book or a technique or a coach or a teacher is responsible for you reaching your goal.

And that's not how it works. You're the one responsible for you reaching a goal. I will tell you that I spent so much time myself really spinning in these questions. When I was trying to change my drinking, when I was trying to figure out a solution that worked for me, I was just stuck here. Stuck, kind of, what exactly do I need to do? What plan do I need to follow? How long is it going to take?

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I wanted a timeline. And as long as I was stuck in these questions, what I was doing is I was doubting not only that change was possible, I was doubting that I could create change for myself. And so I wasn't taking action because I didn't want to take action until I could be 100% certain that my actions would work. Isn't that crazy? We don't want to take action until we believe for sure that our actions will be successful, but that's not what creates success. That's not what creates change.

I was so committed to believing this idea that success was this thing outside of me. It was contained within the program, the book, the teacher, the course. But those are tools, and while tools can be incredibly helpful, success is contained inside of you.

So I really want to dig into both of these questions today. That first one, how long did it take you to change your desire? Here's the thing, I can give you a number, but I'm going to promise you, that number is pretty meaningless for you. It really is, because the length of time required to change your desire to drink is in direct proportion to your willingness to experience that desire, to put yourself in situations where that desire appears, and to not act on it.

That's what determines how long it is going to take. And so that may be your willingness to go out to restaurants with your girlfriends while they're drinking and you're not. It might be your willingness to come home at five and feel stress and anxiety and not open a bottle of wine. It may have everything to do with socializing, or it may have nothing to do with socializing. It may have everything to do with time on your own, or it may have nothing to do with time on your own.

Here's the thing, if you know that when you're eating out with your friends, let's say, and everybody's drinking except for you, and in those moments, you feel deprivation, then that is your work. If you know that when you come home at five o'clock, if you don't open that bottle of wine you feel a

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lot of anxiety, then that's your work. And if it happens in both those situations, then that's your work too.

What people will do is they will attempt these things once. And so maybe once they will go out to dinner with their girlfriends and not drink and think, "Ugh, that was hard. I don't want to do that again. Let's cross that off the list of things that I want to attempt." Or they'll come home for a couple days after work and they won't open a bottle of wine and they'll think, "Ugh, that sucks. That was too difficult. Let's not do that."

So that really is what makes a difference. What is your willingness to put yourself in these situations over and over and over again? You can accept a single invitation to go out to dinner and not drink and try it once and see how you fare, or you can accept every invitation. Maybe you can even invite people out. You can go 30 times to restaurants in 30 days with friends who are drinking and you're not.

And guess what will happen? Guess what the difference is? When you do it once, it's difficult. Remember, your brain doesn't like things that are difficult. It wants to find things that are easy so we use that one moment of difficulty, that one moment of feeling uncomfortable and we decide it's impossible.

Or you can say, "Yeah, that was difficult, of course it was difficult. I trained my brain that when I go out to dinner and when everybody's drinking that I'm drinking too, that I'm getting a big influx of dopamine too. So of course, it's difficult. I got to train my brain to learn something else. I have to teach it that just because it's difficult doesn't mean that I'm going to stop."

So maybe I'm going to go out 30 times in 30 days, and guess what? Guess what would happen if you did that? 30 times of putting yourself in that situation where the desire appears, you have it, you don't act on it, you will start to radically change and retrain your brain. Because your brain will start to learn, oh, okay, this isn't the most comfortable thing but I didn't die. It wasn't the worst thing in the world.

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What happens when we're planning to go out and we're not drinking? It's going to be the worst thing in the world. That's what my brain always told me. "I'm going to die, this is going to be terrible, I'm going to be miserable." And you go and listen, it's really not as bad as the way the brain wants to make you believe it will be.

Your willingness to take action, whatever action is needed in the way that your habit of drinking manifests, your willingness to take action is what starts to create evidence that change is possible. It creates evidence that you can have desire and desire doesn't have to be acted upon. You don't have to be a slave to your lower brain, and it creates evidence that discomfort is survivable. Yes, you can do hard things. Hard things do not have to be something that you run and hide from.

