

Ep #364: Dry January Mistakes



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With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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All right, everybody. Welcome back. So last week. I was talking all about how to have a successful Dry January because taking a month off from drinking can be an incredibly powerful New Year's resolution.

But if you don't prepare for the most common stumbling blocks, your best intentions will backfire. I should know this happened to me again and again. Now listen, I know some of you out there listening right now are not interested in doing Dry January. That's totally okay. You're still going to learn a lot from today's episode about what's getting in the way of changing your relationship with alcohol.

Last week I broke down the five key areas you need to work on ahead of time. So that's all about handling urges, responding to excuses, dealing with temptation, understanding the role that alcohol plays in your life, and what to do if you stumble. Please, please, please do not plan on just being perfect.

But today I'm going to lay out two of the most common mistakes people make during Dry January. And if these mistakes aren't addressed, they are going to get in the way of really changing the habit. And what I want you to know is this: change is always possible. You really can learn how to drink less. You can learn how not to drink in certain situations where you initially think, "Yeah, there's no way. There's no way I can do this without a drink." You can learn how to turn down a drink without feeling like you're missing out. You can create a totally different relationship with alcohol and Dry January can be an amazing catalyst for all of this, but you've got to avoid these two mistakes. What are they?

I'm going to tell you first, they're all about assumptions. You have to stop assuming two very important things. Now, my grandfather, who would have been 102 this year, would always say to me growing up, he would say,

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"Rachel, when you assume you make an ass out of you and me, which as a little kid I thought was hysterical because he was using a bad word."

And my parents would be like, "Bob, don't say that to the girls." But he would always reply back, "It's true. When you assume, you make an ass out of you and me." And that really is true with these mistakes. Both of these things are assumptions that will slow down your process of change. So, assumption number one.

And I will tell you, I think pretty much everyone makes this. I know I made this a lot. Assumption number one is saying no should be enough. Saying no should be enough. I shouldn't have to do anything else to change the habit. If I usually pour a glass of wine at the end of the day, saying no for a month should be enough to change the habit.

If I usually have a couple beers while I'm watching the game, saying no for a month should be enough. If I usually drink as part of date night. Saying no for a month should be enough. If I usually polish off a bottle of wine in front of the TV in the evening, saying no for a month should be enough. You get the picture here, right?

Most people make this mistake. They make the mistake of assuming that saying no to a drink should be enough to create change. Why do we make this mistake? I think that we make this mistake because we are taught to focus on quantity. We're taught to really pay attention to how much you're drinking. How much are you consuming in a sitting? How much are you consuming in a week? So much of our focus is on a number. And if we believe quantity is the problem. Then quantity must also be the solution.

But all of this focus on numbers and just saying no, it ignores the role that alcohol plays in your life. It ignores what the drink represents. It can represent so many things. Maybe it's about rewarding yourself for working hard. Maybe it's about feeling close to others or permission to stop working or permission to stop worrying what other people think.

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Maybe it's entertainment. Maybe it's confidence. Maybe it helps you sleep. Maybe it makes things celebratory. It can be so many things. And when you assume that saying no should be enough, what you're doing is you are ignoring a key part of the habit that you need to pay attention to if you want to create lasting change.

You're ignoring the meaning that your brain has attached to the drink, and this meaning matters. You cannot skip this part. You will be tempted to skip this part. You really will, because I will tell you, I tried to skip this part again and again. I was like, "Nope. I don't care about any of this. Let's just focus on quantity. Let's focus on not drinking so much, or let's focus on not drinking at all."

I would go back and forth between these two places all the time, wondering, why am I not making headway? But I wasn't making headway because I wasn't addressing the root of the problem. It's like weeding without actually pulling out the roots.

So you can pick a dandelion, but you know, the root's underground, it's going to grow back. You might temporarily have a nice looking lawn, but it's not going to stay that way. When you tell yourself that saying no should be enough. You set yourself up to fail because you go into the process of trying to change, believing that if all you do is just say no, then everything else is going to fall into place.

You're not going to need to examine how you feel. You don't need to get curious about what the drink signifies. You don't need to, you know, do any of that. You just need to kind of put your head down and muscle through your desire. But your desire. It's more complicated than the chemical structure of alcohol.

Your desire is connected to meaning. The meaning that your brain attaches to the drink and so muscling through... it might get you days under your belt. It might actually get you an entire Dry January. But it's not going to

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create lasting change. In order to do that, you have to do more than just say no.

You have to understand, why do I want to say yes? Learning how to say no is important, but it's not everything. It's like picking dandelions. You need to not just do that, you need to get at the root of what's going on. I will tell you this, I've talked about this on the podcast before, if you're not sure about what the drink represents for you, the best place to start is by understanding which of the eight drink archetypes show up in your drinking.

These are the unconscious patterns that influence how much you drink. So the eight Archetypes will really help you pinpoint the meaning that your brain has attached to the drink. If you haven't taken my free quiz, please go do that. You can just head on over to findyourdrinktype.com and take the quiz there to get your results.

It's going to give you all the information you need to start working with what's going on beneath the surface. That is assumption number one, that saying no should be enough. It's a part of the puzzle, but it's not everything.

