

Ep #363: How to Have a Successful Dry January



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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 363.

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.

Hey, everybody. It's a new year. We're going to talk about how to have a successful Dry January. Let me tell you this, Dry January is a very common New Year's resolution. And while I do deeply believe that it can be incredibly powerful, I also have a lot of firsthand experience that Dry January can really backfire.

I can't even tell you the number of times in my own life, where I would make a commitment to take time off from drinking, and then shortly thereafter, I would find a reason to give in and I would use that as proof that something was wrong with me.

Or I would make it all 30 days, right? I would be so good. I would feel so proud of myself. And then right after, I would immediately go back to my old ways. As soon as I reintroduced alcohol, it was like I picked up right where I left off. And then in those moments, I would use it as proof that, "Oh God, maybe I really can't change."

So, if you're thinking of doing a Dry January, I really want to help you avoid this. Today, we're going to be talking about the five things that you need to have in place if you want to have a successful Dry January. But more importantly, if you want to use this resolution to actually build a foundation for the change that you seek when it comes to your relationship with alcohol.

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Let's just dive in, because number one, is expect that you're going to have urges. I know this sounds so obvious, but I cannot tell you how overlooked it is. Time and time again I see people do this. We make a commitment to ourselves. We're like, "Okay, I'm not going to drink. I've got all these good reasons why I'm doing this, why I'm making this commitment."

And the moment that the urge comes in, it's like, "Why the heck is this here? Why am I having all these cravings?" I think what happens is that we fall into this trap of believing that we can the logic ourselves out of our desire. Like, if I have a bunch of good reasons, and this really matters to me, then my desire should just know better and not show up.

But the only way out of your desire is learning how to work with it. Notice I said *with it*, not *against it*. When you're surprised by your urges, or annoyed when they show up, when you wish they weren't there, you will be working against them. Because you will start resisting them, and that, my friends, is not a good thing.

I talked about this in the membership all the time, the goal is befriending your urges. I know this can sound like a weird word "befriend," but it really is important. Because when you are able to befriend your urges, you'll start to see that they have an inner intelligence for you. They're trying to reveal something about how the habit works and what the drink represents.

But you're going to miss out on all of that really, really important, valuable information if you're just annoyed when they show up. If you immediately rush to, "Okay, how can I distract myself? What else can I find to fill the void of saying no to a drink?" You're going to go into this place of just kind of gritting your teeth and be like, "Ugh, when is it going to go away?" That is something that you really want to make sure that you avoid.

Inside the membership, I have a guide called Responding to Urges. There are 12 techniques that help you really slow down and get curious, all in the

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name of believing that your urges have something valuable for you. That's how you start to reduce the intensity of your cravings, just by acknowledging, when you have the urge to drink, that nothing has gone wrong.

Your brain has simply learned to expect a reward at certain times or places or during specific activities or when you feel certain ways. The presence of the urge is normal. It's not a problem. It's not an emergency that you need to immediately rush and solve.

It can actually offer a window into your deeper desire. It can offer a window into what's actually happening with the habit. But when you view the urge as an enemy, you're going to miss the opportunity to use that moment that your craving appears to get to know yourself better. Think about that, using the moment a craving appears to get to know yourself better.

We have so many techniques that help you slow down, ask questions, and dial back the drama. But the one that I want to share with you today, it's so simple, it's so easy, anybody can do it. All you have to do is name, normalize, and say hello when the urge to drink appears. It is so simple that people want to skip right over this, right? It's like, "This is just too easy. It can't actually work. It can't actually be effective."

But don't mistake simplicity for a lack of effectiveness. What do I mean when I say "name, normalize, and say hello?" Let's take an example. Let's think about, one moment you're hard at work and the next thing you're daydreaming about a glass of wine that you're going to have later in the day.

In that moment, when the daydream appears, instead of trying to push the thought away, you do the opposite. You name what's going on. "Oh, this is an urge." You can silently say that to yourself. I love saying it out loud. So,

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you just name what's going on. Right then and there, just by naming it, you've interrupted the habit.

Then, you can normalize it. “Oh, of course, I want to drink right now. I'm at a party and my brain thinks this is the key to feeling more at ease.” Whatever situation you're in, you can just normalize what's happening.

Then, you say hello to the urge. This is the part that people think sounds really silly, and I did too, at first. But I promise you, it's so powerful. Saying hello to your urges, it changes everything. Because what you're doing is you're training your brain to see the urge not as a problem, not as an enemy, but something that you can befriend.

