

Ep #330: What Triggers a Backslide



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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 330.

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.

Alright, everybody, we are talking about probably your least favorite topic. Today, we are talking about failure. But I hope that you will stay on through the rest of this episode because if you can start to implement what I'm going to share with you, and if you can actually start to change your relationship with failure, it's going to dramatically change your relationship with alcohol. It will dramatically change your relationship with yourself. It will dramatically change your relationship with your life.

I feel like I have spent the first half of my life learning to hate failure and resent failure and be embarrassed about failure and try to hide from failure, and believed that it meant something was truly wrong with me. The work that I have been doing over the last decade has been about trying to unravel all of that. Trying to really change my relationship with failure. Trying to change how I show up.

The reason why this is so important is because how you respond the morning after you had way too much to drink, the morning after you broke your commitment. You said you're going to be good, and then you weren't. You said you weren't going to have any, and then you gave in. The way that you respond is everything.

One of the things that I've been thinking about, when I think about failure, and I think about going back in time, when I would wake up in the morning and my eyes would open, and I just had that sinking feeling like, oh my

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God, I did it again. I screwed up again. And one of the questions that, to me, felt worse than any hangover, was lying in bed thinking to myself, “Am I ever going to figure this out?”

I'd have that question and it would just fill me with so much dread. It filled me with dread because I have tried so many things. I had made so many rules. I had so many good reasons to change and to follow the rule, and yet, nothing was working. Or it would work for a little bit, but eventually I'd give in. And the more that I would fail, the more defeated I would feel.

Now, here's the thing, when you start feeling defeated, you can easily slip into this place of, you know what? Why bother? Why am I even trying to fix this? Why am I even trying to be good? Why am I even trying to change? Because, to me, that ‘why bother’, that sense of there's no point, it was fueled by this belief that I had so much evidence that I couldn't change, that something really was wrong with me.

But what I didn't know at the time, is I had a lot of evidence, not that change was impossible, not that I was broken. I had a lot of evidence that I had a terrible relationship with failure. I had a lot of evidence that I was failing in the wrong way. I was failing in a way that was just leading to me feeling worse and to backsliding.

And to being in this kind of constant cycle of new rules, new attempts, works for a little bit, then it doesn't. Demoralized. Really scared that I'm never going to be able to figure this out. I feel like there's no point. Why bother? Backslide. Until it got to be too painful again, and then I would start the cycle all over.

I think it's important for all of us, not just people who are worried about their drinking, I think it's important for every single human to really understand failure in a different way. Because failure, in theory, it's supposed to help you avoid repeating the same mistake. But in practice, it usually doesn't

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work that way. In practice, failure is most often an opportunity to feel terrible about yourself, right?

That's why I was allergic to failure. That's really what I was, I was allergic to failure. I would do anything to avoid it. It was okay for others to make mistakes, right? It was okay for them; they were only human. But me, no, no, no. I should know better, especially by now.

And I think part of the piece that I was missing, I was missing the understanding that what I was trying to do, how I was trying to change, I was trying to change my response to my urges. I was trying to change my response to my excuses and my justifications, and I was missing this understanding that that is not just an overnight process.

You don't go from someone who is used to giving in and is used to saying yes, and then magically transform into someone who's an expert at saying no, and an expert at responding to your justifications and excuses in a believable way. Right? That process doesn't happen overnight.

So, like it or not, failure is part of the process, but I didn't know how to use it to my advantage. I didn't know how to use it to grow and evolve. Most people don't. I would just say, "You know, I don't know. I failed too many times. I cannot keep doing this. I cannot afford to keep failing again." But what I really couldn't afford was believing.

Listen, if I just stopped trying, I won't feel bad, right? If I just stopped trying, then I'm going to feel better. Because if I'm not trying, then I can't fail. Except, every time I would worry about my drinking, every time I would wish that I was more like someone else in my life who seemed to have it figured out or didn't have a problem, every time I would wonder if someone was judging me, I'd feel awful.

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So, this idea, that I think fuels so many backslides, of I should just stop trying because I don't believe that I can figure it out. But also, the more that I try, and the more that I fail, the worse that I feel. So, I'll just stop trying, because then I won't fail and then I won't feel bad.

But of course, that's a lie. You feel terrible when you're worrying about your drinking, and you're wishing you're more like other people, and you're wondering what people think of you. Doing nothing, not trying, doesn't leave you happier, it doesn't leave you better off. It actually does the opposite.

