

Ep #345: When You're Not Sure You 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 345.

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, today we are talking about a question that I know a lot of you think about. That question is, how do I know if I can change? Am I ever going to figure this out? Will I ever be able to drink less? Will I ever be able to keep my commitments? Will I ever be able to stop? Will I ever have a different relationship with alcohol?

These questions can be as painful, if not more so, than some of the physical effects of drinking too much. Because not knowing if you can change, ruminating on these questions, can bring up so much shame and so much fear. Certainly, these questions, they were all questions that I struggled with, and they were incredibly, incredibly painful for me for the longest time.

I spent a lot of time kind of spinning in my head, wondering, doubting, that I could ever change. But more than that, I spent a lot of time secretly fearing that the answer was, no, I was never going to figure this out. My drinking was always going to be a problem. I was always going to have a messed-up relationship with alcohol. I was always going to feel like something was wrong with me.

And if I said no, I would always feel like I was missing out. Why was I in that place? Well, because I had so much evidence that I couldn't change. I had failed so many times, so many, more times that I can count. I would

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say, "You know what, Rachel? I'm never doing this again. I'm just not drinking anymore." That would last for a while, and then I would go back.

Or I would go long stretches. Or I'd be really good, and I wouldn't overdo it, I wouldn't get too sloppy, and then there'd be that one night where I drank way too much. And so, all of these moments, all of these failures, to me, were proof, they were evidence that change was impossible. That's what it really seemed like to me.

I really, truly believed when it came to my drinking, that the problem was me. I was the problem. I wasn't good at keeping my commitments. I was too weak when it came to temptation. I always thought that more was better. I couldn't learn my lesson, no matter how terrible I felt the next day.

And if you have these thoughts, you know how much shame they can create, and how much fear they can create for you. It feels awful. That shame will do a couple of things. One, it will keep you in hiding. I can count, maybe on one hand, my decade plus struggle with drinking, the number of times that I really spoke to friends about my worries. I didn't want to talk to people about it. I kept it very close to my chest.

I was insistent that I should be able to figure this out on my own. I believed also, because I had so much shame, that I was really alone in my struggle. That no one could relate. And it seems kind of silly now, but I truly kind of looked at the world and I was like, "Okay, well, I know I'm not an alcoholic, right? I'm not addicted. But then, something over here doesn't feel right." I felt like I was in no man's land.

When I looked at my peers, many of whom also drink a lot, somehow their drinking seemed normal in comparison to mine. I would go through periods of just being like, "Ugh, I mean, who cares? I don't want to think about this anymore. I don't want to worry about it. I just want to go about my life. I just

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want to have fun. I just want to have a good time. I just want to be like everyone else.”

In those moments, in those kinds of ‘who cares’ periods, I would often get to this place of, if you think that I'm drinking too much, you're probably too uptight. You're probably a goody, goody. The issue is with you, not with me.

I was trying so hard to outrun all of my mistakes, right? Stop screwing up. Stop breaking your promise. Stop being so stupid. I didn't realize that my mistakes were actually the key to changing the habit, changing my relationship with alcohol. Hidden inside of what wasn't working was the answer.

I talk about this a lot when people do the 30-Day Challenge with me. I talk about the need to use any moments where you aren't perfect, where you have a misstep, where you give in, to use it to understand the habit. Because the inclination is to do the opposite.

The inclination is, let's just start over, right? I screwed up, yesterday was a mistake. Let's just restart the counter. Let's start over again. And this time, I'm going to try really hard not to screw up.

This all-or-nothing mentality, this idea that my options are, I've got to be totally perfect, or I've got to go back to square one, this is really what traps so many people. It's what trapped me. Because if yesterday was a mistake, if yesterday was a sign that you can't change, then think about it, like you're totally screwed.

And in those moments, your inclination is to turn away from what happened. Your inclination is not to look. Let's not examine what happened, why I gave in, why I said yes to more. When you turn away from

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this information, you don't have the data that you need to understand the habit. To really understand how it's working, you need that data.

I always talk about it like it's a roadmap for how the habit works. You have to see how the habit is currently working in order to chart a new path forward. Sometimes it helps to take it out of the context of drinking, right? So, maybe imagine taking a test and getting a failing grade.

And instead of going back and understanding why you got something wrong, instead of figuring out what didn't work or finding the gaps in your knowledge or studying more, you're just like, "Nope, I've just got to take the test again. Because I just should be able to pass this. I should be able to do this. If I can't pass this, then something is wrong with me."

That's what people do all the time when it comes to attempts to change their drinking. This is what I was doing all the time. I would fail the test, and then I would just take it again. Hoping that this time I would magically pass. But I had no understanding of what went wrong in the first place, other than a lot of messed-up beliefs about how something was broken inside of me.

