

Ep #96: What You Really Think About Drinking



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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 96.

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 doing really well. I'm having a really good morning even though my baby did not sleep through the night. No, he did not, but that's okay. I'm doing really well.

So I want to talk to you guys today before we dive into this episode's topic, which is all about what you think about drinking. And let me tell you, this is a really important thing for you to understand.

But before we dive into that, I want to tell you about a new program that I am launching in 2019. It's a program called In Pursuit and it is an intensive year-long coaching program for clients.

I will tell you, it has been my dream to work on this deeper more intense level because taking a break from drinking is one thing; changing the habit, changing your desire, that is a huge first step. But it is just the first step because once you are no longer cleaning up from the night before, once you are no longer at a place where you're constantly looking backwards and constantly regretting what you did or what you said or wondering if you're ever going to figure this out, you can really start looking forward.

You can start going in pursuit of the life that you want. And I have to tell you that when this was me, I was really unsure of how to do that. I knew that I wanted to desire more out of life than a drink at the end of the day or looking forward to Friday so that I could go to the bar with my friends. But I didn't know how.

And I know that sounds kind of weird to say, but I had taught my brain to be so focused on desiring immediate gratification that I didn't know how to

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desire what I really wanted, and I certainly didn't know how to go after those things. So I didn't know how to get the career that would fulfill me or a relationship that was a true partnership and not me just saying yes all the time and people-pleasing.

I didn't know how to start having a body that I loved and that I always loved, regardless of the number on the scale. I didn't know how to have fantastic sex. I didn't know how to be a woman who wasn't afraid to put herself out there and take risks and make mistakes and dream big.

All of that became in such sharp focus for me once I really made headway on my drinking. I really started to understand that the cocktail or the bowl of ice cream at the end of the day was never going to be a big enough reward for butting my life on the backburner, which is what I had done for so long.

You know, it wasn't just the things that I was consuming, the things I was putting in my body that was holding me back, it was putting everyone's needs ahead of my own. It was never allowing myself to make a mistake or to be anything less than perfect. And it was all the beliefs that once I no longer had a buzz to kind of quiet, it was all the beliefs I had; all that negative self-talk about how I didn't measure up and I wasn't good enough, and something just was off.

Something was kind of wrong with me. It wasn't just that I was out of alignment with what I was putting in my body; I was out of alignment with my life. And this is why the work that I teach you, the think-feel-act cycle is so powerful because, yes, it will show you how to transform the habit of drinking.

It will show you how to stop being a slave to desire and how to change your desire, and actually, how to become someone who doesn't always feel like you're missing out or you're always deprived if you're not drinking. But it will also show you how to transform everything that is not working in your life.

And so I want, for a second, for you to think about, since we are so close to the end of this year, I want you to imagine for a second the end of 2019 and going into 2020 thinking about everything you're going to create and

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everything that you're going to do, rather than everything you want to fix. I was so stuck there for so long; this mentality of what I need to fix.

And for a very long time, it was, "I've got to fix my drinking. I've got to fix my drinking." But it was also everything else I thought was broken. So listen, if you want to find out more, if you're interested in being considered for this program, it's going to be a small number of applicants that I accept. If you want to join me for this work, you can learn more about it at rachelhart.com/inpursuit.

Okay, so let's dive into today's topic; what do you really think about drinking? It seems like a very simple question, but a lot of my clients really get hung up on this and really have a hard time even being honest with themselves about what they truly believe about alcohol, about drinking, about not drinking, about people who do, people who don't. It's so important to uncover this.

You've heard me on the podcast before talk about how alcohol has been with humans for thousands of years. And you know what – it's going to continue to be with us for thousands of years. It is a natural byproduct of life on earth. Everything, all life, can grow. It can decompose. It can ferment.

Alcohol is just the waste product of yeast trying to burn glucose in an oxygen deprived environment. Yes, humans figured out how to harness this process so we could create large quantities of it, but alcohol is- just part of living on earth. One oxygen, two carbon, six hydrogen atoms – you know I love describing it this way because it's no neutral when you break it down to its very base components.

