

Ep #297: The Advice You Should Ignore for Sober October



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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 297.

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.

All right, welcome back. We are talking today, about advice you should ignore for Sober October. Because October is right around the corner, and a lot of you are gonna be doing Sober October. A lot of you may be planning to do Dry January in the new year.

And I want to make sure if you're going to do that, that you're going to do it in a way that actually helps you change the habit instead of just crossing days off a calendar. And then, when it's over, going back to drinking and then discovering, hey, you just pick up right where you left off. That's not what I want for you.

So really, my mission, with the work that I do in the world and the work on this podcast, is to turn conventional wisdom on its head. I think we need a new approach when it comes to understanding why people drink and why it can be hard to change, and the skills that we need to make lasting change.

So, every year around this time, Sober October or in the new year, with Dry January, people are taking breaks from drinking. You hear a lot of advice about how to stick to your commitment.

It sounds like; get rid of all the alcohol in your house. Avoid being around people who are drinking. If you can't avoid being around people, offer to be

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the designated driver. If you feel really tempted, go home. Hang out with people who don't drink or who are also taking a break. Or, make sure that you get your significant other on board with your plans. Or, fill up your evenings and weekends with activities that don't involve drinking.

It sounds very logical; makes a lot of sense on the surface. But I will tell you, that this advice is some of what we need to start to really turn on its head, and really start to understand, is this actually helping you change your relationship with alcohol?

I would argue that it's not. It's helping you make it through a set number of days; that does not equal change. Because all of this advice, it really boils down to three things: avoidance, distraction, and discipline. And I will tell you, I tried all three of these strategies for a very long time in my life.

And I will tell you, that some of them worked for a while. I was, sometimes, able to avoid, or distract, or grit my teeth enough that I could go long stretches without drinking. But avoidance and distraction and discipline, none of these things actually changed my desire.

So, every time, when I would get frustrated, and I would be sick of, you know, being so good, and following rules. When I would go back to drinking, I would pick up right where I left off. And the problem is because avoidance and distraction and discipline are Band-Aid® solutions. They do not, nor will they ever, get to the root cause of the habit.

Now I was coaching, recently, inside the membership and someone was asking, "Okay, Rachel, I hear you talk about this a lot. But is it bad to use willpower? Is it bad right now if I'm avoiding situations or I'm distracting myself?" And the short answer is, no, of course not.

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Sometimes, especially when you are very new to this, sometimes when things are really hard, those are your best options. That's what you got; grit your teeth, make an excuse, stay home. I did that plenty of times. The problem is when you start to feel like these are your only options.

And, that is how I felt for a very long time. I knew how to pour wine down the drain. I knew how to make excuses to skip at happy hour with my coworkers. I knew how to make up fibs and explain away why I wasn't drinking tonight. I knew how to avoid people. But none of it was sustainable. It didn't feel very good.

And sure, I got a little short-term win, I could say; hurray, I didn't drink tonight. But in the long-term, I felt like, this kind of sucks. This doesn't feel good. Is this what my life is gonna be like? That's no fun.

Band-aids are great, okay? I wouldn't want to go through life without them. We use them practically every week in my house, thanks to having a little boy that is constantly injuring himself. We also have very fancy monster band-aids. But seriously, band-aids are not long-term solutions.

If all you want to do is prove that you can make it through Sober October or make it through Dry January without drinking, okay, then discipline, and willpower, and avoidance, and isolation, they're going to do the trick. But I don't know anyone who has that as their ultimate goal. Whose ultimate goal is I just want to not drink for 30 days. That wasn't my goal.

My goal was I want to have a normal relationship with alcohol. I want to stop worrying about my drinking. I want to be able to trust myself. I want to feel at ease, and confident, and comfortable when I decide not to drink. I don't want the answer to a crappy day to be, open up a bottle of wine. I don't want to make a beeline to the bar every time I feel awkward.

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My goals, my desires, they had nothing to do with counting days. And that's why I was stuck for such a long time. Because all I had were band-aids at my disposal. And band-aids were fine, they were great to get through a period of time and prove; you know what? See, I don't need to drink. But they were pretty useless when it came to changing my relationship with alcohol. They were pretty useless when it came to dismantling the habit.

And, that is why I teach and talk about the think-feel-act cycle. The understanding that every single decision that you are making around drinking, whether it's before you start, or after that first glass, or after that second, they don't just happen. They're connected to thoughts and feelings.

And when you start to understand the thoughts and feelings connected to your actions, you start to get a map for how the habit works. You start to understand; this is what I really need to shift, I don't need to just come up with better excuses, I don't need to just distract myself even more, I need to shift this entire cycle. This is how you get to the root cause of a habit.

I say this all the time, you cannot change what you cannot see. And for so many people, you are in a place right now, where most of the habit for you is unconscious, you're not even aware of it. What you see is the drinking. What you see is saying yes, and giving into your cravings, and the repercussions of what it feels like the next day. That's what you see.

