

Ep #315: How Do I Know if I Can Change?



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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 315.

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. We are going to talk today about a question that I get all the time; how do I know if I can change? Am I too far gone? How do I know if this will work for me? How do I know if I've crossed some sort of line and there's no coming back? I mean, I get all kinds of versions of this question all the time from people who are looking to do the work with me and study with me and do the 30-Day Challenge.

And you know what? I had all these questions too. I mean, I really remember spending a long time just spinning on the question of whether or not change was really possible. I was actually just doing a workshop inside the *Take a Break* membership and asking people in that workshop to talk about, to share, why they were doubting their ability to change.

Whether it had to do with, "My urges are never just going to go away. They're too unmanageable. They're too strong. I hate how it feels to say no. I hate feeling deprived." Maybe they were doubting change because of temptation, right? "It's just my life. My job. The stress I'm under. I'm surrounded by alcohol. Everyone in my life drinks. It's a big part of my social circle. I'm newly dating. I've been dating for a long time. My partner drinks a lot."

They might be doubting change because they don't really believe that saying no is going to lead to a good time. And I think a lot of people believe that saying no, will help you feel healthier.

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But a lot of people, myself included, for a very long time are kind of like, “Okay, I can say no, but not going to have as much fun. I'm not going to feel as connected. In fact, I might feel disconnected, wondering what everyone's thinking of me. I'm not going to feel at ease. I'm going to be stuck with this anxiety or awkwardness. I'm just not going to feel as sophisticated or special if I'm not drinking.”

And then there's doubting, really, that you can drink less. Doubting that you can, once you start, stop. I think a lot of people will spend a lot of time spinning here. Especially all of you out there who are like, “I know that I can say no; saying no isn't the problem. The problem is stopping once I've started.”

We have all these reasons why we doubt that change is possible. But I will tell you, for the vast majority of people, the reason that they are doubting change boils down to, ‘I failed too many times before.’ I remember thinking this myself and wanting to kind of hand over all the evidence, all the attempts, all the promises that I had made and then broken.

And I think it's really important to actually spend some time investigating this reason ‘I've failed too many times before.’ I've been thinking about this reason, and it came to me the other day. Well, how many attempts was it supposed to take you? And I kind of laughed when I came up with that question because I immediately, in my own mind, was like, well, obviously zero; you're just supposed to be able to change.

I think when you are struggling to believe that it's possible to change your relationship with alcohol, and part of why you're struggling is because you have this belief, ‘I failed too many times before,’ it's really powerful to ask yourself; well, how many times was it supposed to take you?

One of the things that we miss when we embark on habit change, not just changing your drinking, changing all sorts of habits, changing your

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relationship with food, changing your relationship with your phone, sticking to an exercise routine, and eating healthier. One of the things that we miss is that we have a very unrealistic starting point.

But there's a reason why so many people have such an unrealistic starting point. It's that we are stuck in this belief of, "I should just be able to do this." There's a reason why that happens. There's a reason why we tell ourselves, "Well, when I make the decision to only have two, I should just be able to have two. When I decide that I'm not drinking tonight, I should just be able to say no, come five o'clock."

And again, when that doesn't pan out, when that is not your experience, that you just make a decision, and then it becomes your reality, people will make that mean, you will make that mean, "I failed too many times." Without ever realizing that your tolerance for failure was zero. That deep down, the belief was it's never okay to fail. "It's not okay for me to be struggling with this. It's not okay for this to be hard for me or challenging."

And the question is, why? Why do so many of us get stuck in the same thought pattern? And really, there are two reasons. Number one, the messages we get around drinking. And number two, the messages that we get around intelligence. I'm going to break that out for you today.

So, think about the messages that we get around drinking. Again, when I'm saying messages, I don't mean someone's handing you a sheet of paper; these are all the things you're supposed to believe. What I mean is that from a very young age, we are absorbing a lot of ideas and beliefs and concepts from adults, peers, entertainment, TV, books, and songs, all about alcohol.

And one of the most problematic beliefs that I think so many of us have absorbed is this idea that you should instinctively know how to moderate; you should just know how to do it. And if not, then you need more

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willpower. And if willpower doesn't work, and you can't learn your lesson, then something must be wrong with your brain. And in that case, you should just admit that you're an alcoholic and abide by lifelong abstinence.

