

## Ep #390: The Hourglass: What the Brain Learns



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Rachel Hart**

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

## Ep #390: The Hourglass: What the Brain Learns

You are listening to the *Take a Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, Episode 390.

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.

Hello, my friends. Welcome back. We are doing another episode in my series all about what your brain learns based on each of the eight different Drink Archetypes. The Drink Archetypes™ are really about helping you understand the different ways that the human brain learns to use alcohol and what the drink comes to represent so that you can understand the different types of drinking that you're engaging in.

This is really important information if you want to change your relationship with alcohol, if you want to drink less, if you want to experiment with taking breaks, having alcohol-free periods during the year, or if you want to stop drinking.

I like to explain this, when it comes to The Drink Archetypes, as imagining four people at a restaurant together splitting a bottle of wine. Their actions from the outside, they all look the same, right? Everybody's having a glass of wine.

Yet the individual decision to drink can be motivated by very different beliefs, ideas, and emotions. Which also means what each individual brain is learning as they sit around that table can also be very different. This is a part of the habit that is so often overlooked, because there is a tendency to just focus on quantity.

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

## Ep #390: The Hourglass: What the Brain Learns

Now, I will note that none of the eight Drink Archetypes, none of them are associated with problematic drinking. None of them are a sign that something is wrong. They're really just a tool to help you gain awareness of what is happening beneath the surface, beneath your conscious awareness. And each archetype, they will help you understand what you need to focus on when you want to change.

Yes, we have to do the foundational work that I'm always talking about here when it comes to changing your relationship with your cravings and changing how you talk to yourself when the excuses start to bubble up. But I think one of the pieces that is so often overlooked is that people really need personalized approaches. And those personalized approaches are based on the different archetypes that are activated in any given situation.

Now, The Drink Archetypes, they help you move away from, like I said, solely examining your drinking from the perspective of quantity or how much you're consuming. So, they really help you dig in a little deeper and explore the "why." Why is saying no to a craving hard?

We have this kind of knee-jerk response to that question. Certainly, I did for a very long time, which was, "I don't know, that's just who I am. I don't know, I always go overboard. I feel like I have a compulsive personality. I think maybe something is wrong with me."

But I promise you the reason why it's hard for you to say no, it's not because there's anything wrong with you. There's nothing wrong with you. It's not because there's anything wrong with your brain. There is nothing wrong with your brain. In fact, you have this incredible, amazing tool at your disposal.

That's what your brain is, it's a tool that you can use to actually change itself. We have to use our brain to change our brain, except nobody ever teaches us how to do this. The reason why it's hard to say no when the

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

## Ep #390: The Hourglass: What the Brain Learns

cravings appear... And this can happen before you start drinking. It can happen once you start drinking... The reason why it's hard is because of the different Drink Archetypes activated behind the scenes.

And if you want to cut back or you want to stop, if you want to have a healthier relationship with alcohol, this piece of it is what you need to understand.

I will tell you this. I was just teaching a class all about drinking less. And someone asked, "Rachel, what if I just like the taste? Can it just be as simple as that? Do we always have to go to this deeper meaning?" And my answer to them, and also to you, if that's what's coming up for you, "What if I just really like the taste? What if I just really enjoy drinking?"

My answer is always, "Okay, yes, you like the taste." I'm not here to dissuade you of that, or trying to convince you that you shouldn't, or that it's bad for you, or that you're consuming poison. I mean, you can listen to me on the podcast talk about how I believe all of these things really backfire.

I'm here to help you explore the piece that you're not exploring. I'm here to encourage you to add 'yes, and' to that idea. Yes, you like the taste. And what else do you like about the drink? Your answer is going to give you so much insight into how the habit works. And if you want to change the habit, if you want to change any habit, right?

But if you want to change the habit of drinking, you have to start with awareness first. So often we dive right into habit change, right? We go right to the part of making a plan or setting rules, but we don't have any understanding of why we're doing the things that we're doing, right? Why the things that we want to change, we don't understand why they're happening.

