

Ep #400: When People Give You a Hard Time About Not Drinking



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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Have you ever ordered a club soda and had the person you were with give you a hard time? Maybe you casually mentioned that you're going to skip drinks tonight, or not have another round, and someone makes it their mission to change your mind? This is Episode 400, and I'm going to talk about the skill you need to handle these moments and keep your commitment.

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.

The decisions you make around drinking should be personal decisions, but sometimes it can feel like a whole lot of people are weighing in. This includes people who want you to join them for a drink and people who want you to drink less or stop.

And when people weigh in, it can start to feel like these very personal choices aren't that personal at all. So in this episode, I'm talking about what to do when people are disappointed that either you're not drinking or you're not joining them for another round. And why learning to manage what comes up for you when this happens is a really important piece of changing your overall relationship with alcohol.

So I always say, no matter your goal when it comes to drinking ... Maybe you want to drink less. Maybe you want to experiment with alcohol-free periods. Maybe you want to stop altogether ... Whatever your goal is, your ability to succeed has a lot less to do with willpower and a lot more to do with identifying and changing the unconscious association your brain has with alcohol.

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This is a piece of the puzzle that so often is overlooked. I overlooked this for the longest time, and it's why I spent years and years struggling.

Now, I will say, dealing with other people's disappointment comes up most frequently with two of the drink archetypes. First is The Connector, which is when your brain associates alcohol with creating, strengthening or maintaining certain bonds. It also comes up a lot with The Mask archetype, which is when your brain associates alcohol with feeling confident around others or at ease in social situations.

So if you know that The Connector or The Mask archetypes show up for you, listen to this episode for sure. By the way, if you don't know or you're not sure what your drink archetypes are, you can just go take the quiz and get your free results at DrinkType.com.

And even if your primary and secondary archetypes aren't The Connector or The Mask, I really encourage you to still listen today. Because not wanting to disappoint others is something pretty universal that most people struggle with at some point in their life. And you may struggle with it in areas that are unrelated to alcohol. But what I'm going to teach you today, I promise will help.

So right now, if you're listening, you probably know who the people are in your life who give you a hard time if you say that you're not going to drink or if you decline another round. I mean, most of us, right? We already know who those people are. I had a lot of versions of these people in my life. Some were old friends, some were colleagues.

And to be truthful, I was often this person to other people. I was often the person that was giving people a hard time because I wanted people to drink and have another with me. And as long as that happened, then I

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didn't have to look too closely at my own choices. So I could say to myself, "Well, it's not just me. We all decided to get drinks after work. We all decided to order another bottle."

So I've been on both sides of this equation. But when I decided, "Okay Rachel, you've really got to figure out your drinking," I was struggling with it for so many years. And I got to a point where I realized that setting more rules and restrictions, that was not the solution.

I could see how many times I had done that and that had just failed. So I knew that that wasn't the key to figuring this out. I knew that I had to figure out why I had a hard time saying no in certain situations. I needed to figure out why I always seem to want more. I knew I needed to understand why the idea of removing alcohol from my life forever felt like a death sentence, because back then it truly did.

So those were all very important things that I knew needed my attention. But I also knew that I had to figure out how to deal with people in my life who were disappointed when I said no. And I had to figure out how to do it in a sustainable way because I did not want to hide out forever. I had experience of hiding out from people as a way not to drink and it wasn't sustainable.

I didn't want to give up my social life. For me, when I decided to really take this seriously, and really kind of stop just doing rules and restrictions and waking up after a bad night and being like, "Ugh, I'm never drinking again." When I decided, "Okay, I've really got to dig in here and figure out what's going on." I will tell you that was about 12 years ago for me. I wasn't even sure what my ultimate goal was with alcohol.

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I knew, back then, that I needed to have some time off from drinking. That much was really clear to me. But I also definitely did not want to swear it off for the rest of my life. And in fact, 12 years later, I have not sworn it off completely. Occasionally, I will have a drink. And when I say “occasional”, it truly is very infrequent.

So we are almost at the end of the year, and I have had alcohol on two occasions this year. Both times, when I decided to drink, I had a single drink. Which I will tell you is pretty damn remarkable, at least for me. For the longest time, I truly believed deep in my bones that alcohol made everything better. I really believe that more was always better.

I always used to be the fastest drinker at the table. Now I am almost always the slowest. And I could not imagine on Earth why someone would have a single drink and then just be done. To me, that was just inconceivable. It was like, “Well, what is even the point of drinking?”