We don't say hello to our enemies or our problems. And so, when you do this, when you're like, “Oh, hello, come sit next to me. Stay as long as you like.” What it does, is it just immediately drops your defensiveness. If there's nothing to fear, then you're in a place of power. And from that place, you can start getting really curious about, hey, what is it trying to reveal about the habit?

So, expect that your urges are coming. Even better, don't just expect them; name them, normalize them, say hello. Even though it seems really funny. I promise it will make such a huge difference. You will be able to collect so much data about how the habit works. And, you need that data in order to create change.

Number two, plan for your excuses ahead of time. Do not just hope that in the moment you are going to have oodles and oodles of resolve or the perfect response when an excuse appears, you have to prepare for how you're going to handle that excuse ahead of time.

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One thing that I work on, with people inside the membership, are something that we call “trigger plans.” These are specific plans that we make for those moments that you know these are the moments where I'm most likely to give in. Part of the process in the trigger plan is really practicing how am I going to respond to the excuse?

Now, before I tell you how to respond, I know some of you are like, “Rachel, I have all the excuses. My brain will just make excuse after excuse after excuse.” I've talked about this before. I've talked about it on the podcast. It's what I like to call the “Rolodex of excuses.” I know what this is like, I get it. My brain was like that, too. In fact, most people's brains are like that.

But here's what I want you to know. Even if you feel like you have a ton of excuses, when you start getting curious you really often can boil it down to one or two that are really the ones that act like kryptonite for you. You don't have to prepare for every possible excuse you might have. You just have to choose the top two that you know. When those ones come up, it's like, “Ugh, yeah, it's very hard for me not to give in then.”

One of the cool things that we have members do is actually kind of look at a breakdown of excuse categories. Basically, what we have put together is groupings of excuses under common themes. So, the theme might be seeking a reward, feeling bad for yourself, trying to deal with overwhelm, or trying to assert control. There are many, many different themes.

But the cool thing about thinking about your excuses, in terms of the categories that they fall into, is it you start to see like, “Yeah, I have a lot of excuses. And often they can sound very different, but you know what? Even these ones that sound different, they're often kind of grouped around a similar theme.”

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The key is just to pick two excuses that you feel like are kind of kryptonite and use them as a starting point to plan ahead of time. “What am I going to do when it shows up? When my brain offers me this excuse, how am I going to respond?”

The technique that I like to use, is really stepping into what the best version of yourself would say when those excuses show up. Now, so many of us don't do that. We don't default to the best version of ourselves, we just default into being a disciplinarian. It's just like, “No. No. You shouldn't have this. You said that you wouldn't.” We go into this kind of internal disciplinarian that's barking orders at ourselves.

Here's the thing, barking orders, it just doesn't work all that well long term. It may give you some short-term gains, but constantly telling yourself no, it's frustrating. It's exhausting. But that's what so many people do to themselves.

So, that craving appears, which probably you're a little annoyed that it's even there. And then, the internal disciplinarian appears. And we default into, “No, you can't have that.” Just for a second, bear with me. Imagine that you were reaching for a drink and there was an actual person saying, “No, you can't have that.” You would be pretty angry, right?

You would not react well. But this is what we're doing to ourselves. This is how we're taught to try to handle temptation, by trying to force compliance. It sucks. It's not fun. And most of all, it doesn't work. You can use that internal disciplinarian, and the willpower, you can try to activate it. It might be successful for a bit, but you probably already know that your success rate with willpower is hit or miss.

Now, I know that you're probably blaming yourself for that hit or miss statistic; you're probably thinking that you're the problem. But that's not what's going on here. Eventually your resolve is going to run out because

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it's exhausting to constantly try to force compliance. You're going to try to find a good reason to give in, this is normal. Being at war with your desire, it just leaves you feeling tense and annoyed and defeated every time a craving appears.

Then, what do you do? You start ratcheting up the intensity of your threats, right? Telling yourself, "Oh, you're going to regret this tomorrow." Or you might try using scare tactics like, "Oh, this is bad for you. It's hurting your body. You're poisoning your liver." You might start bullying yourself, "Ugh, Rachel, you should know better. What's wrong with you?"

Here's the thing, guys. Now we've introduced guilt and fear and shame into the mix, and all of this is making it harder, right? It's making it harder to change with all of the guilt and fear and shame. This is why learning to talk back to your excuses is such an important, and by the way, very overlooked skill.

It is so much easier to keep your commitment when you're not tense and frustrated and feeling bad about yourself in the ways that you respond to yourself when temptation appears. So, your goal is to develop a calm, quiet inner authority. You can be firm with yourself, but still be kind when these excuses appear.