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

## Ep #390: The Hourglass: What the Brain Learns

And without that information, your attempts at change will be so frustrating. They will be very hit or miss. And you will start to feel like there's something wrong with you, when in fact, nothing is wrong with you. It's just nobody has ever given you a logical framework for understanding all of your actions and understanding how habits form.

We're taught to think about change. In particular, we're taught to think about saying no to our cravings as purely a matter of willpower. It's this idea that you just got to dig deep, and you got to grit your teeth and you got to learn your lesson and not be so stupid next time if you want to say no in the future.

And of course, there is a role that willpower can play. But I think the problem is we treat willpower as if it's this holy grail, right? It's the only thing that we're taught to focus on. And the fact of the matter is that willpower is often a very small piece of the puzzle.

If you want to learn how to have more self-control, if you want to drink less, if you want to be able to say no to your cravings, really, willpower is not the answer. There's a reason why so many people find willpower so hit or miss. It works for a bit, but then it stops working.

Because willpower is never going to be able to address what your brain has learned from drinking. And the brain always is learning whether you realize it or not. Once you started drinking, your brain started learning. It started making associations. It started connecting the dots. This is the piece that you need to work on.

So, in order to do this, one of the ways that I really help people understand this is talking about the think-feel-act cycle. This is something that I've been teaching on the podcast for the past seven years. It's the idea that your actions don't just happen. It may feel like they just happen sometimes.

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

## Ep #390: The Hourglass: What the Brain Learns

It certainly felt that way for me. I would wake up in the morning with no plan, no idea that I was going to drink later in the day, and then it would just happen, right? Or I would start drinking and then I would just keep going back for more and more. It totally felt like it was completely outside of my control.

But the think-feel-act cycle really is a way for you to see that there's always a thought, there's always a feeling. Your body doesn't make a move towards the drink without something unfolding first in your mind. And that piece is so important, because if your actions are outside of your control, then what are you going to do? How are you going to change?

But if you can start to slow it down, and you can start to see, "Hey, wait a minute, there's something else going on here. There's a way that I can intervene if I have awareness of the thoughts and the feelings." And this piece is so key. And one of the things that I haven't necessarily talked as much on the podcast about over these last couple of years is about really helping you identify the results of your drinking.

So, when I talk about the results of how much you drink, people immediately want to go to the physical results, right? That can sound like, "Well, I consumed 500 extra empty calories. I woke up feeling hungover," or maybe they want to go to the results of the impact that it had on their relationships.

All of this is true, but I want you to also pay attention to the result of what your brain learned. So, what we're going to do today, we're going to talk about, specifically, The Hourglass Archetype. We're going to talk about what the brain learns when it is activated. And I'm going to talk about the pieces that you may be overlooking when it comes to change.

Now The Hourglass Archetype, it's all about the brain associating alcohol with entertainment. When either you're bored, or you're looking to pass the

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

## Ep #390: The Hourglass: What the Brain Learns

time, or you just need a way to make a certain situation that you're in a little bit more tolerable.

So, The Hourglass Archetype, it commonly appears during large moments of unstructured time, major life transitions, or when you just kind of dislike what you're doing or who you're with. Through working with so many people, I have found that it tends to show up most often when maybe you're spending a lot of time by yourself.

You might be undergoing shifts related to work or family or relationships or where you live. You might feel obligated to participate in certain activities that you don't particularly like. You might be socializing with people that you feel like you don't have a lot in common with, or you dislike.

And it also shows up a lot for people who travel very frequently for work. When The Hourglass is activated, saying no to a craving will interfere with your desire to avoid boredom. And that is what will make it hard for you to either abstain or to moderate.

So, it's not just a matter of you don't have enough willpower. It's about the idea that it is interfering with this very normal human desire to not feel bored, or to not dislike what you're doing.

