

Ep #391: The Release: What the Brain Learns



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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

Ep #391: The Release: What the Brain Learns

You are listening to the *Take a Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, Episode 391.

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, hello, everybody. I am back again with another episode all about the Drink Archetypes™ and what your brain learns from drinking. I'm going to hammer this home as I always do, but the learning piece is key if you want to change your relationship with alcohol.

Whether you want to drink less. Maybe you want to experiment alcohol-free periods. Maybe you want to stop drinking. Whatever your goal is, you have to remember that your brain is always learning something when you drink. It is learning to associate alcohol with certain settings, activities, and people.

It's also learning to associate alcohol with how you feel before you start drinking and how you feel while you are drinking. This is why the Drink Archetypes matter so much. This is where they come into play, because they are really all about helping you understand this very overlooked part of the puzzle. Part of what we need to both understand and change if you want to change the habit.

So, inside the membership, I just released a new guide outlining the eight different archetypes. I introduced the archetypes about six months ago, and we have been doing so much work. I have loved doing the work with people, for them to really experience the different archetypes and have this awareness and realization about how they're showing up for them.

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

Ep #391: The Release: What the Brain Learns

In the guide, we talk about how each of the eight archetypes work and the different mindset traps, the common obstacles, the deeper desire connected to each archetype, and the superpowers waiting to be unlocked. That's what I think is really beautiful about each one of the Drink Archetypes. They're not necessarily like, "Oh, hey, here's your problem with drinking."

They're really about helping you see that there is something really beautiful and amazing to be gained when you start understanding the archetype and working with it.

And, of course, the guide, I mean, it talks about the fix, because again, something that I really focus on is helping you see that if you want to create change, you have to stop just simply treating your drinking as a numbers game, right? You cannot change your relationship with alcohol, you cannot change your drinking by focusing purely on quantity, purely on how much you drink.

You have to also examine this piece about what your brain is learning, and you have to start to teach your brain something new. That is what is so missing so often.

So, throughout this series, I've been going through the eight different archetypes. We talked first about The Upgrade, which is all about using alcohol to elevate your experience. We talked about The Connector, which is about using a drink to accelerate and form social bonds.

We talked about The Reward. A lot of people are familiar with this when you kind of pour that drink as a treat at the end of the day for working hard, or a sign that you're off the clock and you can stop working. We talked about The Escape, which is all about pouring the drink to avoid certain big emotions.

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

Ep #391: The Release: What the Brain Learns

The Mask, of course, which focuses more on socializing and social anxiety. Last week, we talked about The Hourglass, which is all about pouring a drink to pass the time, when you're bored or when you dislike who you're with or what you're doing.

And today, we're going to be doing a deep dive into The Release. Next week, I'm going to be closing out the series by talking about the final archetype, The Remedy. Which is all about using alcohol to help with things like insomnia, pain, or other kinds of chronic ailments.

But today's all about The Release, right? The Release Archetype is when the brain starts to associate alcohol with freedom. So, when you are drinking, you then allow yourself to speak and feel and act in ways that you would normally censor.

And even if you come to regret how you acted later or what you said later, part of you also kind of craves this. Because this archetype commonly shows up if you feel constrained by certain aspects of your life. You might feel hemmed in by the expectations that are placed on you by your family or your community, or just who society says you should be.

You might feel pressure to fulfill a certain role in your relationships or to provide for people. You might feel trapped by your circumstances. You might struggle with imposter syndrome or having impossibly high standards for yourself.

This archetype can encompass so many different experiences that on the outside look like they have nothing in common, right? You can be looking at the 50-year-old guy who believes he has to maintain a certain image for his family, right? Look at his drinking and compare that with the single 20-something woman who's obsessed with never making a mistake.

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

Ep #391: The Release: What the Brain Learns

On the outside, you might be like, “Well, their drinking has nothing in common. These are two very, very different people.” But when you drill down and get really curious about the archetype that's been activated, you may see, huh, both of them have this Release Archetype. Both of them may be sometimes using a drink as a way to free themselves from all of that pressure that they feel in their lives.

And I will tell you this, I really love The Release Archetype because when I was initially developing these archetypes, after having worked with so many thousands of people, I had the first seven archetypes come to me very, very quickly.

So, they came very quickly, but as I was developing them and writing them down and fleshing them out, I really had this nagging feeling like something is missing. There's something missing here, but I couldn't really put my finger on it.

