

Ep #341: Excuse Categories



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With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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Ep #341: Excuse Categories

You are listening to the *Take a Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, Episode 341.

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. We are talking about excuses today. The moment that you try to change your drinking, the moment that you try to change your relationship with alcohol, you are going to encounter a lot of excuses. That is very normal. Nothing has gone wrong if you feel like you have just one excuse after another after another.

That's not a problem. That doesn't mean that you're never going to figure this out. That doesn't mean that it's impossible for you to change. In fact, one of the things that I teach people how to do is how to actually leverage all these excuses in order to start to discover what your desire and what the habit is really about. This is a big piece to understand that when you have the urge to drink.

When you find it hard to say no, it's very easy to stay at this surface level and just tell yourself well, I'm just an all or nothing person. Once I start, I can't stop. I'm a beer guy. I just I love wine. We have all of these kinds of surface level explanations for what is going on.

What I'm always kind of encouraging you and everyone that I work with to do is just to consider for a moment that maybe there's more to the habit than meets the eye. Maybe there's another level of what is happening beneath the surface that might be at first a little difficult to see. But when

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you learn how to leverage your excuses, that's what we're talking about today.

When you learn how to use this skill, you will start to very quickly get insight into is this about that drink? Is it about the glass of wine or the beer or the cocktail? Is it that I just really love the taste? Or is there something else going on? I think it's really powerful to start to see yeah, my habit, it's not just about alcohol. It's not just about this desire for the drink. There's something else happening here.

When you discover what that something else is, you suddenly have a new path, a new area where you can start to put your attention. So we're going to talk about excuses today. We're going to be talking about excuse categories. We're going to be talking about how to leverage your excuses.

So I was teaching this a couple months ago inside the membership. I was teaching a workshop all about how to outsmart your excuses. When I was preparing for it, one of the things that I decided to do was to start to put excuses into categories.

So I was trying to look and see are there patterns here? Patterns that I can identify where the most common excuses that I hear kind of can be grouped together. I remember doing it for the first time and talking to my husband about it. It was like I had this little light bulb go off that I really, I've been doing this work for so long. I've been talking about excuses for so long, but this was the first time that I was starting to see there's a pattern here, right?

It's not just my lower brain wants to do what is easy, wants to have the reward, wants to avoid pain or any kind of negative emotion. It's not just that. There's actually a pattern going on here. When I started to see the pattern, it became so much more clear and evident to me about what was behind my desire, right? What was kind of that second layer of the habit

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about what the drink was representing or what you were really, truly desiring in the moment?

So I'm going to walk you through these categories, and I'm going to talk about some example excuses that fall under each category. I'm just going to say this list is not exhaustive. This is not every possible excuse ever. This is not every possible category ever. But the ones that I came up with, I think they really do cover a lot of the different types of ways in which we have taught our brain to use a drink to fulfill a deeper need.

So the first category, and it's kind of the most obvious category, is just about seeking a reward. I want a reward. I think of those excuses. They sound a lot like I deserve it. I've worked so hard. I've been so good. You can probably hear your own brain offering that up as well. This was a really hard week. I've been good. I've been working so hard. I deserve it. So seeking a reward. That is kind of that first category.

Category number two, it can fall into self-pity. It's not fair. How come they get to have a treat? How come they get to have a drink and I don't? What do I get? What's in it for me? I will tell you, I have done episodes all about self-pity.

Self-pity was a place where I really kind of spun for a very long time with my drinking. It's not fair. The title of my book is *Why Can't I Drink Like Everyone Else?* I mean, I really was in this place of feeling like the fact that I had to struggle with my drinking. In my mind, my perception was no one else did, right? It was just me. This was a place where I stayed stuck for a long time.

There's also the category of trying to feel better. You know what this sounds like. I need something to help me relax. I just don't want to think anymore. I just want to shut off. This is the only thing that will help. A lot of this usually comes around kind of the end of the day, stressful days, if

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some of you are dealing with chronic pain, right? It's that in search of feeling better.

Then there is a category of trying to claim your authority. I don't want to say no. I don't want to deny myself. I'm an adult. I'm going to show them. They can't stop me. This was, again, another big thing for me, especially because I felt like I denied myself in so many areas. It's like I don't want to deny myself here too. P.S., I shouldn't have to. I'm an adult. You can't tell me what to do. This sense of kind of claiming authority, and the drink representing in many ways how you claim that authority. That can come up a lot.

