

Ep #275: The Phases of Changing Your Relationship with Alcohol



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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 275.

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.

Welcome back everyone. I want to talk to you today about what I mean when I say, "Changing your relationship with alcohol." A lot of people, will initially say, "What do you mean? I didn't even know I was in a relationship with alcohol." "I think I just want to drink less." "I think I just want to stop drinking." One of the things that is so important, that I teach inside the *Take a Break* membership and the podcast, is this idea that if you actually want to create change that lasts, that you don't have to worry about... "Ugh, am I going to start flip-flopping?" "Am I going to backslide on all of my progress?"

Then, you have to really create change from the inside out. Instead of focusing on a number, instead of just focusing on a quantity, you have to look at your thoughts and beliefs that you unconsciously absorbed about drinking; what it means to drink, what it means not to drink, and what means to struggle with your drinking. You have to examine all of that. To me, that forms the basis of your relationship with alcohol. If you don't do the work to change your relationship then all of your attempts to follow rules, use plans, and counting, all of that is going to be hit-or-miss.

All of that relies on willpower and discipline and being a rule follower. That's not how you change a habit at its core. You have to change it from the inside out, which means you have to start with your thoughts and your

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beliefs about alcohol and drinking, and you and why you overdo it, and about your thoughts and beliefs about urges. You really have to look at that entire think-feel-act cycle, which I believe, creates your relationship with alcohol.

I want to talk to today about what that journey of change can look like. I was thinking about this recently because someone was asking me to get more specific. I realized I've never gotten specific in this way. I've talked about different pieces, but not all together. Knowing what this journey of change looks like will really help you understand how progress, and transformation, is not a straight line. It can be a winding, meandering path. That's okay. That's not a problem.

The first place where people start is intuition. I've talked about this on the podcast before. I have a podcast with a woman who's in my program who is a sommelier. She talks about changing her desire to drink. We talked on that podcast about intuition. It's this internal knowing that something about your drinking doesn't feel quite right. Something feels off. You think it needs to change but you're in this place of, "Yeah, but how?" Intuition often starts off as a whisper. It's a kind of niggling in the back of your mind, "Hey, what's going on here?"

Because intuition is often very quiet, it can be easy to ignore. A lot of times what people find, in this first place of intuition... I probably didn't have an intuition for a couple of years into when I started drinking. It wasn't immediate. It was a couple of years in when I started to get that whisper of, "Hey, I think something doesn't feel right about this." Or "I don't really like how I am when I drink." Or "I don't really like how much desire I have or how my urges feel so intense."

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A lot of times, in this stage, you will have fears like, “Oh my God, change is going to be really hard.” “Everything in my life will have to change.” “Taking the first step is going to feel intimidating.” That’s because your belief fueling this stage is, “I don’t think I like my drinking.” Or “I think something doesn’t feel quite right about it. But, God, what is change going to mean?”

I will tell you this, I was stuck in intuition for such a long time, because I knew I wasn’t happy with the results I was getting. But I also was like, “Oh my God, but change... What is that going to mean for my life, my relationships, my friendships, who I’m dating, socializing, work events?” I was so freaked out by that thought.

What happens a lot once we start having that intuition, that little niggling inside that says, “Something about this just doesn’t feel right,” is we often drop into the place of being the enforcer. The enforcer, as you might imagine, is all about trying to change your drinking using rules, willpower, and discipline. I’ve talked about this a lot in the podcast. I talk about this a lot in my book, *Why Can’t I Drink Like Everyone Else?*

We start setting rules for ourselves about how much we can drink, how often, who we’re with, the time of day. Maybe you’re trying diets or fasts. I did this a lot. It’s like, “No, no, no. I’m just not drinking because I’m on an elimination diet.” Or “I’m doing this juice fast.” Maybe you start counting calories. It becomes all about following rules.

One of the things that comes up for people in this phase, one of the fears, is looking around and feeling like no one else around you needs rules. “Why do I need rules?” “Why is it easy for everyone else to say no and it’s so difficult for me?” “Why can’t I trust myself?”

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In this enforcer stage – again, it's not this linear thing, you can go back and forth between these. But many of the beliefs that are fueling the enforcer stage just sound like, "I should be able to do this. I should be able to control my drinking," Or, "I want to prove that I can drink normally. And, if I can't, does that mean I have a problem?" Now, very quickly, from the place of this enforcer most people find it doesn't work so well. Or it works sometimes but not always. People flip into this bully or fault-finder role.

What you end up doing is starting to use your failed attempts at drinking less or not drinking at all, you start using those failed attempts against yourself. You start beating yourself up. You start punishing yourself. Your fears will start to sound a lot like, "Why haven't I learned my lesson by now?" Some of the beliefs fueling this stage are, "I think I deserve to feel like crap. I think I deserve to feel this badly, regretful, embarrassed, and this hung-over because that might teach me a lesson. Maybe then I'll finally learn."

Part of this, when you start blaming yourself and using failed attempts against yourself, you start spinning on, "Is something wrong with me?" "I feel like something might be wrong with me." I remember telling myself, "I feel like my brain is missing an off-switch. Everyone else has this off-switch, but mine just didn't come out of the box with one." From this place, people move into a phase of searching.

