

Ep #381: What am I waiting for?



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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 381.

Welcome back, everyone. We are talking today about something that what really keeps so many people stuck, and it is when you cannot understand, cannot fathom, "What on earth am I waiting for? What am I waiting for? I really want to change my drinking. I really want to change my relationship with alcohol. So why am I not doing anything about it?"

I get this question all the time from podcast listeners. So many people will say, "I listen to your podcast. I listened to so many episodes. I've read your book, "Why can't I drink like everyone else?" Everything makes so much sense, but I'm not taking action." I work on this a lot with people inside the membership. They'll be on the sidelines for a long time and they're just like, "I don't know, I'm not sure if I'm ready." And then they will take the plunge and they will join. And then sometimes it's almost like they get a little bit of a freeze response and they have this moment of being like, "Okay, I'm here. I finally took the plunge. I invested in making a change. But I'm not doing anything. I'm not taking action."

I had this also in my own life for years and years. I was so sick of worrying about my drinking. I was just fed up with not understanding why I couldn't trust myself with alcohol. I was tired of beating myself up. I was really desperate for change. And yet I wasn't doing a whole lot to actually create change. Yes, sometimes I would set rules for myself. But more often than not, I wouldn't follow through on them. Or I would have one bad night and I would wake up and tell myself like, "Oh god, Rachel, we're never going to do that again." And then maybe like a couple days later, a week later, a friend would suggest grabbing a drink after work and I would forget all about that promise.

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This is a really common thing. I think it's important first, before we talk about the three reasons why this happens, it's just important to normalize it. Because you already know that this feeling of deeply wanting something in your life to change, and then at the same time feeling almost paralyzed or unable to take action. So maybe you're consuming a lot of information. Maybe you're listening to podcasts and you're reading a lot of books and you're spending a lot of mental energy on it, but you're not actually taking the action that is required.

This is not something that is unique to drinking. This is not unique to people who want to change their relationship with alcohol. This happens in all areas of our life. Maybe you want to get in shape and you join a gym and then you don't go. Or maybe you're really committed to getting out of debt and you buy a bunch of books, but you're avoiding looking at your bank balance. This happened for me for a long time where I really wanted to be in a relationship, but I wasn't setting up a dating profile. I wasn't actually putting myself out there. I certainly wasn't asking anyone out on dates.

This type of paralysis. It can happen with all sorts of things in your life. And it's really important to acknowledge that it's universal. At some point, everyone, every single person alive will find themselves desperately wanting to change something about their life, but also doing everything that they can to avoid change. I want you to just have that as a starting point to acknowledge that this is a universal struggle because so often when you're in this place of really wanting to change and not taking action, that's where so much shame can just come in.

We just have so much shame about this. I watch so many people with their drinking in particular, who are stuck in this place, feel such intense shame about wanting the change and not doing what they need to do in order to create the change. I think why we have so much shame and of course it's not just unique when people are in this position with alcohol. I know it can

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happen in other areas, but I think why the shame is so intense is because it feels so illogical. It really feels illogical to be like, "It doesn't make any sense. How can I desperately want this part of my life to change and not be doing anything about it?"

The fact of the matter is that nobody likes to think of themselves as an irrational actor. We don't want to think of ourselves that way. We want to believe that I'm a rational, logical human being. But not taking action about something that you deeply care about feels, it can feel very irrational, but it only feels this way. It only feels like it doesn't make any sense because of your unconscious mind.

Because remember, when we have developed patterns of thinking, when we have developed habits around some of our behaviors, a lot of that will be in the unconscious mind. And if you don't know how to consciously look beneath the surface, which by the way, of course you don't, because we're not taught how to do this. If you don't know how to consciously look beneath the surface of what's driving a habit, what's going to happen is you're only going to see like a tiny sliver, a tiny fraction of what's actually going on. And that little piece that you can see without the rest of the story, yes, it will feel very irrational.

That's why really understanding your cravings and your Drink Archetypes and understanding your relationship with failure. That's why all of this is so important. Because all of what I talk about on the podcast, it's all about trying to gain more access to this unconscious mind, this piece of the puzzle that for a lot of us, we don't even realize is there, we don't see.