And you know, people will tell me all the time, they'll say, "Rachel, I did this. I went out a lot. I went out like, a million times and I didn't have a drink and it still sucked." And you know what I always ask them to do? And I want you to do, if this is something that you are telling yourself right now, get really honest and really specific with yourself.

Because when I ask people to get really specific, how many times in the last week, in the last month have you done this? We'll get really specific and we'll find out, oh, I tried it three times. Maybe I did it four. I kind of topped out at four and I decided it was uncomfortable and it wouldn't work and I didn't want to do it and so when I say I did it a million, I did it like, four.

You know, how long it takes you to change your desire is just your willingness to put yourself in situations where your desire appears and you don't act on it. And my question for you is, are you willing to do that once? Some people aren't even willing to do it once? Are you willing to do it twice? Five times? 20 times? 100 times? Are you willing to do it as long as it takes for your brain to realize, oh yeah, there's desire, of course there is, I trained my brain to expect it, I don't have to obey it, I can notice all the thinking that I have around it, all the thoughts about it's not fair, why me, I

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hate this, it sucks, I can't have any fun, I can't loosen up, I can't relax, I can't deal with anxiety, whatever it is, you can notice all those thoughts and then start to question them and change them and shift them.

Are you willing to do that? Because your brain, especially that lower brain of yours wants you to believe it is impossible, that you will never change, that it will always be difficult. And you know why? Because if you believe those things, you won't take action. You won't say no to an urge. You'll say yes to an urge, and then guess what? Your lower brain will have succeeded. It will have gotten that reward that it was after.

And that's why you can get so stuck asking, well, how long did it take? Give me the number. Because what if I told you it took a year? Would you be willing to do that? Or would you say, nope, sorry, I want all these negative consequences because a year is too long.

Your brain is looking for some arbitrary number to decide, oh, that's too hard, that's impossible, I'm not going to do it. The fact of the matter is that not drinking, saying no to an urge will not always be difficult. Yes, at first saying no requires effort. But after you keep practicing and teaching your brain that you know what, you don't need alcohol in certain situations in order to change how you feel, you will slowly but surely create a new habit and that habit of not drinking, not needing an influx of dopamine to cover up and to numb how you're feeling, that will start to feel easy.

But you have to be willing to do the practice. It will not happen overnight. And most people aren't willing to do it. They want to dip their toe in the water and declare it's too cold and then refuse to go in. And you know what? It will stay too cold if you only ever dip your toe. But when you plunge in, when you dive into the cold water, after a while, your body adjusts. Your body starts to learn a new normal. Suddenly, it's not so cold.

But it only starts to get easier if you are willing to do that upfront discomfort and go all in. because changing your drinking, changing anything in your

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life requires discomfort. It forces you to grow. You have to step outside of your comfort zone. And right now, your comfort zone is feel an urge and act on it, feel uncomfortable, have a drink.

You have to do the hard work of saying no at first so that saying no becomes easier and then saying no becomes not even any difficulty surrounding it. You know, the habit of drinking wants you to do the opposite because that habit is easy. In that immediate moment, it is comfortable. It is numbing and covering up feeling anxious or bored or lonely or insecure.

And so the habit is really just wrapped in easiness in that moment. Of course, the long-term consequences are not easy, but in that moment, it is easy. And this really is a predicament. In order to change the habit, you have to move towards discomfort. But the habit of drinking is all about moving towards comfort in that immediate moment.

So the habit taught your brain that having a drink was the answer to feeling uncomfortable, but now you need to embrace feeling uncomfortable in order to change. This is a conundrum. Change will not happen if you're only willing to experience discomfort four times. You have got to be willing to be all in, to move towards discomfort as long as it takes because your brain will get to that point where it'll say, "This is too hard. I tried it four times. I tried it five times. I tried it 20 times. It's still too hard. "If you stop at a point and decide that it's arbitrarily too hard, you will not see change.