Anyways, 12 years ago, when I was really determined that I was finally going to figure this out, I knew I needed to figure out how to handle these moments where I was saying no and people were disappointed, giving me a hard time sometimes, and really trying to get me to change my decision.

Now, for me, there is one person who really sticks out in my mind. It was a colleague of mine in our London office. Back then I was living and working in New York City. I would travel overseas a lot. And whenever I would visit our London office, one of my colleagues would take me out for drinks.

In fact, our first kind of friendship started with us bonding together over drinks. And so that was a routine that we were really in. After work she would take me out to a pub and invariably one drink would lead to more. And lead to more. I would end up stumbling back to my hotel. The next day,

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we'd see each other in the office. We'd meet up in the kitchen kind of bleary eyed in front of the coffee machine and just commiserate about how terrible we felt from the night before. And that was kind of our pattern.

I will tell you, I really liked this colleague of mine. But once I decided that I needed to make a change, I dreaded seeing her. I dreaded being sent to the London office because I had had the experience with her of moments when I would order a club soda and she would roll her eyes, or she would complain that I was making her drink by herself and I wasn't being any fun.

She would remind me that we rarely get to hang out together because we work in different cities. She would swear we'd just have one. She was kind of relentless. And again, to be fair, I have totally been on the other side as well; being kind of relentless myself and giving people a hard time for not joining in. So this isn't a criticism of her.

I think it's really a reflection of how powerful the drink archetypes can be. Because looking back, I will say I really think that The Connector archetype was activated very strongly for both of us in these moments. So I will tell you, when she was around, keeping my commitment was not easy. And often I caved because I just didn't want to deal with her disappointment. It just felt easier.

Even though I had promised myself, "You know what, Rachel? You're not drinking." I had made a promise to myself. I had made a commitment. But it felt easier to break that commitment to myself than it did to deal with her feelings and her disappointment around me saying no.

Eventually I realized no matter how much I cared about our friendship, I needed to care about myself more. I had to figure out how to do what was right for me, even if that was going to make her unhappy. But learning how

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to care about myself more and how not to cave, it meant that, at first, I was going to feel really awkward and uncomfortable saying no and keeping this commitment.

And I think when it comes to drinking and the people in our lives, often one of the messages that we get when we decide, “Okay, you know what? I need to change. I want to drink less. I want to have a period where I'm alcohol free. I want to stop drinking,” we decide to change, one of the messages that we get about other people is, “Ah, screw them,” right?

Like if they're not going to support you, they're not worth it, right? If they're not going to support your choices, then they're not a good friend. You don't need them. And I will tell you, I understand the sentiment behind these statements. because of course your health and what is right for you, there is nothing more important than those two things in life.

But if you're like me... And it truly, back then, felt like every single person in my social circle drank. It really felt like entertaining and going out for drinks was a big part of my job or a big part of my relationship, right? If you're in that position as well, it can feel really daunting to be, “Well, screw them. I don't need them.”

I was like, “Okay, so I'm supposed to find a whole new friend group and a new job and a new relationship, on top of figuring out my drinking?” Because that felt totally and utterly impossible.

So what I want to suggest is that instead of being like, “Screw them,” and instead of figuring out how to surround yourself only with people who are 100% supportive of the decisions you make around alcohol, you can instead practice learning how to weather someone's disappointment.

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This truly is a skill. Because I will tell you, it's going to feel uncomfortable at first, especially if you don't enjoy saying no to people or if you really focus on putting other people's needs ahead of your own. It's going to feel uncomfortable.

But there is such a benefit to practicing and mastering this skill. Because not only is it going to help you keep your commitments around alcohol, not only is it going to make it easier for you to say no, it's going to help with pretty much every aspect of your life.

That is what I love so much about the work that I teach around changing your drinking and changing your relationship with alcohol. I see these skills as really meta skills that we get to apply to all areas of our life. That really very, very rarely do I teach something that I think, "Oh, this only applies with alcohol."

So not only is this a really important skill, but beyond that, it's just going to help you be more of your authentic self. And I think that that's something that all of us strive for and want deep down, to just be more of who we are and feel like we're being more of our authentic selves.

When you're saying yes to a drink ... And again, yes to really anything ... And you're doing this in part to please someone else, you're not being true to yourself. Now, again, this is not to say that you're only saying yes to the drink because of this only person. I'm not saying that you're sitting there with zero desire for the drink.

But if you are someone who feels like it's a lot easier to say no to the drink, or it's a lot easier to limit myself when I'm either by myself or I'm not around certain people, then I want you to consider that part of what is at play is wanting to make others happy. And wanting to make others happy is

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always going to lead to saying yes to things when there is a part of you that may want to say no.

