

Ep #331: The Problem With Rules



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With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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Ep #331: The Problem With Rules

You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, Episode 331.

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, my friends. We're talking about something today that is something I've actually never discussed on the podcast before. And I'm kind of amazed that I haven't. But it is the difference between rules and commitment. And the reason why I wanted to talk to you all about this today is because it's something that we have been talking about inside the membership. What is the difference? How do I make a commitment without making a bunch of rules?

And I realized that I just haven't done a great job helping you all understand something that's so important, something that was so transformative for me. To shift away from this place of making all these rules to really embracing a commitment.

I also think that understanding this distinction, when it comes to changing your drinking, or changing anything in your life, changing how you eat, changing how you exercise, whatever it is, understanding this distinction really is fundamental to the think-feel-act cycle.

So, what the think-feel-act cycle is showing us and teaching us and demonstrating to us again and again, is that whatever we are doing or not doing, when we say yes to a drink, when we say no to a drink, when we go to the gym, when we sit on the couch, when we go back for seconds, when we say I'm done, those actions don't just happen.

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #331: The Problem With Rules

It can feel like they do, it can feel like they are the result of just who we are, right? "I'm just someone who... I'm always like this." It can feel like it's the result of our personality or our character. It can feel like it's kind of hardwired into our DNA.

But the beauty of the think-feel-act cycle is showing, hey, this is happening because of a thought and a feeling. This is happening because of something that's unfolding in your mind so fast, so quickly, you might not even notice. You might not even realize that it's there. It may feel like your decisions just happen.

Isn't it the best news ever, when you start to realize, "Oh, there's a thought, there's a feeling, something is unfolding inside of me. Because if it's just happening, how on earth am I ever going to change my drinking? If all of this is just happening, how on earth am I ever going to figure out my relationship with food? How on earth am I ever going to get in shape, if all of this just happens?" It really is the best news to understand the think-feel-act cycle.

It also can be, at times, especially at first for people who are new to this work, it can be kind of painful. Because we become so tempted to kind of use it against ourselves, "Well, why am I thinking this? Why am I feeling this? Shouldn't I just think something different?" Not realizing that learning how to shift your perspective, learning how to change your emotional state, it's a skill, it takes practice.

And by the way, I don't care how much practice you have, I say this to people all the time. I was actually teaching a class for another coach, and I was saying, "Listen, the work that we're doing here is not about scrubbing the brain clean. This is not about only ever having positive, amazing, supportive, grateful thoughts. And only ever having wonderful, amazing, fantastic feelings, that's not realistic. That's not the human experience."

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #331: The Problem With Rules

What we're trying to really teach ourselves to do is, first, can I just identify what's going on instead of feeling like my behaviors are just happening? Can I identify what's going on? And then two, can I start to change my response? Now, changing your response does not mean, again, that you only have the most amazing thoughts and the most amazing feelings.

It's really understanding that you can start to change how you respond to certain thoughts, how you respond to certain feelings, and how you respond to your urges. That's the power. That's why it's so important to really study and use the think-feel-act cycle. It's so essential when it comes to understanding the difference between rules and commitment.

Because I realize now, that part of the reason that I struggled for so many years to change my relationship with alcohol, to have a healthy relationship with alcohol, to not feel all this intense desire, and be like, "I can't control myself to not feel like... If I'm not drinking, I'm missing out, right? I can't be the fun version of me. If I'm saying no, something's wrong with me."

To have a relationship where it just is, right? It's not this thing that I'm kind of desperately longing after. It's also not this thing that I'm using all this willpower to restrict myself from. It's not this thing that means anything about me. But part of why I struggled for so long, was because I was just over and over and over again, using rules to try to change a behavior.

And it wasn't until I shifted into the place of commitment, that things really started to change. It took me over a decade to figure this out, and I want to help people figure this out more quickly. So, here's what you need to know.

I think the first thing that it really comes down to is the language of a rule versus the language of a commitment, and how it makes you feel. Now, this can seem like it's just semantics. But you know if our thoughts create how we feel, then semantics kind of matter. What we say matters to ourselves.

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #331: The Problem With Rules

And when I look at rules, when I think about what rules have in common, I think about how rules are always dictating what I'm allowed to do. I don't know about you, but I don't like anyone dictating to me what I can or can't do, even if it's me. But rules are dictating what you're allowed to do. Rules ignore your desires. They don't care about what you want. They don't care about how you feel.