And that's why changing your drinking is not just a matter of willpower and getting really good at following rules. That's not what is going to get you to the change that you want. Because willpower and gritting your teeth and trying to get better at following rules, it's not about understanding what's

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happening beneath your conscious awareness. You need this piece of the puzzle if you want to create lasting change. A lot of people will have success for periods of time just gritting their teeth. And then it's you get to a point and you give in. The reason why this is happening is because you're, it's just like trying to slog through mud. Just using all this effort. All of this effort to say no, not really ever truly understanding the full story of why it is, "I deeply want to say yes to that craving."

Now, the good news with all of this is that you can learn how to identify and figure out what is happening in my unconscious mind. What is happening with that piece of the habit that I can't see with the help of things like the Think, Feel, Act Cycle that I talk about a lot in the podcast and learning how to watch yourself think, learning the principles of mindfulness. With the help of the Drink Archetypes and really figuring out, "Hey, what does that drink actually represent for my mind?" You can start to do this work. And it really is a lot easier than you may think. But all of this really is to say, if you're not taking action, if you're listening to everything that I talk about on the podcast, and it all makes sense, but you're postponing change. If that's you, not only is it very normal, it is not a sign that there is something wrong with you.

It's a sign that we need to dig a little bit deeper beneath the surface. So I'm going to talk about three reasons today why we can get stuck in this state of paralysis. You may find that you really identify with one or more or all three reasons, but I'm going to talk about what they are and then talk about what you can do.

So the first reason why you may find yourself stuck and not taking action is just an unwillingness to allow a craving to go unanswered, to not fulfill that craving for a drink. So why do we have an unwillingness around this? You may be unwilling to feel the sensations that come up when you say no, or the thoughts that come up, or the emotions that arise. Because here's the

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thing, when you say no, stuff is going to bubble up to the surface. Yes, of course initially there will be that sense of deprivation, but nine times out of 10, you're going to discover more than just feeling deprived.

You might feel angry that you can't have what you want when you want it. You might feel shame that you don't have a better handle on your cravings. You might feel anxiety about what it will mean not to have this drink or not to have another glass. So many things can come up when you say no to your craving.

This is why I spend so much time helping people really learn, "Hey, how do we start to work with cravings? How do we name them and notice them? How do we start to take all the drama out of the craving? How do we separate out the story of what is happening in our mind when that desire bubbles up from the sensation that it actually creates in the body?"

This is a huge thing, right? We don't realize that we can separate out story from sensation, and that's a really important skill if you want to make your cravings less intense and less dramatic. You can also develop a curiosity about the wisdom of your craving. This is something, when I talk about it and when I teach people this, it really can blow your mind because talking about the wisdom of a craving, people are like, "What? No, there's no wisdom behind this desire. This desire is just a problem."

But starting to see, no, there is actually an intelligence here. That I can work with, that is trying to help me, that can be incredibly powerful. But all of this is to say if you're unwilling to allow your cravings to go unanswered that makes a lot of sense. That's not a sign that something is intrinsically wrong with you. We're not taught how to do this. But truly, sometimes you aren't taking action because just the thought of saying no, the thought of letting the craving go unanswered, that alone can feel really intimidating.

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And so then your work really needs to start right there. It needs to start with this first piece of building a new understanding of what the craving is and learning a new way to manage them. I teach so much about naming and noticing cravings, which can sound so simple, but I will tell you, I will teach this over and over again, over and over again, and talk about it so much. And then people always come back to me. And it can at first feel really challenging to do because it's like, "What do you mean name it? What do you mean notice it?"

Just because it sounds very simple, you're still learning a new skill. So sometimes it really is just that acknowledging that there's an unwillingness to allow the craving. Maybe because you just, you don't want what else is going to be there when you say no. But again, whatever is showing up with the craving, it's something that when you have the right perspective, it really can start to help you. Sometimes you're not taking action because you're already predicting that you're going to fail. We have this belief like "If I don't try, I can't fail, right? So maybe let's not try." I think it's important to really examine why so many of us have such a terrible relationship with failure. I say us because this is something that I have continually, I still do the work on with my own relationship with failure.