Back then, when I was traveling to London ... And by the way, this didn't only happen for me there. I had plenty of people in New York who also gave me a hard time. But when I was making these trips and seeing this colleague and invariably disappointing her ... I learned only after the fact, of course ... But I learned that figuring out how to weather her disappointment was actually a much bigger life skill that I just didn't have.

So I think a place where a lot of people get confused is we think about holding a boundary as about being really strong. Like, "I've got to hold that boundary."

And, really, what this helped me shift and understand was that holding a boundary, keeping a commitment that I had made to myself, was a lot less about being strong, and it was much more about the ability to feel and allow the uncomfortable sensations that came up when I believed I was disappointing someone, I was making someone else unhappy. To allow those sensations. To know that I could be safe feeling them and not cave in an attempt to make those sensations and those feelings go away.

This is a huge skill that pertains to so much in our lives. The more comfortable you are with uncomfortable sensations in your body, the better able you will be to hold a boundary around anything. And the better able you will be to keep your commitments around anything. And then, guess what? The more you will feel like you are being true and authentic to who you really are.

So how do you do this? Okay, well, I know a lot of you out there are listening, you guys, have a copy of *The Ultimate Guide to Drinking Less*. So

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I have all sorts of exercises, both for The Connector and for The Mask, that deal with this particular situation.

I will say also, I have exercises in here that really help you deal with and start to practice feeling and allowing uncomfortable sensations in your body and normalizing them. But what I want to focus on in this episode is really the skill of learning to distinguish disappointment from rejection.

This is something that I had so confused for the longest time. I find that most people have these two things confused. Because if you don't like letting people down, I guarantee that you are also confusing these two things. And learning how to distinguish between disappointment and rejection is not only incredibly powerful, but it's going to help you in so many areas.

And I will just say, this is still an ongoing practice for me. This is still something that I am continually working on building the muscle when it comes to this skill.

Yes, sometimes people will be disappointed when you say no to a drink, when you say no to another round. That is normal. I want you to really sit with that. It's totally, 100%, completely normal for someone to feel disappointed when you don't join them for a drink or when you say no to another round. You've probably been taught to see this as not normal.

We kind of walk around thinking that normal is when other people are 100% supportive of all of our decisions. Friends, no one is going to be 100% supportive of all of your decisions. It is actually abnormal to expect that in order for us to feel comfortable making a decision we need to have everyone on board. So that is really the first thing, starting to see the disappointment that they are expressing as normal.

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They'd rather that you do what they are doing because if you say yes, then there's not going to be this moment of pause for them to think to themselves, "Well, should I be drinking too? What does this mean about me if I go ahead and have the drink and the other person doesn't join in?"

When everybody does the same thing, we get to skip that moment of pause. We get to skip that moment of having to analyze our own behavior. A lot of people will contort themselves in all sorts of ways not to have to examine their drinking or their own relationship with alcohol.

So I just want to say there's a lot of messaging that we get about drinking with others: It's a social behavior, and that's fine and perfectly normal, but drinking on your own is cause for concern. Now, I'm not buying into these messages or advocating that they're correct. I just want you to acknowledge that they're there. They are in the air that we breathe.

And when you make choices, if you make a choice to say no or 'I'm not having another,' it may disrupt somebody else's own calculations about what is okay for them to do, when it's okay for them to drink, and when it's not. So if someone really wants you to drink with them, it's worth it for you to pause and consider that their disappointment, not only is it normal, but also to start to distinguish it from seeing it as a rejection of you.

This is where I got very confused. I definitely didn't see it as normal, and I very quickly turned their disappointment into a rejection of me. This is what the human brain wants to do. The human brain wants to jump to personal rejection because the other person had a negative reaction to what I said. Because they wished that I would do something different.

What does my brain want to immediately jump to? "Ugh, I'm being weird. I'm making things awkward. I'm being a buzzkill. I'm doing something

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wrong. They don't like me.” The human brain is very good about turning situations to be all about you. When really, someone's feelings about whether or not you drink, it's all about them. It has nothing to do with you.

Now, I do think that we play a role, we play a role in what happens next, and what the ultimate kind of experience of being with other people is like when we say no. So when people in my life would say, “Oh, Rachel, have a drink. You're not being any fun. Have another, don't be a buzzkill,” I believed for the longest time that the truth was I wasn't fun if I wasn't drinking, right?

So this is something that just had me, for the longest time, feel so stuck. Because I truly believe that they were kind of speaking the truth when they said that I wasn't being any fun. What I didn't realize was happening underneath the hood, so to speak, of my brain, was that I wasn't fun sometimes, but that had nothing to do with me not drinking. It had to do with the fact that I was confusing someone's disappointment with a rejection of me.