Overwhelm. This is another big category. These thoughts like it's too hard. I don't have the energy. This will help me push through. I'm too tired. I'm in too much pain, right? These overwhelming thoughts. That saying no to the urge, dealing with whatever's coming up, it's too much for you. Right? Or sometimes idea of like I've got so much going on. I need this to help me push through, right? To keep going. I've just got to get through the rest of the evening. If I have a glass of wine by my side, if I open up a bottle, like that's going to be the thing that helps.

We also have the category of dire predictions. So this is when your brain starts catastrophizing. It starts kind of imagining what a situation is going to be like if you're not drinking. It might sound like I won't have a good time if I don't drink. This is going to be boring if I'm not drinking. It's going to be awkward. This person is going to make a big deal if I say no. I don't want to have to explain myself.

If I stop now, I might as well go home, right? It's that sense of the brain looking into the future and predicting if we're not drinking, if we say no, if we limit ourselves in any way, we're not going to have a good time.

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Now I talk about this all the time, how much the brain loves to catastrophize. It likes to pretend like it's got like a one of those magic eight balls that we used to have as a kid. But when it comes to our brain shaking the magic eight ball, more often than not you're going to hear a negative response, right? That's kind of the built in negativity bias. The ways in which we can just find ourselves catastrophizing all the time.

There's also the category of special exceptions, right? Just this once. It's a party. It's a special occasion. I'm on vacation. So and so is in town. This is my only chance to try this or to have this special thing, right. Making special exceptions like we're not going to have this opportunity again.

There's also the category of what I call kind of valid arguments, right? These arguments that just seem very valid. I just want to have fun. It's five o'clock somewhere. Everyone else is drinking. It's free. It's included. I don't want to be rude. It would be silly to let it go to waste out. I'll just finish what's left in the bottle? Right? It's kind of we're putting forward what on the surface appears to be just as very valid argument for why yeah, we should say yes.

Then there's a category of no point, right? What's the harm? Who cares? Why not? Screw it. F it. No one will know. Right? What's the point of saying no? This can come up a lot. I myself spent a lot of time in the screw it, f it, excuse spiral is what I like to call it because it really was a spiral for me. It was just like yeah, I mean, screw it. F it. Who cares? Why not? What's the harm?

Another category, this idea that there's no going back. I want you to think about how this one might show up for you. I already said yes. I already ordered the drink. I already told my friend that I'd have some. The drink has already been poured. I already bought the bottle. I already opened the bottle. One more won't hurt. I already blew it. Right. I already broke my commitment so there's no point being good now.

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This idea that once I have crossed some sort of line, some sort of imaginary line, whether that is I just verbally said yes. I ordered the drink. I purchased a drink. I told my friend I would. I already had one. This idea that once I've crossed this line it's just no point. There's no going back from here.

Then finally, the category of future promises. You know what this sounds like. I'll start again on Monday. I'll be good once I get back from this trip. This can wait, right? I will wait to change anything until I get back from vacation, until this person leaves town. I'll practice saying no. I'll do this work later. I'll do it tomorrow. Right? It's this idea of a future point in time where we're believing it's just going to be easier, right? I will get back on track. I will start again at this later date.

So again, this isn't every excuse ever. It's not every category. But I think it's really helpful to see your excuses as part of these bigger categories. Because when you start to understand them as part of the bigger categories, it helps you start to leverage the excuse. When I'm talking about leveraging the excuse, what I'm talking about is really understanding and having this internal conversation with yourself when the excuse appears and just saying what is this really about? What am I really wanting right now?

I think the misconception that we have is that in order to be successful, in order to change the habit, we have to make the excuses go away. We've got to get rid of them. We've just got to become this person that doesn't have all these excuses. That is very daunting. At least for me, it's very daunting to be like all right, the only way that I'm going to succeed is if I just stop all these excuses. It just never worked like that for me.

It was much less daunting to say okay, so I've got a lot of excuses. That's normal because I have a lower brain that doesn't care about the future. It doesn't care about tomorrow. It cares about the immediate moment. It

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cares about finding pleasure, avoiding pain, and doing it as efficiently as possible. It's learned that in many situations the way to do that is to have a drink.