And when I did, I had this kind of A-ha moment at my desk. I was like, “Oh my God, The Release,” right? It just came to me in this way. There was so much clarity. Because I will tell you, The Release was an archetype that I personally had to do a lot of work on with myself.

Of course, I didn't realize it at the time, but so much of my own journey around drinking, and a lot of different archetypes, appeared for me as they do for most people. But a lot of my journey was really kind of craving, releasing all of these kinds of expectations and beliefs about who I had to be, right?

Feeling like, when I got to drink, when I could be drunk, I just could forget all of that. I could forget all of the pressure that I placed on myself, and I just got to be free.

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

Ep #391: The Release: What the Brain Learns

Now, before we talk about what your brain learns with The Release, which we're going to be doing a deep dive into on this episode, if you have not yet taken the Drink Archetypes Quiz, it is free. It takes less than 10 minutes.

You will get your full report of your top two, your primary and secondary archetypes, and where you fall with the other six. So, I really encourage you to go over to DrinkType.com, and you can take the quiz there. Keep in mind, your drink archetypes, they can change over time. They can change in different situations, right?

They're not set in stone, but they really provide you with such an important framework, such an important blueprint for understanding how to go about changing your drinking in a way that isn't just about setting rules for yourself or trying to count drinks.

Again, the drink archetypes, they're all about helping you move away from solely examining your drinking from the perspective of quantity, or just looking at how much you're consuming, and just trying to change that, right? What I want you to do with these archetypes is start to explore the "why".

Why is saying no to a craving hard? This is a really important question for you to answer. And I promise, your knee-jerk explanation for why it is hard for you to say no... I promise that knee-jerk explanation is wrong. Because most of you think that it's hard for you to say no to a drink when you have that craving, that desire, that urge to have a drink or to have more, right?

Most of you are telling yourselves that there's something wrong with you or there's something wrong with your brain, right? And this isn't your fault that you're telling yourself this, because we have been conditioned to believe this. Society has this tendency to either pathologize or moralize when people give into cravings.

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

Ep #391: The Release: What the Brain Learns

What do I mean by that? I mean, we are told basically, “Oh, well, something must be wrong with your brain. Something is wrong with you.” You have this kind of defective character, right? So, the reason that you are currently giving yourself for why it's hard for you to say no, if you're falling into either of these traps, you're pathologizing the behavior or you're moralizing it, I want you to consider that there's something else going on behind the scenes.

One, I want you to consider the relationship you have with your cravings. I explore this so much on the podcast. I talk so much about how we are trained to have this kind of combative approach to our desires, especially when we believe that our desires aren't serving us. We go into battle with our cravings, right?

If you're always in battle with your cravings, they're always going to be the enemy. If they're always the enemy, guess what happens when they appear? You're always going to have a little bit of anxiety. So, I'm not going to go into this too much today, but this is a big thing that I talk about. Can you actually change your relationships with your cravings? Can you actually view them from a place of non-judgment?

Because if you can't get to that place of non-judgment, it's very hard to be curious about your cravings, and curious about what they may be trying to show you or reveal to you. So, that's the first thing that you need to consider.

The second thing is, what are the reasons for why you are giving into your cravings? Again, it's not because there's something wrong with you or something wrong with your brain. It's because you're not fully aware of the different archetypes that might be activated behind the scenes, right?

So, it seems just like a drink is a drink is a drink. That's not what's going on with your brain. There are different archetypes activated there, and unless

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

Ep #391: The Release: What the Brain Learns

you know what they are and you're doing that work, in addition to the work that you need to do on your cravings, you're always going to be in this place of relying on either willpower or avoidance.

I talk about this a lot. You know there's nothing inherently bad or wrong with willpower or avoidance, right? It's just that these are two limited resources that don't always work equally well in every situation. Most of us don't want to spend our life avoiding things or trying to live in a bubble, right? That doesn't feel very good.

And when it comes to willpower, when it comes to kind of gritting our teeth and just using discipline to say no, well, guess what? It's a limited resource. You're going to get to a point where you're exhausted. It might work for a little bit, but then you'll find that it stops. It stops working. So many people, myself included, find willpower to be very hit or miss for themselves.

And then what do we do? We go on to make it mean, "Oh yeah, something's wrong with me. I just need more willpower. I need more discipline." But willpower is hit or miss precisely because it's not addressing what your brain learns from drinking. The ways in which your brain has learned to use a drink to deal with what you're feeling, to manage some of your emotions, to deal with your cravings, right?