And when I confused those two things, when I saw someone's disappointment and I said, “Whoa, that's not normal,” and then immediately made it, “I'm weird. I'm making things awkward. I'm being a buzzkill. I'm doing something wrong. They obviously don't like me,” then what would happen? I became not a lot of fun, right?

When you're having all of those thoughts about something is wrong with you, how you're doing something weird, or you're doing something abnormal, or you're being a buzzkill, guess what you're doing? You are hanging out in your head with your inner critic. That is a real cause of your disconnection. That was what was truthfully making me not a lot of fun when I would decide not to drink.

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Not because I turned down the drink, but because my inner critic went wild and I was just sitting there kind of listening to it. Believing that it was just speaking the God's honest truth about me. Because here's the thing, when you see yourself as separate from the group, what do you do? You withdraw. You don't make as much eye contact. You're not fully there. You aren't fully listening or engaging because you're stuck in your head listening to all your negative thoughts, right? And so, then, you clam up.

That's what I would do. I would clam up, and I would blame my lack of connection on the fact that I wasn't drinking. When, in fact, my lack of connection came from everything that was unfolding inside of me.

So, so much of working with The Connector and The Masked Archetypes isn't just about saying no to your desire or your cravings or your excuses, it's about being able to distinguish between disappointment and rejection, and realizing ... I mean this is just powerful in and of itself ... realizing how often you immediately go from, "This is a rejection of me," when in fact someone is just experiencing totally normal disappointment. Which means nothing about you, right?

You've got to do that, and you've got to understand how when you're doing that, when you turn someone's very normal disappointment into a rejection of you, that that is what gets in the way of connection. It is not the fact that you are saying no to a drink. It is not the fact that you're not agreeing to have another round.

Those things are not what's blocking connection. Those things are not what's making it so you're no longer fun to hang out with. It's confusing these two things. It's the inability to distinguish between them. In these moments, especially with The Connector and The Mask, you have to really

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teach your brain how to be curious about others rather than fixating on yourself.

Your brain is not going to want to do that. It's not going to automatically be curious about others, that's something that you have to really practice and teach it to do. I will tell you, I'm looking at it right now, I have this little pink Post-it on my computer that says: Stop making this about you.

It is a reminder that I always try to give myself in pretty much every area of my life. Because my brain, the human brain, just wants to make everything about me and my deficiencies and my problems and what I'm doing wrong, and I have to be on top of it.

I have to remind myself, "Hey Rachel, not everything's about you." I think this is a really powerful place to practice that. Alright?

Finally, one of the reasons why I love The Connector and The Mask archetypes so much is because every archetype has a deeper desire connected to them. And the deeper desire is really kind of helping you to see an additional desire, what you're wanting in that moment, beyond just, "I like the taste of Chardonnay. I like the buzz that I get," to really understand that there's always a deeper desire at play.

For The Connector, the deeper desire is belonging. For The Mask, the deeper desire is self-appreciation. Two things that we all want more of, right? We all want to feel more like we always belong, that we fully appreciate ourselves and can appreciate ourselves. And I will tell you this, those two things that we want, belonging and self-appreciation, they're ultimately not going to be found in what you're drinking. They will be found when you start working with the archetypes.

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So the next time someone gives you a hard time about not drinking, you don't have to replace all of your friends. You don't have to avoid the situation. In fact, I recommend that you don't. This is a moment for you to step back and see, am I confusing their disappointment with a rejection of me or a rejection of the relationship? Can I actually pause and normalize their disappointment instead of assuming the only way I can be successful is if everyone is 100% on board with all of my choices?

And more importantly, can you start to normalize the uncomfortable sensations that come up when you say no? When you put your needs first? This is a skill that you need. Not just in order to be successful with your goal around drinking, but this is a skill that you need in life. When you practice doing these things, it's going to get so much easier for you to keep your commitments.

And here's the thing, if you want more exercises, check out the *Ultimate Guide to Drinking Less*. This is really where I go deep into the drink archetypes, and the exercises for each, that go beyond this kind of “just say no” mentality. And I show you how to start identifying and shifting and changing all of these associations that your brain has made with alcohol and with drinking.

I really want you to start to see the work that you are doing, this work to change your drinking, as work that you are doing to learn skills that are going to help you in all areas of life, right? And here, this one in particular, this skill of learning how to do what's best for you rather than always kind of deferring to what you think is going to make somebody else happy, that is a skill that we all need more of.

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

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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.

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.