Learning how to do this, it's a skill. It is a muscle that you need to build. Most people have never seen this modelled anywhere in their lives. We have tons and tons of techniques that we use inside the membership. But my favorite, favorite one, is the technique of practicing talking to a loved one in your shoes.

The reason why I love this technique so much, is because it's not just helping you with your drinking, it's helping you with everything in your life. Learning how to develop a kinder and more compassionate internal dialogue, that is important for everything.

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So, all you have to do is think of someone that you deeply love. Someone that you have really no problem feeling oodles of compassion for. Maybe it's your best friend. Maybe it's a little kid. Maybe it's a grandparent. I always say, sometimes we have to go really young or really old to find that person with whom we naturally just find ourselves having a lot of unconditional love, and offering a lot of grace toward this person.

Anyway, you have this person in mind, you imagine them in your shoes, and you imagine that they have the same goal, they have the goal of Dry January. You imagine that they're also having this same excuse, whatever your kind of kryptonite excuse is.

Maybe, for example, the excuse is, a drink is the only thing that will help right now. So, you imagine that person saying those words, and then you think about how you would respond to them. Would you start yelling at them and be like, "No, you can't have it?" Would you start shaming them or belittling them or threatening them? Probably not.

You would probably take a very different approach. It might sound like, "Listen, I get it. I know this is hard. But I also know that you can do hard things. I know that you're struggling right now, but the drink is not the solution for the problem in front of you. I know you think that you can't handle this, but I know that you're capable of so much more than you think. It might feel, in this moment, the urge is never going to go away. But trust me, it will."

This technique is really helping to switch off your internal critic, and activate a radically different way of speaking and showing up for yourself. And by the way, the internal critic is not who you want switched on when you're trying to change a habit. Because it's just going to make you feel worse. It's just going to make you feel terrible and afraid all the time.

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So, pick out what those two excuses are, those two kinds of kryptonite excuses, and then use this technique to plan ahead of time how would you respond, what would you say. Don't fall into that trap of just believing you're going to have oodles and oodles of resolve. But also, don't think that the answer is to just become a disciplinarian with yourself. It doesn't work.

All right, number three. If your plan during Dry January is to avoid all temptation, just get really clear about why. Why are you trying to set up this month to avoid temptation? Are you telling yourself, "I think I can do this, but only if I avoid certain people or certain places or certain events?" Maybe you're like, "I think I can do this, but only if I'm never around temptation."

Now, listen, I'm not saying that you're doing something wrong if you're trying to structure this month a little bit differently. I'm not saying that you have to just submerge yourself in all of your temptation and that's the only way to have true success. I just want you to get curious about why.

If your plan is to avoid certain people, or places or settings, or even to just get rid of all the alcohol in your house, none of that is a problem. Just ask yourself, why? Why is that your plan? Why are you telling yourself that you think this is necessary in order to succeed?

This exercise, this exercise alone, is so revealing. Are you telling yourself, "I don't know that I'm strong enough?" Are you afraid that this person is going to give you a hard time? Are you worried about answering people's questions? Are you telling yourself, "I'm not going to have fun if I don't drink, so why bother going?"

Most people who attempt Dry January do so also trying to manipulate parts of their life to ensure success. That's a normal. So, I'm not saying that you're doing something wrong, I just want you to ask yourself, why? Getting

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curious here is going to reveal so much about the habit and how it works. And it's going to reveal what you truly need to work on.

Because if you want lasting success, it cannot be built on the foundation of, “Well, I can only succeed if I can control and manipulate everything in my life.” There's no problem with saying, “You know what? I think that getting 30 days under my belt is something that's going to be really powerful and really help me, and I want to set myself up for success.”

But if you believe that you always have to manipulate these things, or you always have to say no, or stop being around certain people or avoid certain events or never be in the presence of alcohol, I can promise you, you're not going to feel like you're building change on a very strong or steady foundation.

Okay, number four. Understand the role that alcohol plays in your life. Listen, you're going to handicap your efforts to change if you tell yourself, “Well, the reason that I drink is because I like to drink. And the reason that maybe I drink more than I want to sometimes is because I like it too much.” Listen, I get it. I've been there. I've said the exact same things. These used to be my explanations, too.

But the problem with ‘I just like to drink. I just like it a little bit too much,’ the problem with these explanations, is that they kind of act like blinders when it comes to really understanding the habit. What I'm asking you to consider is, that might be true, that you like to drink and maybe you like it a little too much. What else is also true?

