

Ep #312: How to Drink Less This Year



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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 312.

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, everyone. Welcome to a new episode. Welcome to a new year. This episode is all about how to drink less this year. So, last week, I was talking all about the mindset shift you need to make if you want to change your drinking, change your relationship with alcohol. And today, we're talking about the steps you need to follow, and in fact, the steps that you shouldn't follow and are probably following.

Again, everything I teach here, it applies if you want to drink less in a sitting, if you want to drink less frequently during the week, if you want to take a break, if you want to stop drinking. It really does not matter your goal, because the same process applies when it comes to retraining your brain. When it comes to teaching your brain a new way to respond to temptations and triggers, and excuses and desire, and cravings.

But I want to share a story first. I actually shared this story in my newsletter a couple of weeks ago. And I haven't talked about it on the podcast, but I think it really illustrates how you can be stuck in the wrong steps when it comes to change, and stuck there for a long time. So, way back in December of 2010, my best friend, I was living in New York City at the time, and my best friend convinced me to tag along with her to a holiday party.

I actually remember, I know the exact date, because I still have my journal from that time. The following day was filled with a lot of self-loathing and regret, and "How could I have been so stupid?" But I'll explain where that

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comes in. So anyway, she convinced me to go with her to this party. I was nervous about going, I didn't know anybody there. And I had lots of experience of overdoing it, especially when I was around new groups of people. Especially, when I was feeling anxious about socializing.

So, I promised myself ahead of time, I said, "You know, Rachel, just go easy tonight. Go easy on the drinks." And of course, shortly after we arrived to the party, my plan started to unravel. She bumped into an old friend she hadn't seen in ages, and they were deep in conversation. I was standing there with no one to talk to, feeling so awkward, and thinking to myself, "Oh, this is like exactly why I didn't want to come."

Now, before I had even left for this party, I had been in my apartment tearing apart my closet, trying on everything I owned and hating everything I tried on. I finally found something that wasn't horrible, and I started putting on makeup. I just remember thinking to myself, "You know, is it too late to back out?" I just didn't want to go.

I hated, back then, I hated going to events or parties where I just didn't know anyone. And, I was really feeling anxious, so I did what I so often did; I decided to pour myself a glass of wine before I even left for the party, right? It's just like, "I'll just have a glass while I'm getting ready. I'll feel better."

And so, I started drinking before I even got there. And then, we arrived, and of course I didn't know people other than my friend. And, everything felt unfamiliar. I was with all these people I didn't know. She was kind of deep in conversation with someone else. And I did, in that moment when I was standing there wishing that I wasn't there, I did what I had done for so many years in my life.

When I started to feel uneasy in these situations, I just gulped down the glass of wine that was in my hand, and I headed straight to the kitchen for

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another. And, you can kind of guess how the night played out. Right? After two glasses, but you know, actually it was three, because I had started before I even got there, I felt a little bit better. But I still felt kind of awkward and out of place.

So, that second glass, at the party, turned to a third, and like finally, okay, I'm like four glasses in, I'm finally starting to have fun. And then, it's like well why stop having a good time? Like, I'm finally enjoying myself. Let's keep going. Let's have more fun.

And you know, I have no idea how many drinks I had that night. I have vague memories of kind of stumbling home and what happened. I woke up the next day, looked at my phone, with a lot of not-so-happy text messages from my friend; she wasn't happy about how I had acted. And honestly, I didn't even really know so much what I had done.

I kind of had memories of like; oh, yeah, maybe I was arguing with someone a little too loud, and being a little too much. I just didn't really even remember. This had happened to me so many times before. And I was there the next day, in my bed, looking at her text messages, trying to remember what happened.

Asking myself, "Why? Why, again, were you so stupid?" Wishing kind of the bed would swallow me up whole. What did I do? Got out my journal, the journal that I still have. And for like the millionth time, I just wrote and wrote and wrote about like; God, I just need to change. I have to be different.