I know I'm really simplifying it here, but I think that is so often the trajectory that so many of you are on. It really starts with this belief that you should just know how to moderate; you should know how to say no. And if you struggle with it, the solution is really willpower, learning your lesson. That's it. It's all the information we're given.

Now we're getting a lot of scare tactics; we get a ton of that. About how it's bad, the negative things that can happen, and how it can harm your health. Fine, but those scare tactics don't actually do anything when you're in the moment, when you're feeling the urge, when you have that desire, when you're debating whether or not you should say yes or no.

Scare tactics, I think, are actually very ineffective at that moment. They're very effective after the fact. They're very effective after the fact to make us feel terrible. "I should know better. How could I have done this to myself? Why am I doing this thing that I know isn't healthy, I know isn't good for me." They're very effective after the fact at creating a lot of guilt and shame.

I don't think they're so effective at the moment when you have a craving, when you have an urge, and you don't actually know what to do other than this advice of just saying no. And one of the reasons why I think this message, 'You should just know how to do it. And if not, something's just different or wrong with your brain,' I think it's so entrenched because we look around and we think we have a lot of evidence for how it's very easy for other people in our lives.

And so, we look to our best friend, or our sister, or our partner, or someone at work, someone we grew up with, we look at their relationship with

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alcohol, and we kind of put it up on a pedestal, like, “That's the relationship I want to have. It's just so easy for them to say no. They don't seem to struggle with it. They don't seem to have as much temptation. They know when to call it quits.”

We have that evidence, so we think, and it reinforces, “Well, I should just know how to do it because no one taught them. No one gave them a manual or a guidebook. So, I should just be able to do it the way that they're doing it.”

Now, I talk a lot about why this is not the case. And really understanding what we're witnessing when we're witnessing people who seem to very easily say no, or turn down a drink, or don't feel bothered at all if other people are drinking and they're not, or they are able to stop and rein themselves in before going overboard.

One of the things that I talk about is all we see is the action; we're not privy at all to the thought and the feeling behind it. And so, we think that that action is just happening, but of course, drinking never just happens; there's always a thought and a feeling.

But we observe their behavior without understanding what is happening beneath the surface. And you know what? They may not even have that understanding, as well. It really is very unconscious for a lot of people.

What happens when we get this message, and we have this evidence of ‘well, it's easy for so and so.’ What happens when it's not easy for us is that that creates a lot of pain and suffering. So, if you tell yourself, “Listen, I'm just going to stop it too tonight; I'm not going to drink at all,” and then it doesn't work, well, think about what happens next.

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Think about what comes the next day when you immediately go into like, “Oh, God, it should have been easy. I should have been able to follow through. I should have learned my lesson by now. What's wrong with me?” We immediately go into shame and blame. We are not able to look back on what happened with any level of curiosity.

With any level of like, “Hey, what was going on? How was I feeling beforehand? What was I thinking about? How I was going to experience this situation if I wasn't drinking? How was I feeling at the moment when someone offered me a drink that I didn't ask for? What about when that desire came up to have more, what happened then? What was the thought that I had that then I acted on?”

We don't have any of that curiosity. We don't have any of that inquiry about what was going on. “Let me understand that moment with greater awareness. Let me understand what I was actually struggling with in the moment.” We have none of it because we're telling ourselves we were just supposed to know.

And this is where I think we really get into the learning aspect of this. There has been a lot of attention in educational settings and school environments about a fixed mindset versus a growth mindset and how that impacts people's success in school and people's willingness to keep going and willingness to take on challenges.

I really believe that this fixed mindset and growth mindset don't just apply to a school environment; it applies to our drinking. So, the fixed mindset, when it comes to learning, is really this fundamental belief that intelligence is static; you're either smart or you're not as smart.

And when you have that fixed mindset, and you believe that you're just born this way, what ends up happening is you avoid challenges because it's not supposed to be challenging. If it's challenging, it means that you're

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not smart; you avoid obstacles, and you avoid wanting to exert a lot of effort. And then you end up giving up easily, again, because you're not supposed to have obstacles; it's not supposed to be hard. If you were smart, you wouldn't have obstacles; it would all be easy.