The way to break out of this, and this is what I want all of you to consider, the way to break out of this is to figure out how to actually use failure. Use what happened last night, use how you broke your promise, use how you gave in, how to use it, actually, to change. And to me, that is the difference between failing forward and failing backward.

So, I've got to tell you, it took me a very long time to even understand that there was a possibility of failing forward. I didn't know that I was failing backward. I wish someone had taught this to me a long time ago, it would have helped not only in this area of my life, but frankly, in all areas of my life.

But I want to share this with you today. It's something that I share with people inside *Take a Break*. Because when you start to make this distinction, when you start to see that there are different ways to fail, it really does change everything. Because the more you fail backward, and I'm going to explain what that means, but the more that you fail backward, what's the reason why it's hard to learn your lesson.

Those times when you've woken up and you just thought, "Oh, my God, when am I just going to stop being so stupid? When am I going to learn my

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lesson?" Well, the reason why it's not happening is because you're failing backward.

I want you to think about this when you fail backward; three things are happening. Number one, you're interpreting what happened last night. You're interpreting giving in. You're interpreting breaking your commitment, making the mistake. Whatever you did, you're interpreting it as, "Something is wrong with me. Why did I do that? Because something is wrong with me. Some part of me is broken. Something inside of me is missing. Something is wrong with me." That's number one.

Number two, when you're failing backward, you are accepting a lot of outdated explanations for why things happen. This is a place where the idea of 'learn your lesson' comes in, right?

To me, 'learn your lesson' is a really outdated explanation for why you're doing something; you aren't learning your lesson. How on earth are you supposed to learn your lesson when no one's explaining, no one's helping you understand, how habits form in the first place? When no one's helping you understand about the think-feel-act cycle?

It's like, you should just know better. 'You should just know better' is an outdated explanation for what is going on and your ability to change; you should just know better.

Number three, insisting on moments of failure as a reason to be hard on yourself, or harder on yourself. I talk about this with a lot of people. This was something that I had to break. This idea of, I can't go easy on myself. If I go easy on myself, well, then who knows what's going to happen? I need to be harder, I need to be stricter, I need to be meaner to myself. I really believed that for the longest time.

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I really thought that the threat was being easy on myself. I really thought that offering any kind of compassion the next day was actually going to be a problem. But this is what failing backward looks like, and this is what most of us do.

Why do we do it? Because we're taught to do it. Because that's what we see other people doing. We don't often have a lot of good examples of people failing forward. But, failing forward, if you want to change your drinking, if you want to change your relationship with alcohol, your relationship with food, your relationship with yourself, failing forward is the key.

Failing forward is really the opposite of those three things that I just outlined. Instead of interpreting a mistake as, "Oh, something is wrong with me," it's, "Oh, something didn't work." Notice the difference there; something didn't work.

This is why so much of my focus, when I'm working with people, is okay, let's figure out some tools. Let's give you some tools. Often, we don't approach our drinking, we don't approach change, with a tool. We approach it with a rule. We approach it with the mindset, I should know better.

But let's give you a tool. And listen if the tool didn't work, okay, let's figure out why. Right? Instead of believing that something is wrong with you, or it was just something that didn't work. If something didn't work, there's an explanation. We can figure out why, we just need to problem solve that.

Instead of accepting outdated explanations for why things happen, right? Like, "Some people, they just can't control themselves. It's predestined. It's that marshmallow test." Failing forward, I believe, is really about challenging all explanations for why things happen. I mean, challenging even everything that I'm saying.

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I really think you have to figure it out for yourself. You have to be willing to question the things that you have been taught. Are you willing to challenge what you have been told? Are you willing to challenge all the messages that you've gotten? I don't want you to say, "Yeah, we'll challenge all of that. But let's not challenge what Rachel is saying." No, challenge me. Challenge all these ideas, too.

I think it's that spirit of saying, "You know what? I'm just going to question it all. I'm not going to accept anything at face value. I'm going to dig into it for myself." That spirit of questioning, I believe, is something that was carrying me along. Even when I felt like I was at my lowest moments. Even when I had that question of, "Oh, my God, am I ever going to figure this out? Am I ever going to figure out my drinking?"