And this was right around the new year, right? This was right at the end of 2010, going into 2011. And so, you know, it's right around that time, I was like, "Okay, I got a brand new year. Things are going to be different." And so, I just wrote and wrote about all these reasons why I had to make smarter decisions, and I had to follow these rules, and I had to make better choices.

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And here's the thing, did any of that happen? Did I succeed that January 2011? No, I did not. I don't think I lasted even more than two weeks. And I wish I could just share with all of you who listen to this podcast, I wish I could tell you how many times, how many goals, how many resolutions that I set to try to change my relationship with alcohol.

Whether that was drinking less or not drinking, or I mean, just so many different iterations that I went through. But the fact of the matter is, I really don't have any idea. It was more times than I can count. Over and over, I would promise to myself, "Rachel, you're never going to do this again. You're never going to be that stupid. You're never going to make such bad decisions."

And then, I would find myself slipping up, in a matter of days or weeks or months. And, I could not understand why. I could not understand like; why can't you just have fun without getting to the point of being stupid, right? Like, why can't you just enjoy being buzzed without like, going to that place of you know, I barely remember the night. Why can't I just drink like everyone else?

But here's the thing, the more that I made these promises to change, and kept failing, the more I really started to believe and worry that something was wrong with me. Right? Like I could not, I could not come up with any other reason why it was so difficult for me to change.

Because I looked around my life, and I saw; you know what? Like, you're smart, you're responsible. You know, you're doing well in life. And despite these stupid choices that you make around alcohol, you know, your life is not a mess. It's not falling apart.

It was so perplexing to me; why can't I figure this out? And what I didn't realize back then, and frankly, it would take me a couple more years until I figured this out. I couldn't figure out my drinking, I couldn't change the habit,

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I couldn't change my relationship with alcohol, because I was making resolutions the wrong way.

So, I knew how to set them. I knew how to write down in my journal; never again. Here's the new rule that you're going to follow. I knew how to do that. But my follow-through was dismal. It really was dismal. And I interpreted that kind of dismal follow-through as, something must be wrong with you. Maybe, you're just one of those people who can't change.

What I didn't realize is that I was stuck. I was following a process, that I thought would help me change, that was actually keeping me stuck. And so, I want to talk today, about what that process was that I was following. Because I know that so many of you out there are doing the exact same thing.

I want you to see why it doesn't work. And then, I want to talk about how you need to kind of shift. How you need to start following a process that will actually work for you. Will actually help you change.

So, here's what I would do, over and over and over again. I would get to that point where, either the worry or the fear or the embarrassment, that really, I didn't want to look at. I wanted to pretend like it wasn't there. When it came to my drinking, that worry and fear and embarrassment, which is a buildup, it'd become kind of too much. Too much to ignore, just like it was you know, the morning after that party.

And in that moment, when all that negative emotion had built up, that's when I would decide to do something. That's when I would open up my journal and I'd get out a pen, and I'd, you know, I'd write down my goal or my resolution, right? That moment when it felt like it was just too hard to ignore.

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So, it was starting from this place of just being fueled by all of this fear, and all of this shame, and all of this worry. So, that's kind of the environment that my resolution was set in. And what I would do next, is I would make a bunch of rules for myself.

I can't even tell you all the different rules that I tried making, right? But I would make a bunch of rules. Like oh, my God, you're never going to drink again. Or, you're never going to have more than one. Or, maybe never more than two. Or, you're going to just like stop drinking with these people. These people are the problem. Or stop drinking hard liquor; stop the cocktail, stick to wine. Right?

Or, maybe just limit how many days. Limit how often you're drinking. I had so many rules, right? I would make a bunch of rules. And I would swear up and down, "Rachel, this time is going to be different. It has to be different." But here's the deal, I had lots of rules, and I had no plan of action. Because deep down, I believed I should know better. I should just stop being so stupid.

So, I didn't make a plan of action because I should just know not to do this. And not only, that I had all these good reasons, I had all these valid reasons why I should change. When I thought about my health, when I thought about my relationships, when I thought about the ways that it was interfering in my life.