So I don't need to get rid of the excuses. In fact, it's probably impossible. I just need to figure out how to interact with them differently. Part of that different interaction is okay, can I just ask myself a question when the excuse appears? Can I start to be curious about like hey, what do I really want right now?

All right, when I notice myself using the excuse, I've had a bad week. I've worked so hard. What do I really want? I want acknowledgement that I've put in a lot of hard work, that I've accomplished a lot, right? Do I maybe want acknowledgement for how I'm feeling right now, and that it's okay to feel the way that I do?

When I'm telling myself I just want to zone out, right? I just want to stop thinking, right? I just want to check out. Oh, what is that? Right? Is it the drink that I really want? Or is what I really want a way to shut off my brain to stop worrying, to stop thinking about something? A way to stop feeling.

When I'm going into that place of like trying to claim my authority. You know, I'm an adult, right? I can have this. I deserve this. What am I wanting? Am I wanting to feel empowered? Do I feel disempowered in other areas? When I'm telling myself I can't do this anymore. This is too much. It's too hard. Or maybe what I'm actually desiring in the moment is to feel capable, to feel like I can handle what's going on.

I mean you can just go on and on with these different categories and start to really just get curious and say what am I wanting? What am I really wanting in the moment when I'm telling myself it's five o'clock somewhere? What am I really wanting in the moment? When I'm saying just this once, or it's a party, or it's a special occasion?

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What's that thing that I'm after when my brain is predicting that I'm not going to have a good time if I don't drink? To start having that conversation with yourself, to start getting curious, to start asking questions really is one of the most important things that you can do.

I will tell you this. The default response will be I don't know. I don't know what I want. I don't know. I just want the drink. I don't know is the place where I see so many people initially get stuck. Part of me when I really understand what's going on, and I think about how my brain in many ways, wants to preserve a habit, even a habit that's not serving me. Right? Preserving the habit, keeping it in my unconscious, it really does save energy.

So even if I'm having negative consequences, understanding that there's a part of my brain that's like no, no, no. Let's not bring awareness to it. Let's keep this right? Let's keep this hidden behind. We don't want to look. We don't want to understand it.

So, acknowledging, at first, yeah. You might have that response of I don't know. I don't know what I'm really wanting. I think I just want the drink. I don't think there's anything more there. What I always say to people, and what I always do with myself, just take a guess. That's it. Just take a guess.

Sometimes it's really just what else might you be wanting right now? Sometimes just adding in that what else piece can be so important for you. Because it's not saying that you don't want the drink. It's not trying to pretend okay, I don't want it at all. It's just saying okay, so what else might you be desiring?

What we're trying to do here is take the excuses, not make ourselves wrong for having them. Not make it mean that we have so many excuses that we're never going to figure it out. Take the excuses, normalize them,

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and then use them to start to just peel away at another layer of the habit. Start to understand what else might be happening beneath the surface.

I really do think that starting to pay attention to your excuses, writing them down, and noticing like what kind of categories do they fall into? Do I tend to be seeking a lot of reward or acknowledgement for hard work? Do I tend to fall into the self-pity trap? Am I often kind of making dire predictions or feeling overwhelmed? Am I telling myself a lot that there's no point or there's no going back?

Starting to just collect data on your own pattern of excuses. By the way, I fell into most of these, but starting to collect that data and then starting to use it to have just a little bit of a more curious conversation with yourself is such an important part of changing the habit and changing your relationship with alcohol.

So that's what I encourage you to do. Right? This week just write down your excuses. Whatever excuses come up this week. Maybe you want to set aside some time to just think about what excuses have I used in the past. See if you can find some patterns in these excuses. Then start to ask yourself well, what am I really desiring? What's that thing I really want? If you notice your brain saying, I don't know. I think it's just a drink. Just take a guess.

If I did know what I really wanted, if I did know what else I wanted besides the drink, what would it be? The more that you can answer this question, the more that you can start to see what the drink represents, the more data you have for starting to create the roadmap for you changing your habit because everyone's habit is going to look a little bit different.

It might look the same on the surface in terms of how much we're consuming, but what we want to understand is your unique habit. You get

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that data and it's so much easier to change. 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 RachelHart.com/join and start your transformation today.