

Ep #403: Drinking and Feeling Like an Adult



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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When you're not drinking, does it sometimes feel like you're sitting at the kids' table? Everybody else has wine and you're stuck with sparkling water. Maybe you're trying to convince yourself how healthy you're being, but deep down, you can't shake the sensation that the meal, the experience, the setting, no longer feels as special or fancy or sophisticated without alcohol. This can be a real stumbling block when it comes to drinking less.

So, in Episode 403, I'm helping you understand how the messages we get from TV, movies, and marketers not only influence your relationship with alcohol, but can make it hard to change the habit *unless* you make one important mindset shift.

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.

Because this is a high season for parties, fancy meals, and get togethers, I decided to revisit an episode, from 2018, all about why drinking feels special, and how this can get in the way of your goal to drink less or not drink at all.

I want you to listen to this episode so that you can understand how your brain learned to outsource certain beliefs about adulthood to the contents of your glass. It's a lot easier to say no to a drink when what you're drinking doesn't make you feel like a kid. And knowing how to do this without demonizing alcohol makes it so much easier to enjoy social situations when you're not drinking.

My husband loves *Top Chef*, if you've ever watched that show before. We were watching it the other weekend, and this ad came on for San Pellegrino sparkling water. And it's funny, because you know what? I barely

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see ads on TV anymore, right? Everything's on demand, and you can fast forward through everything.

But for whatever reason, I caught this ad for San Pellegrino. It started playing and I was just immediately, completely transfixed. I'm going to make sure that there's a link to the ad in the podcast notes so that you can watch it as well. But let me describe it.

So the ad starts out, and there are all these stylish men and really chic women in a really beautifully decorated apartment, and they look like they're about to head out on the town. They flip a bottle cap, a bottle cap for San Pellegrino, on a map, and it lands on Milan. And so, next, you see them in this beautiful restaurant eating dinner, drinking sparkling water.

And then they're in Greece, hanging out on the beach. And then they're in New York City, headed to an outdoor bar. And then Tokyo, and Dubai, and Buenos Aires, and finally Shanghai. And they're doing all these fun, sexy, chic things, drinking sparkling water. And all the while, they look really sexy, and sophisticated, and relaxed, and worldly.

When the ad finished, I turned to my husband, and I was like, "Did you see that? No, seriously, did you see that? They just advertised sparkling water as if it were alcohol." Everything about the ad screamed fun, chic, celebratory. They made sparkling water look desirable. And it didn't even have a wedge of lime. I don't think there was a wedge of lime to be seen in the entire ad.

And this just blew my mind because I'd never seen anything like it before. So I talk to you guys all the time about how the thoughts that we have about alcohol, and the thoughts that we have about drinking, those thoughts create our desire, right? And that desire then drives the action of drinking.

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So we really have to understand the thoughts because that is what is fueling the habit cycle for us. And a huge part, a huge part of the thoughts that we have about alcohol and about drinking come from advertising. They come from what we see in TV. They come from what we see on TV shows and movies.

And drinking is always portrayed as this fancy, sophisticated thing, right? It's expensive, and it's adult, and it's worldly. And that's why the ad for San Pellegrino made such an impression on me. Because I was there like, "Whoa, wait." What if all ads about sparkling water were like this?

What if they were showing these really attractive people who were having fun at night ... not just during the day, guys ... fun at night, at restaurants and bars, and they were sexy and celebratory and relaxed and chic? What if you saw images like that all the time in the media, of people acting that way and drinking sparkling water?

Very quickly, your brain would be like, "I kind of feel a little different about seltzer," right? It would make such a big difference. And the reason why I want to talk to you guys about that ad, it's because I want to talk to you today about what makes something fancy or sophisticated or special. Because so many of you, when you are taking a break from drinking, struggle with this issue, right?

You get to that point where you're like, "Listen, I want to take a break. I don't like the consequences that I'm getting. I want to understand this habit. I want to understand why I have this pull to drink." And when you start to dig in, you realize how much of your desire is fueled by thoughts like, "Drinking is sexy and fancy and special and sophisticated and adult."

And so much of it is because we're all socialized to view alcohol in this way. We have not been exposed to ads like the one that I saw for San Pellegrino, right? Talking about sparkling water as if it could also be fancy

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and special and adult and sophisticated; which is why the ad really jumped out to me.

But I want to really dig into this topic today because I know that for so many of you this is a stumbling block. You take a break from drinking and you feel like, “Ugh, I'm at the kids table. This isn't as special. This isn't as fancy. This isn't as sophisticated.” And so I want you to really understand what makes something, not just alcohol, what makes anything in our world fancy and special and sophisticated.