Not because it was, you know, creating all these horrible problems. But just like the mental energy that I was spending. The number of mornings that I would wake up feeling full of regret. And, why did you do that? I mean, I could just make a laundry list of why I should change.

I told myself, over and over again, "You should just know better, Rachel. Just stop being so stupid." So, I had all these rules and know-how. I had no plan for what I was going to do when temptation appeared, or my excuses.

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“You know, just one. One won't hurt. You deserve it, you've had a crappy day.”

No plan for when the excuses started pouring in. No plan for when I started having these cravings, or was sitting there feeling like everybody was having a great time and I was missing out. No plan for what to do around things that I knew were triggers for me. I didn't have a plan because I just told myself, “You know what? You should know better.”

My strategy was simply just try really hard to be good. Right? And sometimes it was some version of like; okay, let's just like get rid of all the alcohol in my apartment, right? Or, let's just head straight home. Don't go with your colleagues to happy-hour. Or, stop hanging out with that one friend that, you know, is always trouble.

But I really had no strategy for temptation or excuses, or cravings or triggers; none of it, right? Other than, let's just try to be good and try to avoid these things. And here's the thing, and you may have this experience, too; being good can work for a while. It can work for a couple of days. It can work for a couple of weeks. It can work sometimes, for a lot longer.

But then, eventually what would happen? One day, you'd get to that point, you're just fed up or you had a terrible day. Or, you're out with people and you're so annoyed because everybody seems to be having a great time, and why can't you just have a great time, too? Why do you have to be sitting there drinking that stupid seltzer, to get to that moment where you give in?

And then, in that moment, I would do this over and over again, in the moment where I would give in, it's like; okay, well, I broke the rule. I broke the rule. I was bad, so I might as well keep going. If I'm going to be bad, I

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might as well make it worthwhile. If I'm going to be bad, I might as well be really bad.

This was a mindset that I was stuck in for so long, right? And then, what would I do? I would wake up the next day, and I would feel like a failure. I would have all this regret. I would make my failure mean that change was impossible. And then, from that place of feeling, you know, shame and defeat and hopelessness, I would backslide.

I would just kind of throw my hands up in the air and decide; well, this is impossible. And I would backslide for weeks or months, until the worry and the fear and the embarrassment would build up again to a point where I couldn't ignore it. And, I would just start the process all over again.

Set a lot of rules with no plan because; hey, you should just know better. Try to be good or try to avoid situations, with no plan for temptation or excuses or urges or triggers. Because hey, just stop being so stupid. And the moment it didn't work. The moment it didn't work, it was kind of like; well, let's just go all-in because hey, you screwed up. Might as well enjoy yourself.

Wake up the next morning, decide that my failure meant that I couldn't do it. Feel awful, and then backslide. I'd do that cycle over and over and over again. It is an awful cycle to be stuck in. I'm gonna tell you, a lot of people are stuck in the cycle. Doesn't have to just be around drinking.

It can be around lots of things in your life. Lots of things that you feel like, I'm not making decisions that I like. I don't feel like this is serving me. And I'm also telling myself that I should just know better. That I should just make smarter choices.

I'm so sure that so many of you have tried to follow this exact same process. Because no one teaches us how habits are formed, or how they

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work, or why it is, in the moment we are making the decision to say yes to our urges, or the decision to say yes to have another. No one explains any of this.

And so, I just spent years, I mean, you know, over a decade, kind of doubling down on; I should just be really good. I should just stop being so stupid. I need to develop an iron will. Not understanding that the process that I was following was the problem. The process was the problem.

I had to really change my entire mindset about, how do I go about changing this relationship that I have with alcohol? And I want you to know, it's possible. It really is. The thing right now, that you have woken up so many times and told yourself, oh my God, why was I so stupid? Right? Like, why can I drink like so-and-so? Why can't I be more responsible? Why can't I make better choices? The thing that you have used to beat yourself up over and over again.