I'll tell you this, one of the mindset traps, and there are lots of mindset traps that can come up with The Hourglass, and with all the Archetypes, but one of the mindset traps that I see come up with The Hourglass so often is the thought, "You know, drinking is better than doing this. It's better than what I'm doing."

And so, what I want to help you do is really understand how we end up with that mindset trap. If we can understand how we end up here, we can start to plot out our path out of this. Again, The Hourglass, it teaches the brain

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart



## Ep #390: The Hourglass: What the Brain Learns

that boredom is a problem that must immediately be solved. That piece is really important. It teaches the brain that boredom is a problem that must be immediately solved.

Now, humans have a long history of using alcohol as a form of entertainment. None of this is to suggest that is a bad or negative thing, or that you shouldn't do that. But what I want to help you understand is that the faster that you reach for a drink when you're uninterested in what you're doing, or when you dislike what you're doing, the quicker you will start to feel bored.

This is one of the results that happens from The Hourglass Archetype. So, in order to understand this and understand what your brain learns, I want to walk you through an example of a think-feel-act cycle. We're going to look at the different thought, feeling, and action connected to The Hourglass.

Again, this is an example. I'm going to give you one example thought, it's not the only thought that is connected to this archetype. But what I want you to see is that together, the thoughts, feelings, and actions, they create a learned behavior that then go on to influence your relationship with alcohol and make it challenging to change, if you don't kind of back up and do that internal work on all of the associations your brain has made with a drink.

So, let's just start out from the place of you're here, whatever you're doing, right? You lack interest in your current activity. And in that moment, you may have a thought like, "I might as well drink." I mean, I can't even tell you the number of times that I had this thought in my own life. I was just like, "I don't know, nothing to do. Might as well drink. I don't know. This is boring. Might as well drink.'

'I might as well drink' is just one of those thoughts that I find shows up for so many people in so many different situations. And when you think, "I

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart



## Ep #390: The Hourglass: What the Brain Learns

might as well drink,” you will have that little feeling; generate that little feeling of desire, right? And of course, our actions are motivated by how we feel. When you feel the desire, you will act on that desire. Unless, of course, you start doing the work to interrupt it.

But before we have any inkling that we want to change or drink less or have a different relationship with alcohol, it's kind of like you feel the desire, you act on the desire. So, you have the thought, “I might as well drink,” you feel that desire, and what do you do? You reach for a drink, hoping that alcohol is going to make the situation more entertaining or more enjoyable or more tolerable.

But I think it's really important, and one of the things that I've been stressing as I've been going through this series about what your brain learns. It's for everyone to really focus and pay attention, not just on what you can see, the things you can see that you're doing... It's very easy to see ourselves getting up, going to the kitchen, pouring a drink, or reaching for another.

But I want you to pay attention also to what you are *not* doing. Your *inactions* are just as important for you to be aware of. So, when you reach for the drink, hoping that it will make things more entertaining or make things more tolerable, one of the things that you're not doing is you're not normalizing boredom.

I did a whole podcast episode all about boredom. I think it is such a misunderstood topic, and it comes up so frequently when people are trying to work on numbing behaviors. But what I want you to know is this... You can go back and listen to the whole episode... but know that the human brain is not meant to be constantly stimulated.

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

## Ep #390: The Hourglass: What the Brain Learns

We are not meant to find everything endlessly enjoyable. And in fact, the constant need for stimulation can actually lead to bigger problems. So, that's the first thing that's not happening; you're not normalizing boredom.

You're also not leveraging boredom. I talk about this idea in that podcast episode as well. The idea that boredom is actually something that you can leverage, right? It is a birthplace for new ideas and insights and epiphanies, right? Those things are only possible when your mind has space to think and make new connections.

But if you are constantly trying to find ways to stimulate your brain, guess what's not going to happen? You're not going to have the space for these things. So, it's a very powerful to think, "Huh, I can actually leverage boredom." It can actually be a useful emotional state to be in.

You're probably also not designing a path forward. So, I want you to think about this. If right now, for whatever reason in your life, you're spending a lot of time by yourself and you don't particularly like it, or you're undergoing shifts related to your job or your family or relationship or where you live...