So the second question that I get all the time is what exact steps did I take to create change? And here's what I want you to know; there are a couple of pieces that I think are really important to understand. You hear me talk about the think-feel-act cycle all the time, and I think it is amazing. It will solve any problem in your life. It will explain to you anything that you are struggling with.

But the truth is this, the magic is not in the think-feel-act cycle. The magic is in using the think-feel-act cycle. The magic is practicing it, going all in with

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it. I always tell people when they are deciding whether or not they want to work with me, I always tell them, just give yourself the gift of a yes or no. Do not stay stuck in maybe because maybe is a killer. It will suck time and suck energy when you are just wondering what you should do. You are swirling around in that maybe.

Because here's what I want you to know. If you listen to my work and you think, you know what, not my thing, great. Say no and go find your yes. Go find something that you can say yes to, that you are willing to go all in on. But do not stay stuck in maybe. Maybe is no man's land. It is a place of inaction and you can stay there for years, if not decades.

The steps that I took in order to create change were to keep practicing and to keep trying to understand how my brain was working and why I thought I needed a drink in certain situations. And the think-feel-act cycle helped me do that, but the cycle itself did not create change. It was practicing it and understanding it and applying it over and over and over again.

Because how my habit of drinking manifested may not look the same as yours. You may be perfectly comfortable in social events without a drink, but have trained your brain that you need one when you get home. Or maybe it's the opposite. Maybe it's both. Maybe you don't care one iota what people think about you not drinking, maybe you care a lot.

How your habit looks is going to be unique to you, but what we all have in common is that the think-feel-act cycle is driving the habit. It is driving the action of saying yes to a drink. There is always a thought, always, behind the decision to drink. There's a thought and then an emotion, always.

So when you say, well, what exact steps did you take, what you're really saying is, hand me the proof that it will work before I do anything. And you know what, I can't do that you. I cannot hand you the proof that this will work for you when you're not doing anything.

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What the brain is so convinced is that I'm not going to set out on a path, a path of change, unless I know that I'm going to get to the end. But the brain has it all backwards because it acts like the reason that you get to the end, that you see something through, that you reach your goal that change is possible is because of the path. But it's not because of the path you're on. It's because of you.

You are the reason you will succeed. Not the perfect program, not the perfect time or the right time that you start. Not the perfect coach. Not the perfect book. You. Just you. I spent so much time doubting that change was possible and totally unwilling to start taking action because I wanted proof that it would work before I would start down the path. It doesn't work that way. You have to start walking.

You know, it reminds me a lot of this story I love to tell of when my husband and I decided that we were going to join a climbing gym. So if you are a listener to this podcast, you know that I am afraid of heights. You also know that one of the things I really like to do is to challenge my brain, challenge the fears that I have and see what I'm capable of when my brain tells me, no, no, you shouldn't do that.

And we were also looking for a sport that we could do together because the fact of the matter is that my husband is a triathlete. He has run ultramarathons, he has a fitness level that is way, way above my own, and we also approach exercise in a really different way. So you know, I like to run, I like to bike, I like to swim, but I'm not terribly competitive about it and you know, we have only gone running together once in our relationship and it was immediately clear that not only were we at different fitness levels, but we had very different attitudes towards running.

Because he was looking at his watch and he was paying attention to pacing and timing and speed and I, on the other hand, you know, I like to move my body, but I also want to stop when I see something cool and I get very lost

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in how my left foot feels different from my right foot. I'm very kind of into the mindfulness of it and I'm way less concerned about speed.

So anyway, we joined this climbing gym because it was something we could do together and we could be at very different fitness levels, you know, when I was spotting him, he could climb fast and hard, and when he was spotting me, I could tackle an easier route and go at my own pace.

