

# Ep #319: One Question to Ask Before Starting This Journey



## 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 319.

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, everybody, welcome back. Today, I'm talking today about what you need to do when you decide that you want to change your relationship with alcohol. This can mean whatever you want it to mean. It can mean drinking less in a sitting. It can mean drinking less over a week, or over a month. It can mean taking a break. It can mean deciding to remove alcohol from your life. Whatever it is, the first thing you need to do is always the same.

Now, it's not what you probably think you need to do. Because for most of us, when we decide we want to change our relationship with alcohol, or really change anything in life, what we normally do is we say, "Okay, I've got to make a plan. I've got to write out my commitment. And maybe, I've got to decide what I do; how I'm going to punish myself if I'm bad."

We focus on that instead of asking a question. And asking a question, the question I'm going to share with you today, really gets at the heart of what is keeping you stuck. I will tell you, I ask this question over and over again, when I'm coaching people. Because when you answer it, it reveals the inner workings of your beliefs and your understanding about your relationship with alcohol.

Now, I will tell you this. For the longest time, I didn't ask this question because I didn't *know* to ask this question. And that's why I was stuck for

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so long. But the question that you need to ask at the outset of your journey is simply, when it comes to drinking, what is my hypothesis for why it's hard for me to say no? Not what anybody else thinks. What do I think?

I'm including in this question the word "hypothesis" because I think it's really important to remind your brain that whatever explanation you have, whatever your hypothesis is, it's simply one explanation. It's just your proposed explanation for what is going on.

It's not the only explanation. It's not *the* explanation. It's just your current hypothesis. It's the explanation that your brain comes up with, likely without a lot of inquiry. You likely aren't taking the time to really sit down and do a lot of research. You're probably answering this question very unconsciously.

Which means that your brain is defaulting to the information that it has picked up over your lifetime. All of the messages we get around alcohol and drinking and why some people struggle. Basically, when you answer this question unconsciously, your brain is going to spit back an answer that mirrors societal thinking.

And it might sound a lot like this, "Well, it's hard for me to say no, because I have a family history of alcoholism. It's hard for me to say no because I'm surrounded by temptation. It's hard for me to say no, because you know what? I'm an all-or-nothing person. It's hard for me to say no, because of my environment. I'm just surrounded by a lot of people who like to drink."

Notice what all of these explanations have in common. When you're telling yourself, "Okay, I think the problem is my DNA. The problem is alcohol. The problem is my personality. The problem is my environment." Think about those answers for a second. What do they have in common?

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What they have in common is that they're all outside of your control. You can't manipulate your DNA. You can't wave a magic wand and get rid of alcohol. Most people believe that their personality is immutable, it can't be changed.

And now, you're in an environment; where you live, your relationships, your friendships. Sure, you can change that; you can find a new partner, you can make new friends, you can move somewhere that you don't think has a big culture around drinking. But you can't do that overnight.

What all these explanations have in common is that there are things that you cannot immediately control, or control at all. And when these are your answers, it will probably feel very demoralizing. You will probably feel very stuck.

You have to be willing to ask yourself this question: What is your hypothesis for why *you* have a hard time saying no? Why it's difficult for you to change your relationship with alcohol?

Now, listen, for all you people out there listening who are like, "I don't know. I don't know why." Just take a guess. Because so often, 'I don't know' is actually blocking you from an explanation that is already in the back of your mind. Right? A reason that's kind of already there, but maybe you don't want to acknowledge it because you don't like how you feel when you think that.

When you think, "Yeah, I'm just someone who's missing an off switch." Which is something that I said about myself for the longest time. Ask yourself what your hypothesis is. Come up with your answer. And then, consider if you're willing to believe that another explanation might be true. Are you willing to consider that your hypothesis is wrong?

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Now, you may be surprised how much you do not want to give up on what your explanations are, your explanations for why it's hard for you to say no. I held tightly to mine for so many years, even though these explanations caused me a lot of pain.

I really was like, "Listen, I'm just an all-or-nothing person. That's who I am. That's how I've always been." I was like that with food, right? I've been like that with food, well before I started drinking. Once I start, I just don't want to stop.

I really clung to the idea of 'the drink is just so tempting.' It's, "They're tempting me. If I'm around it, I want it. And then, when I have some, I want more. And oh, by the way, you know what? I've got a lot of relatives who struggle with alcohol and drugs. So, likely, that's also setting me up to fail. Not to mention, hey, I live in New York City, right?" This was my explanation at the time, "I live in New York City."

And at first, I could blame my relationship. So, the guy I was dating for a long time, I was like, "Listen, drinking is just what we do. It's been part of our relationship from day one; from our first date." He's always kind of annoyed when I say, "I want to go easy tonight. I don't want to drink."

"And by the way, he comes home from work, he puts down his bag, he takes off his tie, and he pours himself a Scotch. Like, what am I supposed to do?" But here's the thing, then, when we broke up, I blamed it on being single in the city. Right? "Seriously, you want me to navigate dating in New York, not to mention sex, without drinking? Are you crazy?"

I held on to all of these explanations so tightly. So tightly, because I truly believed this was not a hypothesis, this was the truth. I was telling you the truth of why it was difficult for me to say no. Why I struggled. And, it all fell outside of my control. I felt so stuck. It felt like it was just me trying to

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change something that I never was really going to be able to figure out. It was so demoralizing.

But now, here's the beauty of the think-feel-act cycle, which is the primary tool that I am talking to you about all the time on this podcast. The idea that actions, like the action of drinking, it doesn't just happen. It's not a product of your DNA or alcohol or your personality or your environment.