Now, the growth mindset in this learning situation, or this educational setting, is really based on a different foundational belief. The idea is that intelligence can be developed. It's not an either/or. It's not about separating people into 'this is a smart group' and 'this is the dumb group.' This idea is that your intelligence can always grow; it can always be developed.

And when you have that kind of mindset, then you're open to challenges, you're open to obstacles, you're open to effort, you're open to struggle. Because it doesn't mean that you're not smart, none of those things are a sign of your intelligence.

I want you to think about how this fixed mindset and the growth mindset also apply to drinking. When you have a fixed mindset around your drinking, you have this belief, 'I should be able to moderate naturally. It should be instinctive for me.'

We completely forget or even ignore how we've been training our brains up until this point. How we've been training the brain to respond to rewards. Because listen, your brain has gotten a lot of training around rewards and instant gratification well before alcohol was ever introduced.

When you have a fixed mindset about drinking, you have this belief that moderation should be easy. Okay, maybe you know you go overboard, but then you learn your lesson. You learned, "Oh, that was bad. I felt terrible the next day. I'm never going to do that again. Now I'm going to be good."

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You forget when you have this fixed mindset around drinking. You forget how much you have practiced developing this relationship with alcohol and your urges. How much you have practiced teaching your brain what to associate the drink with, whether that is relaxation, fun, ease, sophistication, or connection.

We ignore all of that. And we're like, "No, no, no. Forget everything that I've been practicing. I should just learn my lesson. This shouldn't be hard. I should just know better. I should just stop being stupid."

And if we don't find it to be easy to say, no, if we have to expend effort, we get really worried. "Oh, my God, what does that mean? Does that mean there's something wrong with me? Do I have a problem? Is there something wrong with my brain?" No, the fixed mindset is a problem.

Certainly, that was the problem for me. And I will tell you, this is a problem for everyone that I work with; it does not matter your age, it does not matter your gender, it doesn't matter how long you've been drinking, it doesn't matter your socio-economic status; it really does not matter at all.

What I see time and time again, is that everyone comes to this work, and everyone comes to the desire to change their relationship with alcohol, with a fixed mindset. But imagine how different your experience would be if you had a growth mindset about your drinking, and changing your relationship with alcohol. A growth mindset about your urges and temptation and your desire and obstacles.

If you had this belief, "You know what? This is a skill that I can develop. I can learn, with practice, how to respond to my urges differently. I can learn, with practice, how to identify the thoughts that lead to me giving in. I can learn, with practice, how to navigate the moments where my brain wants to just say, 'You know what? You don't have to feel bored. You don't have to

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feel anxious right now. You don't have to be worried that people are judging you. Just have a drink.”

Imagine if you had that growth mindset, and it was okay if it was challenging at first to say no. It was okay if you were struggling. It didn't mean you had a problem. It didn't mean that you had to admit that something was wrong with you, or you were an alcoholic. It just meant that your brain was missing a skill and missing some practice.

And then, if something doesn't work, it's okay. You can persist. It's so much easier to keep going because it doesn't mean that something's wrong with you. That's why so many people give up. We give up because we have all this guilt and the shame and this belief, “Well, I just shouldn't have done it. I shouldn't have had that much to drink last night.”

No, of course, you should have because that's what your brain knew how to do. Those were the skills that were available to you in the moment. Those were the thoughts and feelings that were driving the habit, that either you couldn't see, or you didn't know how to respond differently to.

Think about how much faster change would be if instead of waking up after a night of drinking too much, instead of making it mean, “Oh God, I'm such a fuckup, I'm a failure. I've got to get my shit together.” Like, all that nonsense that we make it mean.

Imagine, instead, if you have this belief that deep down, it meant nothing about you and meant nothing about your ability to change. It meant nothing about your ability to radically transform your relationship with alcohol.

The fixed mindset is why people say, “I don't know; I failed too many times. Can I really change?” What they really are saying is, “I never should have failed at all.” And this is why the question of how many attempts was it

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supposed to take you to change your drinking is so powerful. Because it immediately reveals whether you have been in a fixed or growth mindset.

That's what needs to change if you want to change. Because when you have zero tolerance for failure, change will be impossible. But when you change that, when you shift into a growth mindset, all of a sudden, you have laid the foundation to change every part of the habit, and to change your relationship with alcohol 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.

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.

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