They're just telling you what to do. Your desires don't matter. And rules, I mean, they try to restrict your freedom. It's all about what you're supposed to do, what you should do, what you're allowed to do. And this is why I think so many people, myself included, get into that place where I set a rule for myself, and then I find a day, a week, a month later, rebelling against it, right?

We get determined to kind of rebel against these rules that we create for ourselves. Because nobody likes feeling like their freedom is being restricted. So, when you start to understand, okay, this is what rules are about; they're dictating what you're allowed to do, they're ignoring your desires, or trying to restrict your freedom.

You start to understand what rules sound like when it comes to your drinking. They sound a lot like, "No, no, you can't have that. You can't have any. You're not supposed to drink. You're not allowed to drink." Now, here's the thing. You may say, "But Rachel, I need to be telling myself that right now. I'm not making good decisions around my drinking. I've got a lot of consequences here that I don't like. I need to be putting these boundaries on myself."

But my question for you is, when that is the language you are using, 'no, I can't. I'm not allowed to. I'm not supposed to', how do you feel? I will tell you this, I believed for a very long time that those sentences are necessary. They were necessary for me to change. I had to be strict with myself. I had to draw a very hard line in the sand. I had to tell myself that I couldn't do it.

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #331: The Problem With Rules

And I wasn't allowed to do it. And I couldn't. I had to be that strict with myself.

The problem was, is that it made me feel terrible. I would feel angry. I would feel kind of mad at the world. I definitely felt restricted. I would slip into a lot of self-pity, "It's so unfair. Why me?" None of these rules were actually helping me. All of them were ignoring my desire. They were telling me that I shouldn't have that desire. That desire was wrong, it was bad, I should know better.

None of these rules were actually making me feel empowered. I was feeling the opposite; I was feeling disempowered. And so, a lot of times, I would get to a point where I would just say, "I don't want to be good anymore. I'm sick of being good. I'm sick of doing everything right. I'm working so hard. I'm showing up for everyone. I'm trying to do all the things. I'm trying to be perfect in my job, and perfect in my relationship and just perfect all around, and I'm sick of it. I don't want to be perfect anymore."

And what was my way to rebel? Oh, to be bad, and to have a drink. And of course, part of me really desired it. I've talked about this before, how very early on, in my early 20s, decided, "This isn't working. You need to figure this out. Maybe you should just stop drinking." I took almost a year in my early 20s.

I took almost a year where I didn't drink. And guess what? My desire was right there, full force. And I so wanted to. Yeah, I felt healthy. Yeah, it was great waking up in the morning and not having a hangover. And it was really great not wondering what I did or said the night before. Wondering about all the ways in which I embarrassed myself.

But I still really wanted to drink. I still had so much desire. All the rules, all the restrictions, they weren't actually helping me change the habit. I could say no, but my desire was still intact.

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #331: The Problem With Rules

This, I think, is one of the biggest misconceptions that people have, “If I just say no, for long enough, that’s going to be the solution.” But it doesn’t work like that.

If you actually want to change the habit, you have to understand the true source of your desire. And I promise, the true source of your desire, it goes beyond what’s in your glass, it goes beyond the drink. And so, these rules were why I was struggling for so long. Because those sentences, telling myself, “No, you can’t have any. You’re not allowed,” it made me feel awful.

And it maybe it would work for a little bit. But eventually, I got to a point where I hated feeling like that. I hated feeling like my freedom was being restricted. I hated feeling like I always had to be good. I was annoyed all the time, and I was saying how I was always feeling bad for myself, sitting there not having a good time. That’s the problem with rules. Rules really are a problem because of how they make you feel.

I talk about this piece a lot. If you have been listening to this podcast for a while, you have heard me talk about the importance of choice. The importance of saying, “I’m choosing.” I’m deciding to really see that, you know what? You have free will. You do get to decide. Even if you’re telling yourself that you can’t, and trying to pretend like you don’t have free will; probably not helping.

And I think that’s where commitments come in. Commitments are so different from rules because they’re not dictating what you’re allowed to do. They’re not ignoring your desires, are not trying to restrict your freedom. Commitments are really promises that you’re making to yourself. It’s a pledge to do something. Commitments are aligned with something that you do want.

You know, I say to everyone, when I’m working with people inside *Take a Break*, and they say, “You know, I’m really struggling right now. I’m really

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #331: The Problem With Rules

struggling to say no to my urges. I'm really struggling to do this work." I always say, "Okay, so what brought you here? Why do you want to change your drinking? Why do you want to change your relationship with alcohol? Why does this matter to you?"