When they're trying to set the rules themselves. Oftentimes we don't tell anyone that we're setting any rules. We want to keep it very hidden and close to the chest. We start going into the searching phase. I remember desperately searching, trying to find an explanation. "Why does my drinking look the way it does? Why am I struggling?" I was desperate for an answer. Again, I was searching for these answers in secret because I had so much shame.

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I remember when I lived in New York City there was a Barnes & Noble, I don't know if it's still there, in Union Square. They had a big self-help section and the idea of walking over to this section, much less the area that talked about alcohol, was like, "Oh my gosh! No way!" All my searching felt very secretive. One of my fears, when I was in this searching position, was, "Oh my God, nothing really describes what's happening for me. Nothing resonates. All the information I can find, out there, doesn't fit my situation. I don't want to wear a label for the rest of my life. I don't think I'm an alcoholic. I don't think I'm powerless. I don't want to make a decision forever."

One of the beliefs fueling this stage was, "I'm so alone. Nobody else can relate. It feels like the world is divided into normal drinkers and alcoholics. I don't know where I fit in." I felt alone and not sure of, "What do I do?"

Moving through all of these levels, many of you, like myself, will get to an "Ah-ha" moment. My "Ah-ha" moment was when I was first introduced to the think-feel-act cycle. The idea that the drink just sits there. The idea that my body doesn't make a move towards the drink until I have a thought and a feeling. My drinking didn't just happen. I wasn't actually on auto-pilot; it just felt that way. It was part of an unconscious cycle that no one had taught me was there. But I could start to bring an awareness to it.

For me, it was like my brain exploded. Even though at the time I didn't know what I was going to do with that information, just the idea that I now had a framework that made sense. It wasn't about judging. It wasn't about labeling. It was a logical framework of understanding how, when I would tell myself, "I deserve it. One won't hurt," those thoughts would lead to feelings that then would have me reaching for the drink. That blew my mind.

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A lot of people get to this podcast, they get to my book, and they have those “A-ha” moments. You feel excited. You feel hope. You feel a little relief. It’s like, “Hey. This makes sense. Finally, something explains me.” Then, there’s the fear of, “Yeah, but will it work for me?” “How do I take this Ah-ha, this newfound knowledge and transform it into know-how?” “How do I transform it into action?” This is where many people get stuck.

This is what I have found. This is where I got stuck for a long time. I was like, “Yes! Great! This makes so much sense. It’s a logical framework. So, why can’t I put it into practice? What is wrong with me that it now makes intellectual sense, and I don’t know how to do it?”

I had both beliefs of “This makes so much sense. Why has no one ever explained this to me before?” But then, also, “Okay but how?” Again, yes, it’s one thing to understand an intellectual concept, but it’s another thing to go to, how I call it, it’s like go to the mind gym to start actually learning, “How do I practice responding to my urges differently? Without using willpower, avoidance, or distraction?” “How do I start to change my thinking in a believable way, and not like I’m BS’ing myself?”

If I really am understanding one of the things I teach on this podcast... “If I’m truly understanding and embracing this idea that alcohol has no moral value, how do I then connect it to this fact that I really desire to change, and it’s causing negative consequences in my life?”

I felt I had so much information, but I didn’t know what to do with it for a long time. This is one of the reasons why I created the *Take A Break* membership. It’s not enough to land at this “Ah-ha.” You’ve gone through intuition and trying to be the enforcer, then being the bully and the fault-finder and going on the search to find something, and then you got to the “Ah-ha,” and you say, “Okay, so now what?”

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This really is when you start doing the work. One of the things that prevents people from doing the work, more than anything else, is believing they have to do it perfectly.

This is what I say about the 30-Day Challenge. When you join the membership, everybody starts with the 30-Day Challenge. That's what everybody does. We take a 30-day break from drinking. So many people think this is about; crossing off days on a calendar, all about being perfect, or all about, "How long will my streak be?"

What I want you to see is, no, no, no, it's about awareness. Because when you take a break from drinking, and you do it in a way – you do it with the knowledge of the think-feel-act cycle. You do it with the knowledge that you don't need to demonize alcohol in order to say no, you don't need to label it as bad. You do it with the knowledge that it's morally neutral.

You're taking the break in order to understand, "How does the habit work?" "How is my brain working?" "How am I responding to urges?" "What's the real impact of alcohol with my life, my well-being, my relationships, and my body and how I have fun and how I connect and how I unwind and how I relax?" That's the point. The point is not to get to 30-days and give yourself a gold star. The point is to build all these levels of awareness.

I will tell you, what I see happen a lot of times inside *Take A Break* is people will say, "Okay, now what? What happens when my break is over?" Or, if they haven't been able to get a bunch of days under their belt of saying no, then they'll say, "What does this mean that I can't make it to 30 days?" People have both, a whole new outlook, and a whole new perspective on the habit. That's what that 30-days really is about.

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But then, they're also in this place of still having fear and doubt. Because they still haven't shown themselves that they can change the habit at the deepest level.