Can those things contribute? Sure, but they're not the thing, that in the moment, is having your arm reach for the glass, and then having your arm reach for more. That's happening in the moment. That action is happening because of something unfolding in your mind; a thought and a feeling.

And I will tell you this, when I was introduced to the think-feel-act cycle, it starting to shake loose every hypothesis that I had. What if, it was a struggle for me to say no, not because of all of the explanations that I clung so tightly to, but simply because in the moment, there was a sensation in my body that my brain had learned could be avoided temporarily by drinking?

Don't want to feel deprived? Okay, just have a drink. Don't want to feel bored? Okay, have a drink. Don't want to feel anxious? Okay, have a drink. My brain thought that it had found the perfect solution. But the problem with this is that the more that I tried to drink over these sensations, the more intolerable they became.

What I want you to consider is that the think-feel-act cycle, that process of, "Oh, I know how to feel better. I know how to get rid of this deprivation or get rid of this boredom or this anxiety. I know how to have more fun. Have a drink." That process is happening on an unconscious level over and over again in your brain. Whether or not you're aware of it, it's there.

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And so, when you embark on this journey to try to change your relationship with alcohol, if you try to ignore this piece... Because of no fault of your own, no one teaches us about this. But if you try to ignore this piece, as I did for years, you will fail over and over again. And you will start to make it mean that maybe you can't change. That maybe change is impossible for you.

But the reason that you're failing over and over again, is because you're not giving your brain an alternative solution for what it's supposed to do, when these sensations appear, that it is used to trying to drink over. Instead, what we do is, we're like, "I should just be strong enough. I should just be able to say no. I should just do what is smart for me." Right?

We approach it from this purely kind of intellectual level of, "I should know better. I should just have enough willpower." That's why willpower is always going to be hit-or-miss. Because this is not just an intellectual problem to solve. This is a problem of, how do I start to retrain my brain, how to handle what happens, how I'm feeling, when I'm used to, instead, just reaching for a drink?

That's also why you can go such a long period of not drinking, and then have a crappy day and it's like, "Oh, all that hard work is out the window." It's also why people can go long periods of not drinking, and still have a lot of desire. This happened to me, too. Because you weren't actually, I wasn't actually, doing the work to change my desire at the deepest level. I wasn't teaching my brain a new way to respond in these moments. I was just trying to grit my teeth and avoid situations and muscle my way through it.

So, I want you to think about this. It's not that you have a problem with willpower; that's what so many people think, right? When they embark on this work and they want to change their drinking, they're starting out from the place of, 'oh, I must have a problem with willpower.' No, you don't have

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a problem with willpower. Willpower is like bringing a knife to a gunfight; it's the wrong tool.

The tool that you need is the think-feel-act cycle. The tool that you need is really understanding, from the deepest level, why the action of drinking is happening, and then why it's happening again.

And I will tell, you the solution is not, "Okay. So, just tell me what's the thought to think, so I never feel deprived or bored or anxious again." No, that's not possible. Right? Those things are part of the human experience.

But what is possible, is to teach your brain how to handle these sensations differently. How to teach your brain to kind of turn down the volume on the intensity; that's totally possible. But this is really where you have to start out on your journey. What is your hypothesis for why you struggle to say no?

Notice what your answer is. Notice if your answer falls into a category that's outside of your control, and then how stuck and defeated you feel. And then, how you're trying to attack the problem with willpower. That's not how you change a habit.

And all you people out there who are like, "I don't know. I don't know why it's hard for me. I don't know why it's a struggle for me," just take a guess. And then, once you have your answer, ask yourself; am I willing to consider that another explanation might be true? An explanation that has nothing to do with my DNA or alcohol itself or my personality or my relationships or the environment that I'm in?

Am I willing to consider that another explanation might be true? That it's actually within my control to observe what is happening inside of me? To observe that think-feel-act cycle and learn how to change it?

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It's okay if you notice that you want to really hold tight to these original explanations. Just acknowledge if you're in that place right now. That when you hold really tight to them, there's a reason for it. There's a reason why you don't want to give it up.

I didn't want to give up my explanations for the longest time. But when I did, that's what set me free. Because the beauty of this work, the beauty of the think-feel-act cycle, the beauty of the ability to retrain your brain, is that anyone can learn how to do this. Anyone. I don't care who you are. I don't care what educational level you have. How old you are. How long you've been drinking. You can teach your brain how to respond differently in these moments.

Because it's about learning. Your brain can always learn something new. That's what neuroplasticity is. I don't care if you're 80, you never lose the ability to create a new neural pathway.

And all you need right now, is really, how do I make, whatever sensation bubbles up when I notice myself reaching for a drink. Whatever that sensation is, that reason that I'm reaching for it, how do I make it more manageable without a drink?

How do I make it more manageable and not have it be this thing that I have to suffer through? How do I start to take the power out of it? And p.s., this still works. After you take your first sip, you can start to make the sensations that you feel when you're deprived or bored or anxious; there are so many other possibilities. But you can start to make these sensations not a big deal; not something that needs to be solved with a drink.

Because, of course, a drink doesn't actually solve them. The more you try to solve these sensations, these normal human sensations, with a drink,

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the more intolerable they start to become. Which, guess what? Means the more you want to drink.

This is all available to you. To start to teach your brain a new way, moving forward. And it always starts by asking today's question: What is my hypothesis for why I have a hard time saying no? What is my hypothesis for why I have a hard time stopping once I start? Really answering these questions first, will start to change everything.

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 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](http://www.RachelHart.com/join) and start your transformation today.

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