

Ep #300: Why Conventional Wisdom About Drinking is Wrong



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, Episode 300.

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.

Hello, welcome everyone. Today, is Episode 300. I can't believe it. How did we get here? You know, I started this podcast in 2017, and I have had a new episode come out every single week since I started. Through two babies, and a lot of ups and downs, and the pandemic, and all the things.

And the reason why it has been so important to me to deliver this podcast to all of you listening every week, is because for the longest time, struggling with my drinking really made me feel like I was broken. Like something was truly wrong with me, truly wrong with my brain, that I was never going to be normal.

And also, the prospect of not drinking filled me with so much, kind of, despair. Even though I didn't like the results that I was getting from my drinking. Even though I would wake up and say, Oh my God, why did you do that? and feel crappy, and not enjoy the fact... not like this sense that I needed it.

That having a drink was how I became more fun and more outgoing, and it was easier for me to connect with people. I really believed for the longest time, that drinking helped me become more of me. But I was filled with this despair at the idea of; okay, so if I can't have a normal relationship with alcohol, then I can never drink again. And then, life is just what, like, I'm just not going to enjoy it as much? I'm not going to have as much fun. I'm always going to feel like I am on the outside looking in.

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That despair, I think, kept me from being willing to really consider how I was using alcohol in my life. It really did, because I envisioned this future that was just so boring, and bleak, and dull. And who wants that, right?

Even though I had all these negative consequences, it's like, well, I don't want that. I don't want to be the person that can't toast at my wedding. I don't want to be the person that's just kind of always sitting there wishing, well, I wish I had that drink, too. I wish I was having as much fun as these people. I wish this dinner felt as fancy, because I was also doing the wine pairing.

And so, it really was such a struggle for me so long. Discovering the think-feel-act cycle. Understanding not only my drinking doesn't just happen. One drink doesn't just turn into three. Three drinks don't just turn into a bottle. That doesn't just happen. There's always a thought, there's always a feeling, that's happening beneath the surface.

That was the first thing that gave me so much insight and power, because all of a sudden, instead of feeling like my drinking was happening to me, I really was able to understand; no, my drinking is happening. The way that I'm drinking, it looks like this because of what's happening in my mind.

And what was happening in my mind so often was; this won't be any fun without it. I need this to relax. I need this to open up. More will be better. I deserve it. I've had a bad week. If I stop now, I'll have to go home. It's free, why not?

I mean, I had so many thoughts there, so many excuses and justifications. I did a whole podcast on this called, *The Rolodex of Excuses*. Because that's what it really felt like sometimes. My brain just was going through this Rolodex™ of like; well, what about this reason? What about this justification?

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But for the longest time, I didn't really even understand that it was there. I didn't have conscious awareness of it. And so, the thing think-feel-act cycle started to help me understand; oh, it's not just happening, one drink doesn't just turn into three. And, that gave me a little bit more power.

But then, on top of that, the next thing that happened was; oh, if how I feel is connected to what I am thinking, then when I am sitting there not enjoying myself... When I'm sitting there feeling like I'm missing out, or believing that I can't connect, or telling myself that I'm a buzzkill, or I'm not normal if I'm drinking water while other people are having beers.

Then I started to realize; oh, wait a minute. Maybe I'm feeling this way, not because of the contents of my glass, but because what's happening in my mind. So, not only did it start to give me power to understand why I was drinking and why I was drinking as much as I was. Even though I didn't like the repercussions the next day. It also helped me understand that I was not doomed to this life that would be boring, and lacking, and missing out, and not as enjoyable, if I made the decision to say no.

And on top of that, I didn't have to make a decision forever. I think that is also, one of the things that really kept me. Was this idea of like, okay, if you can't figure it out, then you have to stop drinking for the rest of your life. That also, that belief, which I don't think is true, by the way, that belief really kept me from taking action. Because I was like, well, I don't want to make a decision for the rest of my life. And I think that I was held back.

So many of you are in the same situation, because we are stuck with this conventional wisdom that says; you should instinctively know how to moderate. You should just know how to do it. Why? Why on earth, is that the case?

I want you to think about that. Why should we instinctively know how to moderate ourselves around alcohol? When we look at all these other things

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in our lives, we look at food, and sugar, and our phones, and screens, and we see; oh, actually, it's pretty tricky to moderate ourselves. No one really teaches us how to do it.

And when things are very abundant, and very available, and very easy to have more, if no one gives us any tools, that lower brain of ours is just going to be like; more is better, more is better, more is better.

But conventional wisdom still tells us; you know, you should instinctively know how to moderate. And if you don't know how to do this, then the solution is more willpower. Alright, so that's what I struggled with for so long; oh, I just need more willpower. And if I am not successful, it's because there's something lacking inside of me. I guess I don't have enough discipline.

And then, if willpower doesn't work, then something must be wrong with your brain. And then, the only solution is lifelong abstinence. That is the conventional wisdom that the vast majority of people subscribe to. And it's so backwards. It's so outdated. That thinking is what kept me stuck for so long.