So really, the key to change is the willingness to look at what happened. I know that that is challenging. It's something that I work with people all the time because we're so used to looking at what happened from this place of judgment, right?

So, we want to look at: Okay, I drank way too much. I got drunk. I did something stupid. I said something that I regret. We want to look at it from this place of: See how foolish you were? See how much you're lacking willpower? See how something is wrong with you?

What I'm talking about, is not going to that place of judgment, but really getting curious and looking at: Okay, what were the thoughts? What were

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the feelings that led to saying yes to the urge? That led to giving in? That led to having more?

I had no idea, for the longest time, what those were because I was only ever kind of hiding under the covers. I don't want to look at all, let's just restart the clock. Let's take the test again and hope that I pass. Or if I was looking, I was looking from the place of making it mean that there is something very wrong with me.

And the reason why this is so hard is because we have so much shame and so much fear tied up in all of this. We're constantly spinning on the question; can I figure it out? And not in a good way. We're not asking that question, can I figure this out, in a good way. What you really need, and one of the things that I teach, is a really simple check in with yourself.

A simple question to figure out if you're headed in the right direction. That will really start to show you: Okay, are you in the right mindset to change your relationship with alcohol? And by the way, I believe that everyone can. I don't care how long you've been drinking, how much you've been drinking, I believe that everyone has the ability to change.

But the question you need to ask yourself, this check in, is really simple. Right now, right in this moment, do I feel mostly hopeful that change is possible, or do I feel mostly doubtful? Do I feel mostly hopeful or mostly doubtful? Notice, "mostly." Notice that word.

Because I think this is one of the big misconceptions. You're not supposed to feel 100% hopeful that change is possible. It's not realistic. Having doubts is normal. The key, really, is identifying; which way am I leaning?

Am I leaning towards the hopeful side or am I leaning towards the doubtful side? Because if you're leaning towards the doubtful side, and by the way, I

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was there for the vast majority of my time, right? I was leaning doubtful. In fact, I wasn't leaning, I was really swimming in doubt.

If you notice that, you have to address that first *before* you attempt anything. Now, again, I'm not saying going to the place of not having any doubt. I'm just saying, understanding why is it that I'm leaning doubtful?

So often, what I see people do, and I tried to do this for a long time, is we try to do this backwards, right? We're like, "Oh, I've got all this doubt. I don't know if I can do it. So, the way to erase my doubt is to prove that I can change." But that's the wrong way to go about it; it doesn't work that way.

Because if you make a mistake, and your whole goal is to prove that you can stop making mistakes, so you can stop doubting yourself, it's just going to end up setting you back. What you will end up doing, you will end up unconsciously using whatever happened, whatever mistakes you make, to reinforce your underlying belief that 'something is wrong with me. That this is too hard for me, and that I can't change.'

People will say to me, "You know what, Rachel? I'm mostly doubtful right now because I still really *want* to drink. I'm doubtful that's ever going to go away. I'm doubtful because I've failed too many times. I'm doubtful because it's so wrapped up in my social life. I'm doubtful because every time I try to say no, I give in. I'm doubtful because I wake up with all this motivation and then it just drains away by the end of the day."

Listen, embedded in all of these doubts is an important piece of what's keeping you stuck. It might be a perfectionist mindset that's keeping you stuck. Right? It might be the belief that your desire is all about the drink, and not understanding what your brain has learned to connect it with. It might be the associations your brain has made with socializing and alcohol. It might be your knee jerk response to urges.

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What is keeping you stuck is really embedded in these doubts. And so, imagine... Imagine if you have these doubts, and instead of trying to pretend that they're not there, imagine if you could start to get curious about them if you could start to reframe them.

If you could switch it around and start saying, "You know what? Hey, maybe the real thing keeping me stuck is that the moment that I make a mistake, I give up on myself. Maybe it's that perfectionist mindset that's the problem. Maybe I'm stuck because I realized that I'm using a drink to cover that nervous feeling that I have on the inside when I head into a social setting, and I don't have another way to deal with it. Maybe I'm stuck because I don't know how to normalize urges, or reduce the drama connected to my urges." It can be anything.

But you can really take that doubt and use it to help you. This check in is so powerful: Am I feeling mostly hopeful, or mostly doubtful? It takes you out of this black-and-white thinking. This place that is like, 'oh, I can't have any doubt at all.' It helps you see which way you're leaning.

And if you're mostly doubtful, if you're in that place, that's okay. The only thing you need to do is start to see, can I reframe it? Is it possible that the evidence that I'm pointing to, that I doubt that I can change, I'm not sure that I have it in me... It's possible that's actually part of the habit that needs my attention.

Remember, the goal isn't to get rid of your doubt, but to see if you can transform it into something useful. So, try asking yourself this question. Come back to it, again and again. See what comes up. I guarantee you're going to get so much awareness.

Alright, that's it for today. I will see you next week.

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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.