You can't change the associations, the learning that your brain has done around alcohol if you're just focusing on willpower and avoidance. That work of teaching your brain something new, that happens on a different level.

It happens when you start doing the work of the Drink Archetypes. So, in order to do this, what I have been doing for this whole series is really walking you through the think-feel-act cycle for each of the archetypes. Really understanding on a more granular level, what is the thought, the feeling, the action, and then what's the result from that.

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

Ep #391: The Release: What the Brain Learns

I've been teaching about the think-feel-act cycle on the podcast for the last seven years. And I think one of the most important things for all of you to consider when you're using it, what it is doing is helping you understand that your drinking never just happens.

Your body doesn't make a move towards the drink without something unfolding in your mind first. Now, I just want to be very clear, that does not mean that it is your fault if you end up saying yes or giving in or drinking more than you want to. It's not about assigning blame. It is a tool to help you understand the unconscious nature of the habit and figure out ways where you can intervene. It is not a tool about shaming and blaming yourself.

Not only that, the think-feel-act cycle, it helps you identify the results of your drinking. So often we see the results of our drinking simply as how much we drank, or 'I woke up feeling crappy the next day.' What I want you to start to consider is the result of what your brain is learning, the associations your brain is learning to make with alcohol.

Okay, so let's talk about The Release and what the brain learns when it is activated. Again, The Release is all about the brain associating alcohol with freedom and allowing yourself to speak or feel or act in ways that you would normally censor.

Now, one thing that I want to add before we go into this, I will say each of the archetypes has a different mindset trap, and the one that I see come up most common with The Release is the trap of "fuck it," right? This is an excuse that can appear for a lot of different archetypes, it is not exclusive to The Release.

But in my experience, it shows up so often with this particular archetype because it's like, "I'm just so over trying to do X all the time or trying to be Y all the time. Ugh, no more. Just eff it! I'm done with it." So, in order to get

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

Ep #391: The Release: What the Brain Learns

unstuck from that mindset trap, we have to first understand what the brain is learning.

The Release teaches the brain that alcohol is needed to cope with the pressure that you're under. Now, I just want to add here that humans have long used alcohol to push back or rebel against expectations. That is very normal. But the more that you reach for a drink to find freedom from these expectations, or from the pressure that you feel, the more constrained you will feel by the weight of who you're supposed to be.

So, I'm going to explain how this works by giving you an example of the thoughts, feelings, and actions that can show up with The Release. Remember, this is just one example. This is not always the thought or feeling or actions that will show up specifically for you. But I want you to just have an example that we can run through together. And I'm going to use that mindset trap, the thought, "Fuck it."

So, just imagine, in however ways that you might feel constrained, you are feeling constrained by your life. Maybe the expectations that you have for yourself, maybe certain pressures that you feel are constantly bubbling up. Maybe it is the beliefs that you have about who you're supposed to be. But in some way you feel constrained, hemmed in by your life.

When that pressure builds and builds, it gets to be too much. You may have a thought like, "Fuck it." Again, this is not the only thought that will come up, but this is one that I see happening a lot. And in that moment, you feel some desire.

Desire not just to drink, but desire to release the pressure. Desire not to have to care about who you're supposed to be. Desire to let go of all of those expectations. And so, one of the things that we have to always then look at is, "Okay, so my actions don't just spontaneously happen. They are the result of my thoughts and my feelings."

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

Ep #391: The Release: What the Brain Learns

Now, what happens a lot when we look at the think-feel-act cycle related to our drinking, we look at that action and what we focus on really is just the action of drinking. So yes, that's happening here, right? We reach for the drink hoping that we're going to feel some release.

But one of the things that I've been breaking down and helping people explore in this series is also what you're *not* doing. When it comes to the think-feel-act cycle, we have to pay attention both to what we're doing and what we're *not* doing.

So, notice what you're not doing when you have this thought. Number one, you're not dismantling society's expectations, right? Family and community and society all imprint the brain with ideas about what is and is not acceptable according to different criteria. According to how old you are and your gender, your class, your religion, I mean, the list goes on.

But you're not doing the work to dismantle these ideas that you have been given. I want you to consider this. There'd be no need to rebel against expectations if you weren't also letting them dictate how you live your life. So, that's one piece that's not happening here.