Assumption number two is the belief it's always going to feel like this. You know what I mean, it's always going to feel like this. Think about it, you say no at the end of the day and you couldn't relax. And your brain's like, "Okay, well, therefore, I'm never going to be able to relax without a drink." Or you meet up with friends to watch the game, and you don't drink, and they're drinking, and you spend that time kind of feeling like you're on the outside looking in, you're not totally connecting.

What does your brain do? Your brain's like, "Well, okay, so it's always going to feel like this. I'm never going to feel part of the group. I'm never going to have as much fun if I'm saying no." Or maybe you skip drinks on date night and you're left kind of, you know, worrying that you're disappointing your partner.

Again, your brain's like, "Oh God, it's always going to feel like this. I'm always going to feel like I'm letting them down." You can start to see the

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pattern here. It shows up in so many places. It might be that you're not having your usual bottle of wine in the evening.

The first couple of times you do that, you experience a lot of boredom and then your brain rushes to make it mean, "I'm always going to be bored if I don't have my drink there next to me to keep me entertained."

Now listen, I get why it's easy to make these assumptions. I would use the experience of saying no to try to extrapolate what the rest of my future was going to look like. And let me tell you, it never looked pretty. I got to a point with myself where I would think, "Okay, I can say no, but I don't want to because it's just so bleak. Like, sure, I feel good in the morning, but I don't want this to be my life. I don't want to always feel like I'm on the outside looking in. I don't want to, you know, have a life where I have to tell myself that I'm not allowed to drink. I don't want to go through life feeling like things aren't as special or celebratory. I don't want to feel self conscious when I show up at a party and I'm meeting new people."

I was always taking what would happen. And I wouldn't see it as a moment to retrain my brain, I'd see it as, "Oh, this is like a peek into my future, and P. S. it doesn't look very good." You have to really shift your mindset here. You have to start to see this work, the work of changing the habit, as learning a skill.

Which means the skill level that you have today is not necessarily the skill level you will have tomorrow, or next month, or next year. So, if long ago, your brain learned that the way to feel at ease in social situations was pouring a drink, then you have to teach your brain a new way to handle anxiety.

If long ago, your brain learned that when you poured a drink, it meant, "Hey, the day is done and I can stop responding to my work emails," then you have to teach your brain a new way to stop thinking about work. If a long time ago, your brain learned that drinking made you part of the group

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and it helped kind of cement an emotional bond, then guess what? You got to teach your brain a new way to create the closeness that you want.

Change requires mastering new skills and skills cannot be mastered without repeated practice. But so often, That's not how we approach change. When it comes to changing the habit of drinking, we're just like, "No, no, this should be enough." and when I try to say no, and I don't like the experience, it doesn't feel good for me. This is what it's going to be like for the rest of my life.

This is a trap I was in for so long. I wasn't treating this as skill building. I was constantly in this place of, "Okay, so I succeeded. I said no, or I limited myself," but my experience wasn't as great.

I didn't enjoy myself as much. And then I turned that into a prediction about what the rest of my life was going to look like. I wasn't bringing new skills to the table to practice because I didn't even think about this as skills. I just thought, I should be able to do this. And I also had the belief that I think a lot of you share, which is like, "Listen, okay, I tried saying no, it sucked, therefore it's going to suck forever." It's like getting on a bike for the first time and feeling wobbly and then assuming that you're always going to feel this way every time you get on a bike. But when you have this belief, what happens is you're very unlikely to keep practicing writing, which means you don't get any better. Which means, guess what? You are going to prove that prediction of your future life true.

These two assumptions, saying no should be enough and saying no is always going to feel like this, is why most people get stuck during dry January or really at any point during the year when they're trying to change. As we wrap up today, I want to offer you two new thoughts to start practicing:

The first one is, "Saying no is important, but it's only one piece of the puzzle. I have to practice finding new ways to connect with my deeper desire, whether it's relaxation or closeness or ease or belonging or

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playfulness or specialness, whatever it is." Saying no is important, but it's only one piece of the puzzle. I want you to start trying on this thought and working with it, reminding yourself over and over again, "Yes, it's important to learn how to allow my urges and learn how to talk back to my excuses, but this is one piece of the work that I'm doing."

And then the second thought, "Saying no won't always feel this way if I'm willing to show up again and try something new." Okay. This last piece is key. Show up again and try something new. So often we don't do that. We just show up again and do the exact same thing. And then we wonder, "Hey, why don't I feel connected? Or why didn't this feel special? Or why can't I relax?" It's not always going to feel this way. If you're willing to show up again and try something new, you need tools, right? That's one of the things that I'm always, always working on with people. Let's get you more tools.

I was working on this today on a coaching call with someone and really talking about this inside the membership. We were talking about, okay, "How many tools do you actually have right now in your toolkit?" And we realized, oh, she was really working with just one tool. But she was trying it and then it wouldn't work. And then she would try it again and it wouldn't work. And there's nothing wrong with her. She just needs more tools to try. That's what all of you need. Instead of telling yourself, being caught in the cycle of like, "Oh, I should just know better. I should have learned my lesson by now." You really have to start thinking about, "Hey, what tools am I missing? What tools do I need to change my experience of this situation?" Okay, guys, so that's it for today. If you are considering Dry January, I want to invite you to do it inside the Take a Break membership.

We're weaving the Drink Archetypes, these eight unconscious patterns into our 30-Day Challenge for the first time this month. So come on over to the membership and do the work with us, break free of these two assumptions that are keeping you stuck. All right, that's it for today. I will see you next week.

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