It is totally possible for you to change if you follow a different process. You cannot rewire your brain, you cannot change this habit, you cannot develop a healthy relationship with alcohol or change how you respond to urges, when you're following this kind of shame cycle. That's what it really is.

This cycle of; I feel terrible. I'm going to create all these rules. I have no plan, I'm just going to try to be good. And when that doesn't work, I'm going to make it mean that I can't change. And then, I'm going to backslide until I start the process all over again.

You need a new process; you need new steps for change. You need steps that actually help you understand how the habit works. And what's happening in the moment that you reach for a drink. And what's happening in the moment when you feel the desire, or you tell yourself; hey, one won't hurt. What's happening in the moment when you feel the desire for more.

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So often, we don't realize how blind we are to what is happening in the moment, because we've decided; well, it's just like, you know, it's too tempting. Right? Once I start drinking, I just can't stop. It's just who I am. I have always been this way. I always give into temptation.

We're so sure that we have the explanation for why we struggle, which blocks the very first thing that you need, which is curiosity. This is the very first thing that I work on with people. It's the thing that helped me the most. Could you just be curious for a second? If you could just drop all the explanations that you have, right now? Why it's difficult for you. Why you specifically struggle. Why it's hard for you to say no.

If you could just drop all those knee-jerk explanations and get curious. This is what I talk about so often. This idea of, you already know how to focus on the downsides. You don't need any more help focusing on the downsides of drinking. But have you spent a lot of time looking at the upsides?

Have you spent a lot of time thinking about how it's helping you? And again, this is not a trick question. There is an upside, otherwise you wouldn't be saying yes. So, what is it for you? What is it helping with? I mean, you can see in that story with me, totally helping with that unease and anxiety and awkwardness that I felt in social situations; that no one ever taught me how to manage.

And, I had been feeling it for a very long time. I mean, well, before I even started drinking when I was 17. You have to start from that place of curiosity. You cannot start from that place of; here's the rule and just stop being stupid. You have to really bring that curiosity in, to understand; how does the mind work? How is this habit working? What is your unique relationship with alcohol?

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And then, only once you understand that, then you have to start preparing for obstacles. You have to actually prepare ahead of time. What are you going to do when the temptation appears? When the craving appears? When you're around your triggers? When someone says, "Oh, come on, don't make me drink alone."

What exactly are you going to do other than; gosh, I hope I'm going to be good. Or, let me just try to avoid those situations and hope that they never happen. This is another thing I spent a lot of time working with people; what are you actually going to tell yourself in the moment? What is going to help you navigate that moment of discomfort?

Because you know, that's what I was talking about in last week's episode; you're going to feel a little discomfort in that moment. That's okay, that's normal. But so often, we make that discomfort mean that something has gone wrong, because no one's showing us how to navigate it.

And it's not just that you have to prepare for obstacles, you have to plan ahead for the moments where you aren't perfect. I need all of you to hear this so much. It's so important: We don't want to plan ahead for the moments that we aren't perfect. We don't want to plan ahead for; okay, but what if I slip up? What if I fail? Because we're like; no, God, I can't handle failing again.

The only reason you can't handle failing again is because you make failure mean that something is wrong with you. Rather than; oh, maybe it happened because I'm missing a piece of a puzzle. Maybe, it happened because I'm missing a tool or a strategy. Or, I don't actually have a plan for this moment.

Planning ahead, for the moments when you aren't perfect, it is actually one of the most important things that you can do. And actually, speeds up the process of transformation. Because when you plan ahead for these

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moments; what am I going to do? How am I going to show up with myself? How am I going to examine what happened, instead of kind of pretending? Oh, God, like, that was stupid. Let's not look, let's not look at all. Let's just kind of start over and pretend it didn't happen.

That's not going to work. Planning ahead for, how am I going to have my back in these moments? And, how am I going to use what happened to understand what am I missing? If you can do that, your process of change will go so much faster. Because then you are always in a place of assessing and adjusting; what is working, what isn't working.