If you're feeling obligated to participate in certain activities, or you're feeling like you have to socialize with people that you don't really have a lot in common with, or you don't really like... If you're on the road all the time... If something about this isn't working, then you've got to design a pathway forward, right?

Just because boredom is a very normal state, and just because it can be leveraged, doesn't mean that we shouldn't also figure out a way to start to adjust and change if certain parts of our life feel like they're not working. But you're not going to design a path forward if you're just drinking over the boredom, right? You're not actually going to be able to do that until you remove the constant stimulation.

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

## Ep #390: The Hourglass: What the Brain Learns

You remove it, and all of a sudden, you're able to be more present with, "Hey, these are the things that aren't working right now." Which at first can feel kind of not so great. That's why a lot of people try to drink over their boredom. Because they don't want to be present with the things in their life that aren't working.

But the fact of the matter is, you have to be present so that you can design a path forward. So that you can clear the space to figure out and brainstorm solutions.

And finally, this is a big thing that I see with The Hourglass Archetype and it's a little counterintuitive, but one of the things that *isn't* happening when you reach for the drink, hoping that the drink is going to make things more entertaining, you're actually not pursuing what lights you up.

There's a difference between consuming and creating your enjoyment. Now, it's not about making these things good or bad, right, or wrong. It's really about just understanding that so often, we don't pursue what lights us up because creating enjoyment, it takes more upfront energy than just consuming it.

It's just like, I can just sit back, I can pour a drink, I can stare at my phone, I can swipe through things, and I can have the TV on in front of me, that takes very little energy. So, creating enjoyment, it takes more upfront energy. But the payoff is so much bigger. This is the action piece of the think-feel-act cycle for The Hourglass.

So, we looked at both what you're doing, your attempt to drink over boredom, and also what you're not doing. All of this then comes together to create your result. Again, your result is not just about how much you consumed. Your result is about what your brain learns.

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

## Ep #390: The Hourglass: What the Brain Learns

And one of the things that I like to do when helping people really understand what your brain is learning, I like for you to understand the difference between a short-term result and a long-term result.

So, the short-term: When The Hourglass is activated and we're trying to drink over our boredom, that feel-good hormone dopamine, it stimulates the brain. That's our short-term result.

But long-term, what happens when we repeat this pattern over and over again? One of the things that happens is that you will be less able to tolerate boredom. You will find yourself getting bored faster. And I want to explain why that is.

So, alcohol makes things more entertaining by stimulating the brain's reward center. The lack of interest or the dislike, that's where you started, all of a sudden that feels a little less acute when you drink because of the release of the feel-good hormone dopamine.

But the thing for you to understand is that for every high, there is a corresponding low. And the entertainment that your brain gets from alcohol, it's short-lived, right? The buzz wears off. So, a single serving, if you're starting out from a place of disinterested or disliking what you're doing, a single serving of alcohol is unlikely to radically change your mood.

And when you don't necessarily get that new feeling that you want, you're more likely to go back for more, right? So, you're more likely to overdrink.

In addition, you are likely experiencing negative emotions about your boredom, right? I talk about this a lot. Sometimes what happens is we have our first emotional experience, and then we have the judgment that then we layer on top of it. Sometimes that judgment comes in the form of annoyance.

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

## Ep #390: The Hourglass: What the Brain Learns

So, you might be thinking, “Oh, I hate having to sit through this.” It might come in the form of anxiety, where you might be sitting there feeling bored and then think to yourself like, “Oh, I guess this is my life now.” It might come in the form of shame. A lot of people will tell me, “You know, Rachel, I have no reason to be bored with my life.” As if it is something that you need to have a reason for rather than just a normal human emotional state.

And because of this, because you have the additional layers of judgment, maybe the annoyance or the anxiety or the shame, alcohol has more to compensate for. So, this is part of it.