That thinking is what had me feel like something was wrong with me, and that some part of me was broken. It's why I called my book, *Why Can't I Drink Like Everyone Else?* Because I really felt so incredibly alone in this. I really just looked out and I perceived kind of, you know; here are all my friends and here's my family, and they're not struggling. So, what's wrong with me?

That's the beauty of starting to study the think-feel-act cycle, and starting to learn; oh, my actions don't just happen. I don't make a move. My body doesn't make a move towards the glass, without something unfolding in my mind. I always say this to people that I work with, we can't change what we

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can't see. We have to start to slow things down, so that we can see how the habits unfolding, so that we can intervene with more than just willpower.

Because lots of you probably know that you can say no, right? You're able to use willpower. It just doesn't work for the long term. It's exhausting. This is why so many people get stuck, in what is often, kind of thought of as a diet mentality. This restricting and then binging, but it also applies to drinking. You know, this idea of like; yeah, I can say no, I can say no. But you're using all this energy to say no. You're not enjoying yourself.

And then, you get to a point you have a bad day, you have a bad week, something happens, or you just start telling yourself like; I've been good for so long, I deserve to be a little bad. And you give in. And then, when you give in, it's like; okay, well, I mean, all my hard work is out the window. So, I might as well go all in. That is the, you know, binge and restrict cycle that so many people are stuck in.

Again, you're stuck in that because you're believing that willpower is the solution, when it's not. The solution is learning how to manage your mind. Learn how to understand why it is you do the things that you do. Learn how your brain responds to concentrated rewards. And then, when you have those tools, then it's so much easier to decide the relationship you want with alcohol. It's so much easier.

I say this all the time, there is no one right solution for everyone. The people that I work with in my membership, some of them want to drink less in a sitting, that is their goal. Some of them want to drink less during the week, they don't want it to be a daily habit. Some people want to save alcohol for special occasions.

Some people are kind of like; I don't really want to drink at all anymore, right? I just think I'm over it. Some people want to take an extended break, you know, they want 30 or 60, or 90 days, or longer, to just really reset.

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There's no right or wrong goal here. There's just, really, giving you the tools and the information, so you can decide what's right for you. And I think the reason why so many people resist the conventional wisdom, is because we aren't told that we can decide what's best for us. We're told; if you struggle, then something's wrong with your brain. And, the only solution is lifelong abstinence.

I actually think that that message does a disservice. A lot of people end up wanting to rebel; I certainly did. This is why I do the podcast. This is why it's so important to me to just let all of you know, whoever's listening, you're not alone in this struggle. Feeling alone is awful. Feeling like other people have a brain that works and you don't, is awful.

And again, what that think-feel-act cycle shows us, is that the more shame that you feel, the more hopelessness that you feel, the more that you other yourself, that you believe that something is wrong with you, something doesn't work right. When you create those negative emotions, guess what we want to do? We want to escape them.

And this is why sometimes I would fall into the trap of like; well, I don't know, like, if I just screwed up, if I'm just missing this off switch in my brain, I might as well enjoy myself, right? That was the result of me really believing that something was wrong inside of me.

There are two things that I want to share. One came in recently from a listener, a new listener to the podcast. And he wrote this, he said, "As someone who drank regularly at home to relax, or quote, 'because my ancestors are German,' ..."

I'll just add in here, I often thought like, yeah, because my ancestors are Irish. So, I relate with that. He wrote, "And I wanted to have a more healthy relationship with alcohol, your podcasts have shown me how important it is

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to understand why. It didn't take long to know; I now have the power to make better decisions and retrain my brain.”

My team forwarded that message to me when it came in. And it meant so much to me, that this person, who I will probably never meet, they may never work with me directly, they may never join the membership. But just listening to this podcast, helped this person start to consider; why? If I can just drop the story of, well, it's because of my ancestry, or it's because I need to relax.

Or, it's because it's an easy way to have fun. Or, I'm just a beer guy, I'm just a wine person, right? Like, I'm just someone who loves to drink. If you can drop that story for a second, and just be curious about the why, that alone can shift so much. Because now, you start to see the habit for what's really going on. You can start to understand your desire, not just, oh, I just love to drink. And I'm just a person who thinks more is better for everything.

You can start to understand; okay, well, why? What's happening? Why do I want it in this moment? How do I perceive this moment will be, if I say no? Why do I want another? How do I perceive I will feel, if I say no to another. Just starting to ask questions is the most powerful tool that you have at your disposal.

Now, the other thing that came in recently, and this actually was something that came in inside our membership. Someone posted and said, “Why am I listening to the podcast, and why am I listening to your video modules, and feeling like a fountain of tears? Like, what is going on?”

And again, when I read that I thought; you know, I'm not entirely sure why that's happening. But my guess is this, that we've so learned to connect our decision about whether we drink and how much we drink, and whether or not we drink too much. We have made this connection in our brain unknowingly. That somehow, whether or not we drink, and how much we

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drink, and whether we drink too much, has something fundamentally to do with who we are as a person.