I want you to really start to understand, and start to think about how is it that so many of us have come to associate these terms, these ideas with alcohol, and how you can start to shift these thoughts, these beliefs if part of what is holding you back is that not drinking and taking a break is kind of boring, plain and ordinary and unrefined.

Because if you hang onto those thoughts, trust me, you will always be feeling like you're sitting at the kids' table. You will always feel like you are missing out. And that is not sustainable, my friends.

So listen, I want you guys to take a guess: What do you think makes something ... anything, not just alcohol ... feel fancy or special or sophisticated? If this isn't your very first podcast episode you may have a clue. It's your thoughts, right?

When you are engaging in an activity, and you have thoughts like, “This is so special. Ooh, how lucky we are. Ooh, how exciting,” you're going to feel like this is fancy or sophisticated or special, right? Whatever you're doing takes on this air of privilege because of the thoughts that you're having about what you are doing.

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I was actually thinking about this a lot recently at a friend's birthday party. My husband and I, we went out with a friend of his from college and his wife to celebrate their 40th birthday. It's actually my husband's 40th birthday and his friend's 40th birthday; they're pretty close together.

So we ended up deciding that we were going to go out to a restaurant in San Francisco and it happened to be a Michelin Star restaurant. It was one of those places where you do a tasting menu that lasts four hours, right? A really long meal; I think we had something like 14 courses. And you will not be surprised to know, of course, there was a wine pairing, which I did not do.

But there was a wine pairing, and our friends did the wine pairing. It was fascinating for me to watch the sommelier at work. We had this wonderful time, and I was loving the dinner, but I was also... I can never turn off my brain when it comes to really wanting to understand how it is that we're socialized to view alcohol and how it is that we have very similar thoughts around drinking. And so I was just fascinated by the entire experience of the wine pairing, which of course I've done before when I was drinking.

Anyway, the wine pairing is, first off, not cheap. It's almost \$200 per person. You're spending a lot of money on wine. It's almost as much as the tasting menu itself. And so most people are going to feel like, "Listen, I want to get my money's worth." And that is part of the sommelier's job, right?

I mean, yes, his job is to ensure that whatever you're currently eating, whatever course you're on, is paired with something that the wine will compliment. But he's also there to make you feel like you're getting your money's worth, right? So with every new glass, he would come over and he would spend a couple minutes with the table, presenting the bottle and talking about where it's from and the taste and the color and why it complements the dish.

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He was giving you this whole story of the wine, right? The vintage and how rare it is and where it's grown and what the soil is like. I mean, the guy is an expert. He knows what he is talking about.

I was watching it, and I was like, "He is giving us all these thoughts to think about the alcohol, all the thoughts about how fancy it is or how special it is or how sophisticated or rare it is." That's his job, right? He is there to not just help pair wines with certain foods, but he's there to help the restaurant make money by selling wine. And my brain was just fascinated by it.

Because I was thinking, "Here we are at this fancy restaurant with a sommelier who's talking about these wine pairings. And it really is the end result of, thousands of years ago, humans figuring out how to harness fermentation, figuring out how to make alcoholic beverages. And here we are sitting in this restaurant, having these bottles presented to us like they were the most rare, unbelievable things you had ever come across."

And one of the reasons that all of that happened, that we were sitting in the restaurant, that restaurants can make a lot of money on wine pairings, is because the brain likes dopamine. Harnessing fermentation thousands of years ago helped humans figure out how to deliver a concentrated reward of dopamine to the brain.

And now here we are sitting in a restaurant in San Francisco, many, many moons later, and there's all this story and buildup and specialness attached to drinking, attached to alcohol. And the thing, for me, that was really interesting was that my brain used to believe all of these thoughts too. All of it about being special and fancy and sophisticated, right?

Which of course creates all this desire. And now it just rolls right off me. And not in a judgmental way, but just in like, "Oh, that's not what I want. That's not what I'm here for. I'm here for something else. I'm here for the

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company. I'm here for the experience. But the experience of being really present.”

And so what I want you to consider is this: Anything, and I mean anything, can be special, can be fancy, can be sophisticated. It depends solely on what you think about it. I'm not just talking about sparkling water, right? I'm not just talking about that San Pellegrino ad.

I actually think that I have a really good example for you guys to really get this concept. Because when I was growing up, and this is still the case, my dad is a very avid collector of coins. Which, by the way, if you do not know, a coin collector is called ... and I can barely pronounce this word ... a numismatist.