You know, sometimes I'll ask people, do you always feel like you'll be missing out on life if you can't have ethanol? Do you always feel like you'll be deprived if you can't have one oxygen, two carbon, and six hydrogen atoms?

It sounds so silly. I know it sounds silly, guys, but I want you to notice how there's no emotion around that. When you start talking about the chemical

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makeup, when you start talking about ethanol versus alcohol, there's no emotion around it.

But why then is there so much emotion – why does it feel so supercharged when you think, “I'll always be deprived if I don't drink. I'll always be missing out if I'm the person at the party who has seltzer in her glass.” Why is that?

The reason why that is, the reason why the exact same thing can feel, on the one hand, totally neutral and, on the other hand, so charged, is because all of the story, all of the beliefs, all of the thoughts that your brain has about what alcohol means. Imbibing is a vice; abstaining is a virtue. You know I don't think that.

Drinking is fun. Not drinking makes you a killjoy; another thing that I no longer think. I did believe these for a long time. There are so many cultural narratives about drinking that it is hard to see through the labels of good and bad and right and wrong and just really understand alcohol for what it is, which is the results that it is creating in your life.

And if you want to change the habit, you must be able to see your own story of alcohol because the habit is fueled by thoughts. I talk about the think-feel-act cycle all the time. But a big portion of that cycle is the feeling part, the emotional part.

Listen, if you never felt disconnected, if you never felt stressed, if you never felt bored or deprived or insecure when you weren't drinking, then the act of drinking wouldn't have so much pull on you. If you knew how to feel connected, if you knew how to have fun, to feel fulfilled, spontaneous, confident on your own regardless of what was in your glass, then you wouldn't need to turn to a drink.

You wouldn't be telling yourself that you would be missing out and deprived if you aren't drinking. Now, what creates all of those emotions, the emotions that you're trying to avoid and the emotions that you're seeking out, are the stories that you have about alcohol.

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So one of my favorite exercises that I give clients, and I'm just going to talk to you guys about an abbreviated version of this today, is an exercise that helps them identify what these stories are. Now, this is a really fast exercise. You're not supposed to think about it. You're not supposed to ponder it. You're just supposed to write whatever first comes to your mind.

So if you were somewhere where you have a paper and pen, you can do it right now. You can write down your answers. If you're not, don't worry, you can come back and you can do this exercise later. But I will tell you, before we do it, the very biggest mistake is to put what you think you should think or what you wished you thought about alcohol as opposed to what you really do.

So here's what I'm going to do. I'm just going to give you a couple of prompts for you to fill in. Just fill in with whatever comes to your mind, good or bad, whatever pops up first, just write it in. So here is prompt number one; drinking is... Fill that in; drinking is... What comes to mind when you think drinking is... How would you fill the rest of that sentence out?

Prompt number two, drinking makes things... What comes to mind? Fill that out.

Prompt number three, drinking helps me... Again, whatever comes to mind when you think that, the beginning of that sentence; drinking helps me... Fill it out.

People who don't drink... What comes to mind then? People who don't drink... That's prompt number four.

And then prompt number five, life without alcohol would be... Life without alcohol would be...

Now, if you have paper in front of you, I want you to go back and look at your answers. If you are just listening as I was reading through those prompts, what came to mind?

The thing that you must, must, must be sure that you are doing is being honest with yourself because here's what I will watch happen when I have

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my clients do this – and I have my clients do a much longer version of this exercise. They will write down all negative responses.

So they'll say, "Drinking is horrible. Drinking makes things worse. Drinking helps me act like an idiot. People who don't drink are smart. Life without alcohol would be better." So all of their responses are focusing on how alcohol is negative and drinking is negative.

And I always tell them this; listen, if you really believed this 150%, you wouldn't be drinking. That's really the truth. If you truly believed these things, you wouldn't be drinking. So you have to be honest with yourself, even if you don't like the answers that your brain comes up with because alcohol doesn't magically end up inside of your body.

You don't magically pick up a glass. You decide to consume it and you make that decision based on the thoughts running through your mind and the feelings that are then produced. That is what drives the action of drinking.