Yes, you like to drink, what else might also be true about the role that alcohol plays in your life? Yes, liking the taste can make it hard to stop. But what else might also be playing a role in why you're over drinking? It's about what the drink represents in your brain. This key piece is so often overlooked.

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Now, this is a big part of my work. I talk about it all the time in the podcast. If you're not sure what the drink may represent, all you have to do is take The Drink Archetype quiz. This is a free quiz that I have developed, that will help you understand the associations your brain has made with alcohol. The quiz is not about labeling you as a problematic drinker. It's about identifying universal tendencies when it comes to drinking.

And in fact, The Drink Archetypes, there are eight of them, they apply across the board. You don't have to be a problematic drinker for them to apply, they really are explaining the universal human experience of drinking. So, maybe the drink acts as a reward. Maybe you see it as helping to create social bonds and connection.

Maybe it's about shutting off your brain. Maybe it's about elevating your experience. It might be about feeling more confident in social situations. It might be about passing the time. Sometimes drinking can be about unleashing a part of yourself that you keep hidden. Other times, it's a remedy for physical discomfort.

The point here is that the drink does represent something for your brain. There is something going on there beyond just 'I like the taste, and maybe I like it a little too much.'

Doing the quiz, and understanding this piece of the puzzle before you start Dry January is so incredibly powerful. It will reveal so much not only about how the habit works for you, but how to create lasting change. Understanding the archetypes that apply to you are going to show you where you need to focus your efforts.

So, if you haven't done that, make sure you go take the quiz. It's totally free. All you have to do is go to FindYourDrinkType.com, and you can take it over there.

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All right, finally, that brings me to number five. What is your plan if you give in? Listen, I know a lot of you are like, “Rachel, the whole point is not to give in. I don't want to plan for it.” But listen, unless you want to keep hanging on to this perfectionist fantasy when it comes to change, you need to plan for the moments when you might stumble.

Stumbling is normal. The real question is, how are you going to pick yourself back up? How are you going to get back on track? So many people miss out on the benefit of Dry January, because the moment they stumble, they give up. They're like, “Well, that didn't work. I gave in, so there's no point stopping now.”

When in truth, there is so much value to be found in the moments when you don't keep your commitment. These moments are a goldmine, they can reveal so much about the habit. Inside the membership, we have a whole system that it is built into, how do you get back on track? We are not requesting or advocating that people focus on trying to be perfect, it will work against you.

But getting back on track, this is a skill that you need not just for changing your relationship with alcohol, it's a skill that you need for accomplishing anything you want in life. Think about all the things that you gave up on the moment that you stumbled, or the moment that you broke your commitment. The skill of learning how to rebound is everything.

Again, I have a tool that I walk people through. But what I'm going to share with you is one simple and very powerful question that can help prepare you to get back on track. So, if you go back on your commitment, if you give in at any point during Dry January, what are you going to make it mean?

This is such a powerful question for you to answer: What are you going to make it mean? Because here's the thing, your brain is going to make it

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mean something, that is just a fact. If you don't decide ahead of time what you want this moment to mean, what you're going to make it mean, your brain is going to default to what it just easily will make it mean.

It's going to default to things like, "I knew you couldn't do it. You blew it. Yesterday was a bust. So, today I might as well give in, because I lost the streak." You can see how those kind of default responses may come very easily, but they are traps. They just lead to more giving in. They lead to giving up on yourself, throwing in the towel, and believing that you can't change. When, truly, you can.

When in those moments you tell yourself, "I blew it. All is lost. I knew I couldn't do it," the habit just goes right back online. So, you have to decide now, what are you going to make it mean? Because you can make it mean anything.

You can make it mean, "This is part of the process. Nothing has gone wrong. I can use this moment to learn and grow if I'm willing to get curious about it. This moment, that moment where I believe the excuse and I gave in, it's actually trying to reveal something important about the habit." There's so much that you can decide to make these moments mean, that aren't actually going to sabotage you and will help you get on track.

Okay, so these are the five steps to make your Dry January successful: Number one, expect that you're going to have urges. Number two, plan for your excuses ahead of time. Number three, if your plan is to avoid temptation, get really clear about why. Number four, understand the role that alcohol plays in your life. And finally, what are you going to make it mean if you give in?

Now listen, if you want to join us this January, you can come on over to the membership. We are going to be talking and coaching on taking 30-Day challenges from drinking all this month. We're going to be helping all the

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people who want to do it. We're going to be helping you do it the right way, a way that actually builds a foundation for lasting change rather than backfiring. So, if you're interested, just head on over to RachelHart.com and you can get started over there.

All right, I will be back next week with another one of our archetypes. See you soon. Bye-bye.

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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