Commitments are aligned with a desire that you have. And here's the thing, and this is very important, they also acknowledge competing desires. They don't try to pretend that that other desire isn't there. They don't shame you for having it, or saying it's bad, or try to focus on all the reasons why you shouldn't desire. They acknowledge the competing desire. There's so much freedom in that.

I think, so often we're afraid to acknowledge. Especially when we're in this place of wanting to change and trying a lot of things; to change our drinking, to drink less, or to stop, and it's not working. It becomes almost fearful to acknowledge the desire. But you need to acknowledge the desire, because it's really going to show you, hey, how does this habit really work? What's going on here? What's the upside of saying yes? What's the upside of drinking? Because of course, there is.

If we try to pretend like there isn't an upside... If we try to tell ourselves, "No, no, no, no, I shouldn't want it because it's bad for me..." If we tried to pretend that desire isn't there, guess what's going to happen? It's like our own internal b.s. meter goes off. We feel like we're lying to ourselves, and that's not going to work.

Commitments are really about a choice that you're making with free will. You're not trying to restrict yourself; you're making a choice. You're empowering yourself. It can sound like, "You know what? Tonight, I'm choosing not to drink. Even though I know it's going to be hard to say no. Even though I know I'm going to have a lot of excuses. I'm making this choice."

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #331: The Problem With Rules

Or, “I've decided to stop after two. Because making good decisions gets harder, the more that I drink.” It can sound like, “You know what? Even though it's tempting, I just no longer want to use a drink for stress relief. I want to learn another way. That's important to me.”

It can sound like, “I'm going to practice tuning into my experience of drinking. I'm going to practice listening to my body's messages, rather than disconnecting and not paying attention.”

There's just so much more substance to the commitment, rather than the rule. And I really do think this was a turning point for me, even though at the time I didn't really understand. But the turning point for me was saying, “You know what? This isn't even about alcohol. I just want to be someone who doesn't feel like I need it. Doesn't feel like, oh, yeah, when Rachel has a drink, it's like the better version of herself comes out.” Right?

Yeah, I can be super social and fun. But when I'm drinking, when I've had a couple, I didn't want to be that version anymore. I wanted to step in to a different version of myself. And so, suddenly, the work that I was doing was no longer about no, no, no, you can't have any, you're not allowed. You're not supposed to be doing this.

The work transformed into who I wanted to be. Making a choice that yes, I knew this wasn't going to be just a walk in the park. I knew it was going to be challenging for me to figure out. How do I manage the anxiety that I have? How do I manage stress? How do I manage these excuses, and these thoughts and beliefs that everything is better, and I'm better in life, is more fun?

How do I manage all of that, knowing that I'm trying to become someone different? I'm trying to have a different relationship. It wasn't just about the relationship with alcohol, it's about the relationship with myself as well. And I think when you start to really see what am I doing, how am I trying to

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #331: The Problem With Rules

change, am I just making a bunch of rules for myself that then I feel kind of annoyed about and then want to rebel against? Is this about trying to ignore a desire that I have, a desire that's real, a desire to drink? That's not bad, or shameful or wrong? Am I trying to pretend that it's not there? Because I think if I acknowledge it, that will be a problem.

I want you to think about the language that you're using right now. I want you to think about, is it falling into that category of making a rule? Or am I in the place of making a commitment? I want you to notice what that language is like.

Are you acknowledging that yeah, maybe you have competing desires. And that's okay. Are you maintaining and preserving a sense of choice and free will? Or are you trying to do the opposite? Are you trying to restrict your freedom, telling yourself what you can't do, not what you're choosing to do?

When you think about the ways in which you talk to yourself, about your decisions around drinking, how do they make you feel? Are you feeling empowered? Are you feeling disempowered? Are you feeling annoyed and angry? Are you feeling like, you know what? This does feel a little difficult. I am a little nervous about this, and I want to do it. This matters so much. So, think about that today. Think about the language that you're using.

I think one of the most important things for everyone who wants to do this work, and whenever you want to change your relationship with anything in your life, is to not pretend. The desire that you have isn't there to just acknowledge that. There are multitudes going on, and they can be in conflict. And that's okay. But trying to push them out of your sight, trying to pretend that they're not there, isn't actually going to get you any closer.

So, think about that. Are you using rules to dictate what you're allowed to do? Or are you using commitments as a way to make a promise to yourself about who you're trying to be and who you want to become and

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #331: The Problem With Rules

the relationship that you want to have? That really is the difference.

All right, everyone. 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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