This is why you have to get to curiosity; from awareness to curiosity. This is something we focus on after the first 30 days. People have access to different advanced classes. The first one is on avoiding numbing. We also have one on conquering stress and overwhelm. We introduce a module on The Mindful Drink for people who want to re-introduce alcohol into their lives. We have a lot of initial next-steps that are all about fostering curiosity.

You start to see your drinking, and your relationship with alcohol, really don't have much to do with alcohol. They have a lot to do with the relationship with your emotions, and how you have taught yourself unconsciously to cope with negative emotions. How to create relief, enjoyment, and pleasure.

In this stage people start saying, "Oh, my urges and my emotions don't have to be immediately answered with a drink or avoided. I don't have to run from them." And "Oh, I can see how the habit I developed around alcohol shows up in these other areas of my life. I see there are similarities with food. I see that there are similarities with my desire to people-please, or my inability to set boundaries." I think that this phase is really just about being, "I don't have to see my knee-jerk response as a problem. I can just be curious about it. And, I don't have to see every misstep."

We're not focusing on being perfect, here. "I don't have to focus on every misstep and make it mean. There's a problem here but I can see it as a deeper learning." That it really is about – curiosity is about starting to embrace progress over perfection.

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From there, we want to be curious, we want to foster non-judgment, but we also want you to evolve. I want you to learn that you can access pleasure, fun, and connection without needing a drink. We have courses on cultivating pleasure and reconnecting to your body. Because when you build more pleasure and connection in your life, guess what? The volume on your desire starts to naturally turn down.

This is the place where people will say, “Yes, yes. I feel so much healthier but I’m not enjoying myself, as much.” We have to get over that hump. We have to get over that hurdle. And a lot of times, in addition to learning that you can create pleasure and connection, a lot of times, what happens is people will say, “Do I even know what I like?” This can often be an in-between period for people. Without guidance, it can feel like, “I don’t even know who I am. What do I like to do? What do I even enjoy?”

A lot of times, people will be doing the work, continuing the work of the mindful drink, and they’ll be realizing, “Do I like the taste of this? Am I enjoying this after my first class?” It’s so fascinating when you start to question all of those thoughts.

From that place of evolution, you start moving into a place of trust. Trusting you can make a decision and follow through on it. Whether that is when it comes to drinking and you can trust yourself to say no, if that’s what you want. Or trust yourself to stop when you’ve had enough.

The same is true for food. Because many people see their relationship with alcohol, in many ways, mirrors their relationship with food. Trust in the relationships in your life. Trust in the confidence that you feel, like you can just show up as yourself and you don’t need a drink to be the best version of yourself.

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You start to see that trust is about relating differently to everything that you consume. It's relating differently to yourself and your relationships. It's about getting to that place and letting go of the fear of; "What if I start backsliding?" Or "What if this is too good to be true?" Or "What if my progress doesn't last?" For so many people, they get stuck in that area.

They get stuck in, "I'm making all this progress, but what if it doesn't last?" What we help people... When you're changing your relationship with alcohol and really, your relationship with yourself... help them start to see, "The reason you are afraid is not because of everything that's happened in the past. It's because you're not actually claiming ownership for everything that has brought you to this moment. For all the change you've created."

You need to have that trust. You need to have that trust in yourself to know that you've got your back, no matter what. You created your success, and you can figure this out. If you have a misstep, you trust that, "Yeah, I'm still going to show up for myself."

Finally, from trust, it's moving into potential. This, to me, is the most exciting time. This, to me, is like, "Hey, listen." Once you don't have to worry, once you don't have to use all this mental energy to think about your drinking, or to think about your over-eating, or to think about all the ways in which you procrastinate, or consume too much of things... If you don't have to do that, what are you going to use your mental energy for?

Who can you become? What do you want to create? What are your dreams? What are your desires? You get to this place of seeing, "I have so much untapped potential. I've spent so much of my mental energy focused on worrying about my drinking, or beating myself up for not following through on my commitment. When I can get past that and be in a place of trust, I can unlock my potential."

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And here's what I'm going to say. Here's where people realize, "Oh." This was true for me. I don't have to worry about defining myself as a drinker or non-drinker, or making a decision that lasts for the rest of my life because it doesn't matter. All of this work that I did was laying the foundation for creating, not just a different relationship with alcohol, but a different relationship with myself. You have a different relationship with yourself and it's like, "If I was this wrong about drinking what else am I wrong about? What else is possible for me?"

That's why I always say that this work you do is so transformative. It's not just about, "How do I learn to drink differently?" "How do I learn to stop drinking?" It really is work that can transform your entire life.

So, that's what it looks like going from; intuition to the enforcer to the fault-finder to searching to having that "Ah-ha" moment. And then, you can't just stop at the "Ah-ha," you have to learn how to put the "Ah-ha" into practice. You have to learn to transform knowledge into knowhow. Build your awareness. Create curiosity. Start to evolve and build that trust so that you can unlock your potential. That is what is available for you.

That's what I'm talking about when I'm talking about changing your relationship with alcohol. It's amazing. It's a crazy, amazing, unbelievable journey that will change your life forever.

All right, that's it for today. 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.

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