Inside, I had this spirit of questioning, that wasn't unique to this area of my life. It was something that really showed up in all places. But cultivating that. Cultivating this mindset of questioning ideas and messages and authority. Questioning all of it, figuring out what makes sense for me, that helps you fail forward.

And then finally, instead of using these moments as like, "Okay, you know what? I was bad. I screwed up. I did it again. Let's be hard on myself." Really figuring out, "You know what? Is it possible for me to offer the kind of love and compassion that I know I could offer a friend in need?" I know if there was someone in my life that I cared about deeply, and they were struggling and they were showing up in ways that they didn't like, I know that I could offer them love and compassion.

So, am I willing to do the practice of offering that same love and compassion to myself? I think sometimes we get stuck because we think, "Oh, no. That feels weird and awkward. I don't know how to do it, therefore I can't." As opposed to, "Yeah, it is going to feel weird and awkward. And you aren't really going to know how to do it, at first. Because you don't have

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a lot of practice doing it. You have a lot of practice being really hard on yourself. It will feel weird and awkward at first. And that doesn't mean anything's gone wrong.”

This is my broken record analogy of going to the gym. It's like if you went to the gym... If you've been sitting on the couch for a while and you go to a gym and you start lifting weights. Or you go out for a run. You know what? It's going to feel weird and awkward, at first. That doesn't mean that you can't do it. That doesn't mean that you're doing something wrong. Understanding oh, right, I'm using a muscle that hasn't gotten a lot of exercise. Of course, it's going to feel this way at first.

Those are the components of failing forward. And failing forward, again, it's a skill that we all need to practice. Because every time, every time I work with someone, and really help them fail forward; we kind of work on this together. This is a huge part of what we're doing inside *Take a Break*. It's a huge part of the 1-2-3 Process.

It's not just about getting curious. It's not just about using tools. Those pieces are incredibly important, but we also have to be able to assess and adjust. And we can't assess and adjust, we can't problem solve, we can't strategize something new, if we're always in the place of, “Well, I screwed up, something's wrong with me. It just means that I'm never going to be able to change. I just need to be harder on myself.”

It's like putting on blinders. Like, when you see the horses. I'm thinking of like the horses in a Central Park, they have the blinders on. I don't even know if they can have horses and carriages in Central Park anymore. That's how long I haven't lived in New York.

But it's like you put blinders on, and you put on blinders to understand how that habit was working, what was going on. But each time you fail forward, you start to unlock a hidden piece of the habit. Understanding how the habit

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works, it really is a key to change. I always say we can't change something that we don't fully understand. If you don't fully understand what's going on with the habit, how on earth you're going to change it?

I think a lot of times, I've talked about this on the podcast before, what blocks us is that we think that we know the answer. We think that we know, "No, no, I get it. I know why I have this desire. I just like to drink, I always have. It tastes good. It's fun, it's relaxing. I know why I'm overdoing it. This is just who I am. I've always been this way. I'm a black-and-white person. I tend to do things compulsively; it runs in my family."

I think we have all these explanations, but what I'm asking you to consider is that you can hold on to these explanations all that you want. I'm not trying to convince you that they're wrong. I'm not trying to convince you that secretly, you don't really like to drink, you don't really like the taste. And you know that there's actually no history in your family of people struggling with alcohol. I'm not trying to convince you otherwise.

I'm just trying to get you to the place of, what if there's more to the habit than meets the eye? What if there's more to your desire than meets the eye? What if there's a piece going on here that actually is kind of hard to see that you haven't uncovered, yet? What if that's also true?

Failing forward is a skill. It's a skill that requires practice. But it is so much better than failing backward. That's what I was doing over and over and over again. That's what I watched my clients do, over and over again, they just failed backward. It feels awful. It feels awful. It leaves us defeated; it leaves us feeling hopeless. It leaves us believing that there's something wrong with ourselves, and then we just backslide. Then it's like, what's the point?

Learning how to fail forward really is everything. And it will be challenging to do, don't get me wrong. But you definitely can learn how to do it. 100%,

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you can learn how to do it. And when you do, when you start to bring this approach to your drinking, to anything, any habit that you want to change, any piece in your life, any goal that you have.

When you start to see that you can fail forward, it will completely change your relationship with failure. And when that happens, the process of change goes so much faster. So, think about that today. Think about how failing backward is showing up for you right now, and how you could start implementing failing forward.

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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