And I think that we have this terrible relationship because in part we're never taught that failure is useful. At least most of us aren't taught that. We're not shown how to find a silver lining in a failure. It's just, "No, failure is bad. Failure is not good." If you're trying to change your drinking, if you're trying to say no, so you promise yourself, "I'm not going to drink tonight", and then you drink. If your belief is, that there's no silver lining. There's no upside to failure. Then it's just this was bad. This is shameful. If you promise, "I'm only going to have two glasses of wine" and then you polish off the bottle. How many times did I say this to myself? So many. Again, I would wake up the next day and it was just like, "There's no upside here, right? This is just shame. This is just me being bad. This is just me being

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stupid." When you attach being bad, being stupid, being an embarrassment. When you attach all of those things to failure, then yes, you will stay in a place of it's better just to not even try because then I can avoid failing.

This is a huge piece of the puzzle for so many of you is learning how to get out of this mindset. How do you go back and look at a moment when you didn't follow through, when you drank more than you wanted to, how do you actually learn something useful? And I'm not talking about, "Oh yeah, I learned that I was stupid, or I learned that I can't trust myself, or I learned that, I just shouldn't drink." I'm talking about learning, "Hey, what was that tipping point? What was the point in the situation where everything changed, where everything shifted, where I felt like there was no going back?" I think that most people never look for a moment like this with alcohol. We just fall into this trap of "I don't know. I'm just one of those people. I just can't help myself. Once I start, I can't stop. I don't know. My drinking doesn't make any sense." I had that belief for the longest time that my drinking didn't make any sense.

And there was a good reason why I had that thought, because no one was teaching me how to look below the surface. No one taught me anything about the Think, Feel, Act Cycle. And I would look at my drinking and I wouldn't understand why sometimes, I would go easy and I would know when to be like, "Okay, I've had enough. And other times it was just like, what happened? Why did I go off the rails?" That didn't make any sense to me. And I had no framework for helping myself make sense of it. So it's this idea of, looking for, "What is going on. How was I feeling before? What was happening in that day? Was I meeting my physical and emotional needs?"

This is a big thing that I talk about with people. I was coaching someone on this really recently who was saying, "I just don't get it. I've been doing really well. I've been saying no to my cravings. I've been naming and noticing,

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I've actually, I've seen that they have intelligence for me. And then last week it was like, whoa, I was off to the races. I was giving into my cravings left and right. Every night I was doing this. And it just felt like this sudden shift, like bam, right? All of a sudden I had lost all that progress that I had made." And it really is easy to fall in this trap. Especially when you start doing this work to feel like, "Okay, this is just me, right? I'm this person. I get a little progress under my belt and then I just backslide." We start to make it as if it's almost a personality trait, as if this is almost just part of my DNA.

So I was working with this person and we were exploring it together. And she mentioned like this little moment that she mentioned this and hadn't even really realized it when she said it to me, but she mentioned, that she had been feeling really physically exhausted early on in the week. She'd been really tired. And so I asked her about that. And I said, "What do you do when you're exhausted? When you're really tired, do you go to bed earlier? Do you allow yourself more rest during the day?" And she looked at me like, "What are you talking about? No. That would mean going to bed at eight o'clock, Rachel."

But it's so fascinating, right? Because all of a sudden, we just started having a different conversation. It wasn't just, "Oh, why am I saying yes to the drink? Why am I saying yes to the food?" All of a sudden it was like, "Why are you ignoring your physical needs? If your body is tired, are you not going to bed earlier? Why aren't you giving yourself more rest?" That is a whole other avenue that she didn't even realize was there to explore. And what we discovered is that, night after night, feeling very exhausted, not going to bed any earlier. She was then trying to compensate by pouring herself a drink or eating junk food.

Now I will tell you this, if you think that there is no upside to failure, you're never going to want to look at this moment. Because in your mind, you're

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just like, "Oh, this is just shameful. It's just proof that I'm bad. It's proof that something is wrong with me." But when you start to create more safety around failure, that's something that a lot of people don't have. It's just safety, feeling safe that they can fail and it's okay.

When you start to see, "Oh, it might have an upside." All of a sudden you discover parts of the habit that you didn't even realize were there. And in her case, it was understanding that she had unconsciously learned to use alcohol and food to override her physical needs. And unless she started to pay attention to these physical needs and treat them as if they were important, as if they mattered, then she was always going to be repeating this pattern. Not because she was just someone who gets a little progress and then backslides, but because there was something underneath the surface that she couldn't even see.