So listen, maybe you think drinking is fun and that drinking makes everything better and that drinking helps you open up and relax and that people who don't drink are kind of weird and life without alcohol truly would be boring. If you think all these things – because, you know what, I did for a very long time – that's okay.

In fact, that's good news because if you think these things, if you're honest with what you truly believe about a drink and about alcohol, you can start to see how the think-feel-act cycle is working. And that's what I always want you guys to be able to do, to understand how that cycle is driving the habit, because so often, we come from this space of, "Oh, the habit's just totally mysterious. I have no idea how I finished that bottle of wine. I have no idea how I ended up even drinking tonight. I didn't have a plan."

It's because so much of your thinking is unconscious and we need to bring it to the surface. And here's what I also want you to know; it is okay to have two competing sets of beliefs. It is okay to think drinking is fun and it's also

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a source of a lot of problems. Drinking makes things better and it also kind of makes me feel worse the next day.

Drinking helps me open up and relax and it also has me act like an idiot sometimes. People who don't drink are weird, and you know what – maybe I also kind of think they're smart. Life without alcohol would be boring, but maybe I also secretly kind of think it would be better.

It's okay to have two competing sets of beliefs. You just have to acknowledge what is actually there. You cannot trick yourself, you cannot pretend, you cannot fake into what you wish you thought. Just be honest with yourself.

Because if you notice these two different sets of belief, it is just something called cognitive dissonance. All that means is holding two competing thoughts at the same time. And this will happen a lot; not just when you want to change your drinking, but frankly, when you want to change most things in your life.

Now, the problem is that these two competing sets of thoughts, they don't feel good. And I was stuck in this place for so long. For so long I was stuck with, like, "Life would be so boring without a drink. But man, it kind of would be better not to have to wake up and deal with all the regret and shame the next day."

So I was so frustrated by this cognitive dissonance. I was so frustrated by having these two sets of competing thoughts at the same time and I didn't understand why they were there. I just kept thinking, "Why do I keep drinking? Who do I keep repeating the same thing over and over again if I so hate the repercussions? It must be that something's wrong with me." That was the only explanation that I had.

But, of course, it wasn't that something was wrong with me. It was that I had all these positive beliefs about alcohol and how it helped me and how it improved my life in the immediate moment. And that fact was that it did, because I had no idea how to deal with feeling anxious or awkward or insecure or lonely or bored without going out into my external environment

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and trying to find immediate gratification; something that would make my brain believe that it was enjoying itself and it felt good and it felt confident, when deep down, I really didn't feel any of those things.

Now listen, it is easier not to look at these competing beliefs, because then you don't have to face the discomfort. But you need to see that they are there, otherwise you can never change them; you can never get your beliefs into alignment.

Once you see what your thoughts are about alcohol, positive or negative, the whole spectrum, you have to decide which direction you want to head in. And the way that you do that is by looking at the think-feel-act cycle and putting the thoughts that you have about alcohol, about drinking, about not drinking into the cycle and seeing what it creates.

So we're not just looking at our thoughts and thinking, "Hey, does this look like a good thought? Does this seem pretty? Does this seem nice? Does it seem supportive?" No, we're actually putting it in the cycle and asking ourselves, how do I feel when I think this thought and how do I behave, what do I do or not do when I feel that way?

You're looking at the results that these thoughts create in your life. So let's just take the thought, "Drinking is fun..." a thought I had forever and ever and it felt like I would never not have that thought. When I thought drinking is fun, I felt kind of anticipatory. I was looking forward to it.

And then what was my action? I was trying to find moments then to have that fun, to go get a drink. I was looking for excuses and for opportunities to fill up my glass. A thought like, "Drinking makes things better..." that, for me, for the longest time, just felt true. I felt so certain that that was just the truth.

And so what happens when you're certain that that thought is the truth, that drinking makes things better? Well, if you're not feeling good, you look to a drink to improve the situation. Again, finding opportunities and excuses to drink, that's the action.

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If you think the thought, “Drinking helps me open up and relax...” maybe you feel a little dependent on having a drink, especially in certain situations. So maybe when you head to a party, instead of trying to connect with others on your own, instead of practicing the verb of connection – I talk about that a lot; connection requires an action, to connect. Instead of doing that, maybe you just head to the bar and get a drink.