Another thing that's not happening, you're not questioning self-imposed expectations, right? There's society's belief about who you're supposed to be, but then there's also your own self-imposed expectations. So, one of the things that I work on a lot with people, so many people who do this work will say, "I just have really high standards for myself."

When I talk about the need for kind of learning to work with mistakes instead of seeing them as flaws, learning to work with your imperfections and accept your imperfections instead of always trying to erase them, people will just say, "But I just have really high standards, Rachel."

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

Ep #391: The Release: What the Brain Learns

And it sounds very admirable, but so often high standards are really just a cover for perfectionist thinking. They're a cover for an intolerance for making mistakes. Because what happens? You make a mistake, you do something wrong, the brain swoops in with all kinds of automatic beliefs and patterning about how this now means something negative about you. How now you are a failure.

We so quickly go from, "I failed" to "I'm a failure." And that is a pattern that not only we have to recognize, but we have to change.

Finally, what else aren't you doing in this think-feel-act cycle? You're not prioritizing your own opinion of yourself. Instead of making that the most important thing, that you like who you are, what do we do instead? We try to live up to who somebody else wants us to be. We're looking to other people for validation rather than believing in our own inherent worthiness.

So, I just want you to notice that all of this is happening. We don't want to just focus on, "Okay, so I had the thought, 'fuck it.' And then, yeah, then I felt the desire and I reached for a drink." But you want to get really curious about what are you not doing when you feel constrained by your life and you're looking for that kind of temporary release in a drink.

That's what's happening, right? That's what's more obvious of what's happening, right? So, I spelled out some of these inactions that are a little bit less obvious for people to see, but you can probably identify how some of those may be showing up or not showing up for you as well.

But then, let's talk about the result. And the result is what your brain is learning. So, short term, yeah, sure, you get that temporary freedom from expectations. You get to lose your inhibitions, and you can just do and speak and act and feel however you want.

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

Ep #391: The Release: What the Brain Learns

Long term though, you're going to feel increasingly constrained by the weight of who you're supposed to be. And I want to break down why exactly this happens. So, let's start with the short term.

Alcohol lowers your inhibitions, right? It slows down activity in your cerebral cortex, the part of you where you have your judgments, where you censor yourself. The more you drink, the less access you have to thoughts that would normally censor your behavior.

And as your blood alcohol levels increase, this effect is going to become more pronounced. So yeah, alcohol is in a way acting a little bit like a pressure valve, in that the more pressure you're under, the greater release that is needed, right? So, it's giving you a little bit of freedom or quiet from that part of you that's constantly telling you how you're supposed to be.

But the more pressure that you're under, the greater the release needed. So, generally speaking, when you have this archetype appear, the effect of one or two drinks is not going to be enough. It's not going to cut it, because it's not going to be enough to radically alter your inhibitions or create that kind of freedom that you're after.

So, I want you to think about it this way. It's kind of like the stronger the facade, the more you're going to need to drink to break through or to free yourself from it. Because of this, The Release Archetype tends to overdrink right out of the gate. You may have several drinks really quickly. You may drink really fast.

You might find yourself wanting to go straight to the “hard stuff”, right? Because intuitively some part of us, usually our more unconscious level, understands that the faster you drink, the faster you'll get drunk. And we want to feel drunk because we want to really slow down that activity in the cerebral cortex. We want to no longer have access to the thoughts that would normally censor our behavior.

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

Ep #391: The Release: What the Brain Learns

Now, the human body can only process a certain amount of alcohol in a given timeframe. So, anything above that amount, it's going to accumulate in your blood and it's going to have a greater effect on the brain. So, it's going to impair your judgment. It's going to increase the chance for conflict or violence, and contributing to memory loss or poor decision making, right? So, that's one of the problems that happens.

If we want to very quickly get that release, if we're drinking really fast, if we're going straight to the hard stuff, we're also increasing the chances that all of these things are going to happen as well.

One of the things that I think is important to understand also, is that while you may regret your actions when drinking, over time you may also start to believe, whether consciously or unconsciously, that getting drunk is really your only outlet to escape intense pressure.

And so, even though you're regretting the actions, if you also believe, "Hey, this is the only way to escape," guess what? You're bound to repeat the same behavior despite the consequences. You may fall into a cycle of drinking to rebel against all of this pressure. And then you may restrict alcohol because you didn't like what you did. So, you restrict it in an effort to kind of punish yourself for "bad behavior", but then what do you do?