Okay, why isn't it working? What strategy do I need here? Assessing and adjusting. Constantly being in that place of trying to figure this out, rather than; well, it wasn't perfect. See? So, this didn't work. Might as well just give up.

This is so important. These are the steps that most people are missing. Right? Because the moment you get stuck, when you're, you know, assessing what's going on, why didn't this work? The moment you get stuck, you just go right back to curiosity; okay, let me try to figure this out.

That's why it's so beneficial to have someone by your side. To have someone who can help you, and show you, and kind of give you insight into something that you may not be able to see. That's what the work that I do is all about sometimes. Really figuring out how to find that curiosity, and how to unlock this thing that's been so difficult for us.

To really see, in a new light, all it really takes is like one question. One question that helps you understand what was going on in the moment. Or, understand something about temptation or desire, in a new light. And then, it's like rinse and repeat; you just keep going through these steps of curiosity and preparing for obstacles, and planning ahead for the moments when you aren't perfect. And then, assessing and adjusting.

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And then, starting back again with curiosity; you just rinse and repeat until you get where you want to go. And if you don't know how to do this, I don't blame you. Because you know what? I didn't either. No one teaches us how.

This is what I work on with people, day in and day out; how to master these steps. Right? Because people will come to this work, they will come to the membership, and it's like; well, how can I be curious when I'm so filled with shame?

And how can I prepare for obstacles when I just truly believe I should know better? And how can I plan ahead if I'm literally terrified of failing again? If I keep telling myself that failure isn't an option? How can I assess and adjust, if deep down I believe that I might be the problem?

The answer is always the think-feel-act cycle. That's the answer, always. Because then, you start to see that the only thing standing in your way, is a sentence. It shifts you from this place of; I should know better. I should be smarter. I shouldn't be so stupid. I should have learned my lesson by now.

To oh, what's going on beneath the surface? What was that thought? How was I feeling in the moment? What led to drinking when I'm around my triggers? It wasn't that trigger, it was what was unfolding inside of me, that I've been blind to. Well, let's find that thought. Let's find that feeling. If we can see it, we can change it.

And changing it is not a matter of just say no. Just say no. Just say no, over again. That's not actually changing it. You're gonna start to ask yourself; why are these excuses so believable for me in the moment? And, what am I going to do the next time the excuse appears? I can't just cross my fingers and hope that it doesn't appear again. Right? How am I actually going to respond?

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I need to plan ahead to have a believable response. This is a huge thing that I work on with people. Doing the work of the think-feel-act cycle and really understanding how your thoughts and your feelings and your actions are all connected.

You have to understand, how do I start to create believable thoughts for myself? New thoughts to think, that aren't just all like, you know, rainbows and unicorns. And of course, I can do it. No, like, what am I really going to say in that moment to myself, that I think will work? And if it doesn't, how am I going to adjust?

The think-feel-act cycle really is the key to understand; oh, you're not making an illogical decision when you decide to drink, even though you have all this evidence that your relationship with alcohol is not working so well for you. It's not illogical, because you start to see in the moment; oh, I wasn't responding to this unconscious feeling. Maybe, it was deprivation, maybe, it was boredom. Maybe, it was anxiety. Maybe, it was stress.

I was responding to something that my brain had learned; hey, I know the solution. Let's have a drink. This is all a matter of learning and practicing. It's not a matter of knowing better. It's not a matter of having an iron will. It's a matter of actually following a process, and learning a process, and practicing a process that will help you change.

That's what I want for all of you this year. That's what's possible for everyone. All of you out there listening, that's what's possible for you. Because it does not matter what your goal is, these steps will help you get there. They truly will.

Alright, I hope that I have given you something to think about at the beginning of this new year. A new way to think about how you want to go about changing the habit. And as always, if you want to do this work with me, we're starting the January Reset, our annual reset, inside the *Take a*

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Break membership. We're starting it on the 18th. Come join me there. Join us, as we do this work together. It will transform your life.

Alright, that's it, everybody. 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 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.