If you have a thought, “People who don’t drink are weird...” that was another one that I loved and I had for so long – well when I thought that, I felt incredibly judgmental; incredibly judgmental. “Oh god, those are weird people. Who would want to be like that? Not me.”

And so what did I do? What was my action? Well I would do anything to avoid being in that category. I would do anything to avoid being one of those weird people. So guess what – it meant that I was drinking.

And then finally, a thought like, “Life without alcohol would be boring...” that made me feel really resistant. It was like I could look into the future. I had my little crystal ball, I could look into the future, and I knew it would be boring, and so I really resisted change. And when you resist something, when you feel that emotion, you do everything possible to keep things as they are.

And that’s what I did. I didn’t want a life that was boring. I wanted to enjoy myself. So then in my mind, it meant I had to figure out ways to keep drinking. This is what I mean when I’m talking about you have to not only understand the beliefs that you have about drinking, but you have to see what they are creating for you in the think-feel-act cycle, because then it becomes clear to you why you keep making the decision to drink.

So the question is, how do you bridge the gap between these thoughts? How do you bridge the cognitive dissonance between drinking is fun, it is also the source of a lot of problems, or drinking makes things better and it kind of leaves me feeling worse. Drinking helps me open up and relax and sometimes also helps me act like an idiot.

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How do you bridge that gap? Well you have to start to figure out how to challenge the beliefs that aren't serving you.

So I did an entire podcast episode on this all about the idea of creating something called bridge thoughts. so this is podcast 75 if you haven't checked it out before. Bridge thoughts are essentially baby-steps that we take in this work, in the work of learning how to manage your mind, so that you can just open up a door of possibility that there could be a new way of thinking or a new perspective or a new way of seeing or interpreting this situation.

Because what I want you to know is that this is not about positive thinking. This is not about just slapping on thoughts like, "Oh, I don't need a drink to have fun..." that your brain does not believe right now, and trying to convince your brain to believe it. It doesn't work like that.

You need these kind of bridge thoughts, these baby-steps. You can go back and listen to episode 75 if you want to go do a deep dive, but for the sake of what you need to know today, there are three types of bridge thoughts; thoughts that help you detach from a belief so you don't feel like you are at the mercy of it. You're able to look at it from a distance; thoughts that help you create possibility and thoughts that are just neutral.

So I'm going to give you an example of this. So I want to really talk to you about how you start to shift this. But then also, what I'm going to do is, actually in next week's podcast, really dive in to teach you how to go one step further and start practicing how to disprove your current belief system.

But for now, what you need are these kind of bridge thoughts. so let's take a thought like, "Life without alcohol would be boring." If I tell you right now that life without alcohol is amazing – which I 100% believe, I do believe that life without alcohol is amazing.

If I was just starting out on my journey and I was just starting out trying to change the habit, that thought would just feel like BS to me. I wouldn't believe it one little bit, "Life without alcohol is amazing? Forget it. That person sounds stupid."

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That's what I mean when I say positive thinking won't work. You have to find a bridge that will help you start to move in the direction of where you want to go, because if you always hang onto the thought, "Life without alcohol will be boring..." well, put that in the think-feel-act cycle and you can see why you're incredibly resistant to change and you're always trying to find ways to not change.

That's your action; to just keep things as is, to keep drinking. So we have to find a bridge thought. Now, if you look at the three different types I talked about, detaching, possibility, and neutral, these are the different types of bridge thoughts.

If you have a thought like, "Life without alcohol would be boring..." you could have a thought that helps you kind of just detach from it; kind of observe that thought from a distance. So if you notice your brain thinking that life without alcohol would be boring, you could have a bridge thought like, "Oh, that's a thought that I keep on thinking that fuels the habit."

So you're not trying to change it. You're not trying to shift it. You're just acknowledging that that thought fuels the habit of drinking. That's what I mean by detaching a little bit. You're looking at it from an observer; from the outside looking in, seeing what that thought produces for you not only in your brain, but in your life.