There was a deeper habit of, "Yeah, I don't acknowledge when I'm tired. You just push through." So if you're not taking action, it really can be sometimes simply because you're trying to avoid failure because you see and believe that there's no upside, but I promise you that there is. So remember, it's really not even failure that we're trying to avoid. What we're trying to avoid is all the judgment, all the meaning that we attach to failure. Every time, we wake up the next day and immediately tell ourselves, "See, I knew I couldn't change. I'm never going to figure this out. Something is really wrong with me."

This is why a huge piece of the work is really retraining your brain around failure and normalizing missteps and really learning how to collect data. There's so much data in these moments that we just want to not look at. If you're just willing to look, you can make progress so much faster when you have a willingness to look.

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And then finally, the third reason why you may not be taking action. This one is really important. It may just be because you're imagining a very bleak future without alcohol. Now, listen, I know a lot of people out there who are listening to this. When you think about how you want to change your relationship with alcohol. You may not be thinking that the end point that you're getting to is, "I'm never going to drink again." And you don't have to be thinking of that. One of the things that is really different and unique about the work that I do is, allowing for people to figure out what is the relationship that they want to have with alcohol.

It's not, everybody needs to get to this place where you're never going to drink again. Abstinence is like the only and best place for everyone to end up. So a lot of you will have this goal of, "I just want to drink less. I want to feel more in control. I don't want it to be like a nightly thing. I don't want it to be something that I always turn to in certain situations or when I feel a certain way."

Here's why this may be coming up for you because you have that goal, but then you may also have the fear of, "Yeah, but if I can't do it, If I can't figure that out, then maybe I'm going to have to stop drinking forever."

And when you have a very bleak future that you are imagining about what life will look like without alcohol, that can definitely keep you stuck. Because I will tell you this, you may have all the good thoughts. The good thoughts are like "I'll be healthier, and I'll feel more energized, and I'll probably lose weight, and I'm, I will go to the doctor, and I'm going to get a clean bill of health."

And you may have all of the physical health upsides. Which, listen, there's a lot to be said there for the physical benefits of not drinking. I think it's important to acknowledge that we can hold that and then also hold this piece of "Yeah, but deep down, I also envision a future where I feel less

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outgoing or less connected to my friends and family, or I don't feel normal, or I feel like I'm always missing out, or I don't feel like I'm able to just let loose or blow off steam, or I feel like I'm just going to be unable to relax." That can also be there. This is why I created the Drink Archetypes, by the way, because I really wanted to help people untangle all of this meaning that the brain unconsciously assigns to the drink.

We're always learning. We're always learning when we drink. We forget about this piece. We don't even know it. I certainly didn't know it when I started drinking. The brain is always learning. It's always attaching meaning. We don't understand this piece of the puzzle and then we think about change and then we worry, "Maybe I won't be able to change. And then what will that mean? And does that mean I can never drink again? And then all of a sudden, we're just like, We're just living in this bleak future."

Because until you do the work here, until you do the work with your Drink Archetypes, no matter what your goal is, you may find yourself resisting taking action because saying no comes with so much baggage.

It's not just about saying no to this one drink. It can feel like, "Oh God, I'm like saying no to being normal. I'm saying no to feeling connected. I'm saying no to having an easy way to relax for the rest of my life. I'm saying no to feeling celebratory." The stories that we have connected to drinking, but there's so much there.

This work with the Drink Archetypes is so important. I always advise people when you're in this place of really feeling stuck, you really want to change. You're on board with this approach. You're on board with everything that you're hearing me talk about but you're still just paralyzed.

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I really have people just consider, what do you think of these three blocks, whether it is around cravings or failure or the future that you imagine, what do you think is the one that's really keeping you stuck? Because when you start to see it in that light, it can really help make your paralysis stop feeling illogical.

It starts to make a little bit more sense. And for those of you listening, you may feel like all three reasons apply. That's okay. But maybe start with what is your biggest block? What feels most intense? Maybe that is your starting point. Just remember this, your cravings have a wisdom. Your failures are here to help you understand a part of the habit that you can't yet see, and the future you imagine is only bleak. Because your brain keeps insisting that what you are deeply desiring in life is only possible with alcohol, and that is never true.

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