But that is only at the surface level. If you want to understand the habit in its entirety, you have to dig below the surface. You have to start to bring awareness to the thoughts and feelings that are leading to these decisions. You need to be able to peer inside all of the thoughts, all of the beliefs that are blocking progress, because that is what is holding you back right now.

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If you feel stuck with your drinking, and I felt stuck for the longest time. I'm going to tell you this, you are not stuck because you have an addictive personality. You are not stuck right now, because alcoholism runs in your family. You are not stuck because of how long you've been drinking when you started drinking, when you were in middle school or high school. You're not stuck because your brain is somehow missing an off switch. These are all the things that I told myself.

The reason that you are stuck right now, the reason that you are struggling to figure this out, is because you aren't looking beyond; how do I say no? And digging a little deeper and getting to; why do I want to say yes? That piece is the piece that most people don't examine. Because no one really teaches us how to examine it.

And so, we answer it, if we think about it at all, in a very superficial way. I just like to drink; I just always have. I'm just a wine person. I just love my craft cocktails. I'm just a beer guy. We answer the 'why I want to say yes' in a superficial way that doesn't actually help us.

So, listen, avoidance and willpower and distraction and discipline, none of these are bad things. I just don't want them to be the only tools at your disposal. Because when they are the only tools at your disposal, it's not fun, it doesn't feel good.

You will sit around and think, okay, sure, I can say no, but why would I want to? I'm not really enjoying life. I don't like having to make excuses. I don't like having to avoid seeing people. That is not sustainable. So, the question is okay, then what? What do you do if you cannot just change a habit with these Band-Aid solutions?

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You have to start examining the root of your desire. Again, I promise it is more than 'I just love to drink; I always have'. There is more there. This is what people do when they start inside the membership. This is one of the first exercises we have people do, is really spend that first month uncovering their mindset about alcohol, their mindset about desire and cravings. And also, this one's really important, their mindset, their beliefs about their own ability to change.

And so, every day they get a new question to work on. And all it really takes is five minutes a day, to kind of download from your brain what's in there and start to look at it. But it is so incredibly powerful. Spending those five minutes examining your thinking, it is key.

Why do you want to change your relationship with alcohol? What do you think about your ability to keep a commitment? What are your specific obstacles? What doubts do you have? What are your thoughts about people who struggle with drinking? What are your thoughts about people who don't drink? What is your relationship with deprivation? How do you react when you break a promise to yourself? Why are you trying to do this on your own, instead of asking for help?

These are the sorts of questions that I ask people to spend time with; the list goes on. Because here's the thing, I can give you all the tools in the world to say no. We talk about tools all the time on this podcast. We talk about how to work with your urges, and how to start to move away from the permission-giving thoughts that have you saying yes. But here's the thing, the tools are not going to work if you try to skip over the mindset piece. You have to start with your thinking.

And so, this is really what I want you to do, for everyone listening. The next time you find yourself making an excuse, or avoiding certain situations, or

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certain people, or distracting yourself in the evening, you're not doing anything wrong. But I want you to take it one step further.

I want you to ask yourself; okay, so I'm making an excuse, I'm avoiding, I'm isolating, I'm distracting; acknowledge what you're doing. And then, ask yourself; what would I need in this moment, so that I didn't have to make an excuse? So, I didn't have to stay home? So, I didn't have to avoid certain people? So, I didn't have to distract myself? Be really curious with that question.

Now remember, you are looking for something that you need to help you in these moments, rather than thinking about how you want other people to change. Or, other people to be more supportive. Or, thinking about how it'd be so much easier if you weren't from a family of big drinkers. Or, it'd be so much easier if you weren't single right now and trying to date. Or, it'd be so much easier if you didn't live in the city that you lived in.

I want you to be curious and think about; okay, so in this moment, what else would I need, so I didn't have to use distraction, or avoidance, or willpower? If you do this, every single time you find yourself using a band-aid solution, it is going to be transformative.

It will start to show you the roadmap for change, because everyone has a different roadmap for how to change the habit. This is another fallacy that we have, is that everyone's habit looks the same. Not true at all. But you're not gonna be able to find your unique roadmap if you're not asking this question.

You will start to see the skills that you need, to make change permanent. And this is possible whether or not you want to drink less in a sitting.

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Whether you want to drink less frequently. Whether you want to stop drinking altogether. It's possible.

So, that's what I want you to try out. Try out, the next time you notice yourself using distraction or avoidance or isolation or willpower. Just acknowledge what you're doing and ask yourself; what else do I need in this moment?

This is what I'm helping people do. This is what we do inside of the membership. It's working together to figure that out. Because when you have the answer to that question, all of a sudden, it really does change the entire trajectory of how you're going about changing your relationship with alcohol.

All of a sudden, you start to see it has very little to do with what's in your glass. It has very little to do with the drink, itself. It has so much more to do with how you want to feel, what you need to feel good, and relaxed, and confident, and at ease, and comfortable, in this moment.

And when you can do that, then you leave behind all these Band-Aid solutions that are exhausting, and make you think; God, is my life gonna be like this forever? That doesn't sound like a lot of fun. So, try this out. I promise, it really will make a world of difference.

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.