You're starting out bored. You're not realizing that you have these additional layers of negative emotion, and this can also contribute to why you may find yourself reaching for more, right? Because you're not just trying to deal with that little bit of boredom, you might be trying to deal with the boredom and the shame that you have no reason to be feeling bored. And something's wrong with you that you're feeling bored, or that this is going to be your life forever.

Here's the thing. Of course, the more that you keep going back for more, the more you drink, the more likely you are to develop a tolerance to alcohol. Again, this is why when you're having major shifts in your life, when all of a sudden... Maybe you were so busy taking care of your kids and all of a sudden, your last kid has gone off to college and now you're an empty nester.

Maybe suddenly you retired. Or maybe you're going through a job transition. When you're in these periods of big transformational shifts in your life, and you're having extended periods of time where you're not necessarily filling it up with activities, or you're not sure what to do, you can get in that habit really quickly.

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

## Ep #390: The Hourglass: What the Brain Learns

Like, “I don't know, let's just open up a bottle of wine.” ‘I don't know, let's just open up a bottle of wine’ the next day and the next day and the next day. But the more that you're doing that, the more likely you are to develop a tolerance. And once a tolerance is developed, you're going to need to drink more to produce the same effect, right?

In other words, it takes more alcohol to replicate the good feelings you used to get from a single glass. And because of this, you may find yourself drinking more in a sitting.

At the same time, your brain has learned to expect the reward of alcohol during specific times or during certain activities. So, maybe after the kids go to bed, or while you're watching TV, right? The brain is always paying attention to what's happening, what's going on. It's trying to remember when is it going to get the reward.

So, the brain learns to expect the reward of alcohol. And guess what? If it doesn't come, now these moments become doubly unpleasant. And without healthy ways to manage boredom, you start to believe, whether consciously or unconsciously, that alcohol is necessary during your downtime. Or it's necessary when you're engaging in activities that you don't particularly like.

The idea of trying to manage these moments on your own, it can actually trigger anxiety. And this added layer of anxiety makes boredom feel even less tolerable. So, even though you don't like experiencing a lack of interest in something, I want you to consider this: Your brain is now incentivized to maintain this state. Your brain is incentivized to feel boredom more often.

Why? Because your brain knows that when you're not interested in something, when you're bored, it now knows that you're more likely to drink. So, the brain will devise a laundry list of reasons of why change is too hard.

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

## Ep #390: The Hourglass: What the Brain Learns

And what happens so often is that we just believe this laundry list instead of realizing, “Wait a minute, maybe part of my brain has been incentivized to prefer feeling bored because then it knows it's going to get a reward.” And because alcohol creates a relatively large dopamine response and takes very little energy or effort to consume it, guess what's going to happen?

Your brain's going to prioritize alcohol over expending energy, or spending time on activities that require more effort. Again, these activities may be more in alignment with who you want to be and your dreams and your goals for yourself, but if you're not realizing that all of this is happening, you'll start to be in this place of wondering, “Oh, I don't understand why I'm not taking any action.”

Not realizing that your brain, if left to its own devices, is just going to prioritize whatever creates the biggest dopamine response with the least amount of effort or energy. And the more you reach for things like alcohol, but of course... By the way, this shows up in so many places outside of alcohol as well.

But the more you reach for things like a drink that create quick and easy and large dopamine responses, the more anxious you'll feel without it. And the less you can tolerate a lack of entertainment or a lack of neural stimulation.

So, what ends up happening? You feel bored faster. The moments without this kind of stimulation feel less and less tolerable. Meanwhile, you're not pursuing what lights you up. You're not learning healthy coping mechanisms for when you feel uninterested, or you dislike what you're doing. As a result, you just keep believing the thought, “I might as well drink,” which reinforces The Hourglass Archetype.

In reality, alcohol is making you less able to tolerate boredom. All of this, I know it's a lot, right? But all of this goes into what the brain is learning. So,

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart



## Ep #390: The Hourglass: What the Brain Learns

if you want to change your relationship with alcohol, if you want to drink less, if you want to stop drinking, if you want to experiment with alcohol-free periods during the year, you can see if The Hourglass archetype is activated.