If you want to create a thought that creates possibility, you could try on a bridge thought like, "It's possible that some people enjoy life a lot without drinking." Now, I probably would have agreed to that thought. I probably also would have held onto – this was back when I was still really wrestling with this myself – I probably still would have held onto the idea, "Yeah, but not me."

But just even the idea of, "It's possible that some people enjoy life just as much or some people enjoy life without alcohol..." just maybe would have created a little space in my brain that maybe it wasn't 100% correct that life without alcohol would be boring. Maybe it was possible for some people. I didn't know how they did it. It felt like a mystery. I thought they might be kidding themselves, but it was possible.

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And then finally, the third type of bridge thought for something like, “Life without alcohol would be boring...” a bridge thought to go really neutral is just, when I drink, I can’t actually evaluate the reality of my life.

So I’m not trying to make an assessment on what life is like, either good or bad, boring or exciting, with alcohol. I’m just kind of going very neutral and saying, “You know, when I drink, I can’t actually evaluate the reality of my life.” Because of course you can’t, because you’re intoxicating yourself.

So you have these bridge thoughts so you can start to practice heading in a different direction. It literally is like going into a store, seeing a skirt or a dress or a pair of pants, whatever it is, a shirt on the rack, saying, “That looks good...” and then trying it on and seeing if it fits.

That’s what you do with these bridge thoughts. You have to try them on. You have to see if they feel good, if they fit, if they help open up a little possibility, if they just fall flat. Not every bridge thought is going to work for you. It is really a matter of trial and error.

This is why you need to understand what you really think about drinking, what you really think about alcohol, what you really think about a life without it, because even if you’re not in a place right now where you’re saying, “I never want to drink again...” your brain has some sort of beliefs about what it will be like for you not to drink. And you need to understand what those beliefs are.

Whenever you are moving towards a goal, any goal in life, but especially the goal of changing your drinking, of taking a break, of getting out from under this habit, you have to do a couple of things. First, you have to know clearly what you want.

“I want to stop drinking. I want to stop desiring alcohol so much. I want to stop needing it in certain situations. I want to stop feeling like I’m missing out.” Whatever it is for you, you have to really know what you want.

Then two, once you know what you want, you have to start knowing what your stories are. So many of us think the next step is to run after and go after what we want. It doesn’t work like that. You have to understand your

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current belief system first. Be honest with yourself. Don't write down what you should think or what you would like to think or what you wish you thought about the habit.

Write down what you actually believe about drinking, what you actually believe about alcohol. This will be uncomfortable because likely, you're going to uncover cognitive dissonance. Once you have what your beliefs are – and really, the best way to get them is to do something like the exercise that I ran you through, giving yourself prompts just to see whatever comes to mind first.

But once you have that, you can go onto step three, which is answering the question, what are those beliefs creating for you? What is the cause and effect of those thoughts? What happens when you think them? How do you feel? How do you act? Because then you can start to see what those beliefs are actually creating for you. And then the last step is to plan and practice how to start shifting to new thoughts.

Now, I gave you guys a way to start doing that with bridge thoughts. But what I'm going to show you next week is actually teach you how to go one step further by starting to learn how to disprove your current belief system. That is such a powerful thing.

So, it's not just the work of how do I shift to new thoughts, but how do I actually disprove my current belief system about alcohol? That work is incredibly powerful.

Alright, I hope you guys will dig in, be honest with yourself, figure out what your own belief system is about alcohol, about drinking, about how it helps you, how it makes you feel, what it does for you, what it does for other people. Really dig in. Get your full story and get that down on paper so you can start to see the cause and effect of these thoughts for you.

Alright, finally, if you are interested in being considered for this new program, In Pursuit, submit an application. All you have to do is head on over to rachelhart.com/inpursuit and all of the details are there. I am so excited to launch this program in 2019.

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It is what I have been dreaming of creating for my clients to really take this work to the next level, because this is what I truly believe; changing your drinking, learning how to change the habit, learning how to change your desire is so incredibly powerful because you will learn the skills to go get anything you want in life. And that's what I want to show people how to do.

Alright, everybody, have a fantastic week. I will see you in the next episode. Bye-bye.

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.