And when we have that belief... When you start to listen to an explanation that teaches you about the think-feel-act cycle. Teaches you about this cycle unfolding inside, that you can't yet see but you can bring awareness to. And you start to understand; oh, this has nothing to do with whether or not something is wrong with me, or I am broken, or I am screwed up, or something is wrong with my brain.

I think that can be such a huge weight off our shoulders. I know that it was for me. It was such a relief to see; oh, this is just a habit that I learned. And you know what? This habit, I learned well before I started drinking. The habit of turning to things to feel better, that's something I learned well before I started drinking.

The habit of not tuning into my body, but using an object, like a plate or a glass, to tell me when I was done with something, that's something that I learned well before I started drinking.

The habit of just responding immediately to urges, not knowing how to allow them, and feeling like the only alternative to responding to an urge was to go to war with it; was to fight with it, right, and struggle with it, or distract myself, or try to hide out and not be around the thing that I thought was tempting. Oh, I learned that well before I started drinking.

And so, understanding that, of oh, this is just a pattern that my brain learned. For many of us, these patterns started forming well before alcohol came into the scene. And also, it has nothing to do with who I am, or my personality, or my ancestry, or my family tree. It really just has to do with these thoughts that, I have not really had full awareness, are there.

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And, knowing that was such a huge relief for me. And I think sometimes, when we have that kind of huge relief; oh, there's nothing wrong with me? It's just nobody gave me these tools. We've been living with this incredibly outdated thinking that just says, you should instinctively know how to moderate, right? You should just instinctively know how to do that with alcohol.

It's so backwards. I can't even tell you the number of stories that I read about screen time, and how so many people are addicted to their phones. And it's like, okay, so phones are very addictive. And we don't tell people, that you should just instinctively know how to moderate with your phone. Why don't you know how to do this?

Phones, we can understand. That is very challenging for people without tools to understand; how do I put this thing down, where I'm constantly getting rewarded, and I'm constantly getting dopamine? So, we understand that with a phone. But then, when it comes to wine, beer, and liquor, we're like; oh, no, no, you should just know how to do that. Right? And if you can't, I mean, obviously, the only thing you need is willpower.

Like, that thinking it's so backwards. If you can leave that behind, if you can start to see no one actually, ever, probably modeled for you anything other than giving into an urge, or resisting an urge, or trying to distract and isolate yourself. And I'm not just talking about with alcohol, I'm talking about with all things.

No one ever sat you down and said; hey, maybe you can learn how to do something called "allow an urge". Maybe you can start to separate out what's happening in your body, from what's happening in your mind. That's like, tool number one.

No one sits us down and explains; hey, you know what? Your actions don't just happen. Everything that you do or don't do in life, it doesn't just happen

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out of the blue. It's connected to how you're feeling. And, how you're feeling is connected to what you're thinking. No one gives us that key to understand ourselves.

No one explains that things don't tempt us, right? I don't care if it's alcohol or food or whatever; they're not tempting us. The temptation comes from what's happening in our mind. And certainly, no one models for us; how do we deal with our emotions? When we're feeling stressed? When we're feeling overwhelmed? When we feel kind of shy and closed off? When we're bored?

What do we do with that? No one models how to solve that internally. What happens is, people are like; oh, the solution is outside of you. You need to look outside of you to change how you feel. It's just like, I think of it a little bit like, we're carrying around an empty toolbox. And if only, someone would fill that toolbox with just a couple of tools, we would be so much more effective, right?

It's like a carpenter going around and he's got an empty toolbox, but he doesn't have a hammer, or screwdriver, or level. Just three tools would make him so much more effective. That's what you're missing; that's it. And so, I wanted to talk to you today because it is the 300th episode. I wanted to talk to you a little bit, about why this podcast is so important to me. Why I do it every week.

And just to reinforce, that if you are struggling, and if you're feeling defeated, or hopeless, or shame, about your drinking, there's nothing wrong with you. You're not broken. There is no one right solution. When you have tools, you can start to decide what is best for you, what works for you. That's what's so important. And, that's what's so empowering.

So, here's what I'm going to ask for all of you listening. If you are a new listener or a longtime listener, and you find this podcast helpful, I want to

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ask you to go to Apple Podcasts™ and leave a review. And, the reason is simple. Because when the podcast has more reviews, it helps more people discover the show.

So far, I've had 4 million people discover the show; which blows my mind. And if I can bring this message to even one more person, who right now is suffering, who right now thinks that there's something wrong with them, who feels kind of hopeless, that they're never going to be able to figure this out.

If you can help me bring this message to one more person, that is the greatest gift that you could ever give me. This podcast will always be free, it will always be available to anyone who needs it. Because it really is time that we have a new approach. That we start, collectively, thinking in a different way about this struggle.

So, help me do this. Help me bring this podcast to one more person. It really is the greatest gift that you could give me. And it's the greatest gift that you could give someone else. Who's out there struggling, and unable to figure this out, and making it mean that there's something wrong with them. When truly, nothing is wrong with them. We've just been given an empty toolbox.

Alright, 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.

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

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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.