If you're just throwing willpower at the problem, it's going to be a slog. Willpower is not going to do anything to help you learn how to better handle boredom, or how to better deal with the moments of dislike. What you need is to realize that learning to drink less, with this archetype, it's about so much more than just willpower. It's about so much more than just saying no.

It's about learning how to normalize boredom. It's about learning how to leverage boredom. It's about learning how to manage dislike. By the way, "manage dislike" does not mean that you should like everything. I think this is a really common misconception. It's very normal to dislike certain things. Disliking things is part of what it means to be human. You're not meant to like everyone or enjoy every activity. In fact, your likes and dislikes are part of what make you.

I always think somebody who enjoyed absolutely everything would be a little unsettling. So often, when it comes to disliking certain activities, the real problem isn't that you don't enjoy it. The real problem is what happens after your dislike appears.

Again, this is very similar to what I was talking about with boredom. But you start judging yourself. You start saying, "Oh, well, a good mom wouldn't dread playing blocks with her toddler."

Or you don't give yourself permission to voice your preferences. Maybe it's family movie night and you're thinking to yourself, "If everybody else wants to watch this, I guess I should just go along too."

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

## Ep #390: The Hourglass: What the Brain Learns

Or maybe you're turning your participation in certain activities into a duty or an obligation that you have to uphold. So you start telling yourself, "I have to do this. I have to go. I don't have a choice."

Managing dislike is not about liking everything. It really is, more often than not, just removing all of that judgment that we have around dislike and normalizing it.

In addition to that, you have to learn how to design a path forward. If there are parts of your life right now that you want to change, if you want to spend your free time doing different things, you can't just keep drinking over your boredom.

You have to actually design a pathway forward, knowing that part of your brain, the lower brain, is going to prioritize, "Hey, let's just sit here and have a drink." It's the bigger dopamine reward.

Finally, once you have designed that pathway forward, you actually have to move towards it. You have to take the steps to pursue the things that light you up. Now, on the surface, all of these actions may seem totally unrelated to your drinking. But they're incredibly important.

Yes, you still need to work with your cravings. You still need to learn how to manage them. You still need to learn how to not go to war with them, but you can't do that work in a vacuum.

So, that's a little sample today of the think-feel-act cycle and how it works with The Hourglass. I'm going to be talking about The Release next week. This is the archetype that is all about the brain associating alcohol with freedom.

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

## Ep #390: The Hourglass: What the Brain Learns

But for those of you who know you have The Hourglass Archetype; I want you to try to see what your think-feel-act cycle might look like. Remember, what I gave you today is just one example. It's not the only way that this can show up for you.

What is your go-to thought when The Hourglass is activated? What feeling bubbles up inside of you? Do you notice having a lot of judgment about how you're feeling, in addition to desire? And most importantly, beyond just the act of reaching for a drink, right? Beyond just the actions that you can see, what are the inactions that are less visible to you?

Spend some time considering what you're *not* doing. When you do this, it will really help to show you the best place to start to focus your energy if you want to start doing the work to unravel this archetype and change your relationship with alcohol.

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

Hey guys, you already know that drinking less has plenty of health benefits. But did you know that the work you do to change your relationship with alcohol will help you become more of the person you want to be in every part of your life?

Learning how to manage your brain and your cravings is an investment in your physical, emotional, and personal wellbeing. And that's exactly what's waiting for you when you join my membership *Take a Break*. Whether you want to drink less, drink rarely, or not at all, we'll help you figure out a relationship with alcohol that works for you. We'll show you why rules, drink plans, and Dry January so often fail, and give you the tools you need to feel in control and trust yourself.

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

## **Ep #390: The Hourglass: What the Brain Learns**

So, head on over to [RachelHart.com](http://RachelHart.com) and sign up today, because changing the habit is so much easier when you stop trying to go it alone.