You rebel against the rules, right? You don't want to feel too constrained again. And if you have ever been stuck in this cycle... Which by the way, I totally have... of using alcohol as a way to rebel and then punishing yourself for your bad behavior while drinking and setting rules, saying, "Okay, we're not allowed to drink anymore." And then rebelling again, you may feel like your behavior is so illogical because you're not realizing the role that alcohol plays as a release valve in your life.

So, despite the fact that your brain has learned that drinking is a way to kind of unleash the parts of you that feel constrained, what's going to

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

Ep #391: The Release: What the Brain Learns

happen? Over time, this chasm grows. It starts to feel like you may have two selves.

There's the you when you're not drinking, trying to chase after all these expectations and be the person you're supposed to be and live up to this idea, or who you think others want you to be. And then there's the you when you're drinking, and it can feel like... and it certainly felt this way for me... "I don't even know how these people are connected." They just seem so vastly different.

And finally, there's a tendency to be self-critical, that we already talked about, right? Because when we were talking about how alcohol lowers your inhibitions by slowing down activity in your cerebral cortex, that's where all your self-critical thoughts are.

All the thoughts about how the way that you are is not the way that you're supposed to be. But guess what's going to happen? This tendency to be self-critical, it's going to migrate to your choices around alcohol. So, it's now not just about who you're supposed to be and how you're not doing things right, or living the way you're supposed to, or achieving the things that you're supposed to, but now it's going to be self-critical around your drinking.

So, you're going to be self-critical. You're going to worry what others will think if you decide to abstain, if you decide to limit yourself. Or after sobering up the next day, you're going to be self-critical and immediately assume that your behavior was embarrassing or wrong.

Now, meanwhile, the pressure to fit a certain mold or be who you're supposed to be, that just grows. At the same time, so does your need to shed all of these expectations and just be yourself. So, what happens as a result? You keep believing the thought, "Fuck it."

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

Ep #391: The Release: What the Brain Learns

You're never letting go of that thought. And the more that you believe it, the more that it reinforces The Release Archetype, because you have no other way to cope with the pressure that you feel. In reality, alcohol isn't actually a freedom for you. Getting drunk isn't a freedom for you. It's just a temporary forgetting.

So, if you want to change your relationship with alcohol, if you want to drink less, if you want to experiment with periods where you're not drinking, if you want to stop drinking entirely, you can see that just trying to throw willpower or avoidance at this situation or at this archetype, it's going to be a slog. It's not going to work.

Willpower is not going to help you learn how to let go of all the expectations. Avoidance is not going to help you get rid of all those self-critical thoughts about how the way you are isn't right. So, realizing that learning to drink less, learning how to say no to your cravings when you have The Release Archetype, it's about so much more than just saying no.

You cannot just kind of focus on counting drinks or setting rules for yourself and expect that this is going to change, because you have to do the work at the same time of starting to question and dismantle society's expectations. You have to start to question and dismantle your self-imposed expectations. You have to start doing the work of prioritizing your own opinion, and making it be that your opinion of yourself matters the most.

And I will tell you, on the surface, those actions may seem totally unrelated to your drinking, but they are incredibly, incredibly, incredibly important. Yes, you still need to work with your cravings. You still need to learn how to manage them and not go to war with them. But you cannot do that in a vacuum. You have to really focus on this piece about what your brain is learning. All right?

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

Ep #391: The Release: What the Brain Learns

That's just a little sample today of how the think-feel-act cycle works with The Release Archetype. Again, it may be showing up different for you. I encourage you, if you know that The Release Archetype is one of the archetypes that appears for you, I encourage you to get really curious about that.

Try seeing what your own think-feel-act cycle looks like. What is your go-to thought when you just feel all of this need to release the pressure in your life? When that release archetype is activated, what feeling bubbles up for you? And most importantly, think about what you're doing.

Think beyond just reaching for a drink or drinking quickly or reaching immediately for the hard stuff. Think about the actions that you aren't taking. Spending some time considering this is going to show you the best place to focus your energy if you want to start to unravel this archetype and create lasting change. All right?

Next week, I'm going to be wrapping up the series talking about The Remedy, which again is all about pouring a drink to deal with insomnia, pain, injury, or any kind of chronic issue that comes up for you.

That is it for today, everyone. I'll see you all with The Remedy, 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

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

Ep #391: The Release: What the Brain Learns

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.

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