But you know, we had to go through these group lessons before we would get certified to climb in this gym. And I had one experience climbing before we went and I was 11 years old, I was in gym class at school. It was kind of crazy that my school actually had a climbing wall, and my mom came to school one day to watch me attempt to climb the wall in gym class, and I just froze. I got maybe five feet off the ground and I panicked.

That was it. And I couldn't go any further and I came off the wall, and I was so embarrassed that my mom had come into school that day to watch me, to climb this wall and I just completely chickened out. I barely even made it up.

And so when I went with my husband to this first group lesson, I had some anxiety because my brain loves to hang out in the past and I was thinking about that time that in front of someone that I really cared about, I had just completely chickened out. But as part of this lesson, we had to climb up to the top and we had to practice doing a controlled fall off the wall, and suddenly, this idea that had seemed so good, yeah, my husband and I should totally join a climbing gym, I mean, it seemed terrible.

I was totally sure, I watched my brain tell myself, I don't know if you can do it. And I remember I started asking the instructor, "Okay, but like, what route exactly should I take up the wall and how will I know where to put my foot next? And how will I know what to do when I'm halfway up and what happens if I get stuck?" And he was just like, "I don't know. You just got to get on the wall, Rachel."

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I wanted proof that I could make it up to the top before taking action, and success doesn't work that way. You have to just start climbing. You can't know that you're going to succeed at something before you start. You have to just start. And then once you start, you have to keep going. You have to keep trying. You have to keep doing what is uncomfortable.

And trust me, it was totally uncomfortable for me as I was going up that wall. And it was totally uncomfortable for me as I was figuring out how to desire alcohol less and how to change this habit. The moment that you will get proof, the moment where you know that you will succeed, that moment for me was when I was 95% of the way up the wall and I saw that the last grip was totally within my reach, and all of a sudden, I believed, oh yeah, I'm going to make it.

The rest of the way, I was propelling myself up even though I had all this doubt, even though I wasn't sure I could do it, even though I was scared, even though it felt uncomfortable. I was propelling myself up only with belief. Belief that it could be possible and that proof didn't come until the very last moment.

That's what I did to change the habit. In fact, when I was working on changing my habit of drinking, I didn't have anyone telling me that it was possible to change your desire. I just believed that I could train my brain to want something differently. I had that belief but I didn't have any proof. Nobody was telling me I could do that.

And this is what it's like when you are trying to change your habit. You cannot have proof before you set out. Yes, I can be an example of what is possible, I can serve as a possibility for your brain, but as long as you are waiting for proof that it is possible for you, you will stay frozen, you will stay stuck. Because no one can give that to you except for you, and the only way that you can get it is to start taking action repeatedly, over and over and over again and not clock out at four times and tell yourself you tried a million.

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So when you find yourself questioning, "Yeah, but how long did it take you to change your desire? How long is it going to take me and what exactly did you do to change the habit? I need the exact steps," what you are doing is you are staying stuck in wanting proof ahead of time and believing that success is connected to a set of steps rather than you, rather than your willingness to keep trying.

And so my question for you today is how all in are you? How willing are you to keep taking action over and over again when it feels uncomfortable? Because if you are willing, you will get to a point where not drinking feels really easy. Then you will have your proof. But you have to be willing to do the uncomfortable thing. And so are you willing to do it once or twice or five times or 100 times? Or are you willing to do it as long as it takes?

Because if your answer is as long as it takes, then I can guarantee that you will have success. But if you have some arbitrary number about a point at which you're going to say nope, too hard, you will never get there. The key to changing your drinking, the key to changing any habit, anything in your life is you. Plain and simple. That's what you have to start believing.

Alright everybody, that's it for today. I will see you guys next week. Maybe it will be warmer in San Francisco. I don't know. In the meantime, if you have any questions, if you want to hear me talk about a specific topic on the podcast, all you have to do is send me an email at [podcast@rachelhart.com](mailto:podcast@rachelhart.com). Thanks everybody.

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

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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](http://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](http://RachelHart.com/join) and start your transformation today.