So when I was growing up, we got a magazine at home called *Numismatic News*, which had all the latest information about collecting coins in the U.S. My dad loves coins, and he started collecting them probably when I was around nine or 10 years old.

His very first collection was with Lincoln pennies; those pennies that you guys get in your change and you just toss away because you think that they're worthless. That was his first collection. He has since moved on to bigger and better things, to coins called “large cents”, which were minted. Well, the ones that he collects, they were minted prior to this. The ones that he collects are from 1816 to 1839. But he started out with just your average penny. That was his first collection.

Now I want you to think about this. Because most of you listening, and I would venture to guess most people in the United States think that pennies are pretty worthless, right? We do not think that pennies are special at all. When you get a handful of change from a cashier, and you look down and you see all these pennies, it's like, “Ugh, why did you give me all these pennies?”

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There's even a movement ... and this kind of breaks my heart, I've got to tell you, as a daughter of a coin collector ... to get rid of the penny. And I understand there are all these economic reasons behind it that make a lot of sense. But I have to tell you that inside, I'm like, "No, save the penny. Don't get rid of the penny. I love the penny!"

Because here's the thing, I grew up believing that pennies were incredibly special. Every time we would get change, whenever we were at the store together, there was this possibility of, "Oh my gosh, we could have a great find." I want you to think about that. How often do you get a penny and you're like, "Ooh, what do I have here?" That's what it was like for me growing up with my dad.

Not only that, I quickly learned from him that there was so much to discover if you were willing to look closely at a coin. You could find out where it was minted in the U.S. You could find out how long it had been in circulation. And you know what? It was not that uncommon to find coins that were currently in circulation that weren't supposed to be.

You could find mercury dimes sometimes, in the handful of change that you got. You could find "wheat pennies". You could find these coins that were like, wow, where'd this come from? Why am I even getting it? And every time that we would get a handful of change, when I was a little girl my dad would say, "Rachel, today could be the day. Today could be the day that we could find the 1955 Double Die."

For those of you who are not schooled on Lincoln pennies, the 1955 Double Die is this very famous and rare penny. Basically, because when it was minted ... and it was actually minted in Philadelphia, in 1955 ... it was struck twice. In a way that the letters and numbers surrounding Lincoln's bust, the words that say "Liberty" and "In God We Trust" and the date "1955", they all appear kind of twice on the face of the coin.

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If you look for it you can find a picture of it online. If you look at it, it's almost like you have double vision. [DELETE 0:17:14.9 when you're looking at it] And guess what? The 1955 Double Die is worth way more than a penny. It's worth way more than one cent. It's probably more like a thousand bucks for a good one. And that's what my dad would say to me, "Rachel, today could be the day. Today could be the day we could find the 1955 Double Die."

And so coins, to me, pennies, to me, that for most people are just ordinary and worthless and you throw them away... Like, "Ugh, who even wants this?" ... they were fancy and sophisticated and special. And that just goes to show you that really anything can become fancier, sophisticated, or special depending on how you think about it.

I think this is such a good lesson. It's such a good lesson and a way to see that it really is what you believe, what you think about something, that makes it special or fancy or sophisticated. All of that is created in your thinking. It's all about the story that you tell yourself about something.

But now, here's the thing, most of us are just bombarded by images of alcohol and drinking as being something that is special and fancy and sophisticated. We get these messages all the time. And we get them in very subtle ways. So it's no surprise that so many of us have trouble kind of shaking free or shaking loose of this idea.

I think about it with the TV shows that we watch, right? You think of Carrie Bradshaw and her cosmopolitans on *Sex and the City*. Or if you watch *Scandal* and you see Olivia Pope drinking red wine from these huge, huge wine glasses. Or if you ever watched *Mad Men* and Don Draper drinking an Old Fashioned, right?

We're always getting these very subtle messages about what drinking means, about what it is, about what it reflects on us as a person. It comes

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from books, it comes from TV, it comes from movies, and it comes from advertising.

And now, here's the thing, we all get even more of it thanks to social media. How often are you scrolling through your feed on Facebook or Instagram and you see friends talking about drinking, or taking pictures of what they're drinking, or talking about how they can't wait to have a drink? Our brain is getting bombarded with all these messages about alcohol, what it means, what it means to be a drinker, and what it means not to be a drinker.

And so you have to recognize that. You have to recognize that alcohol is not inherently special, fancy, or sophisticated. We have a lot of thoughts about how it is this way, and those thoughts come from so many different places. But the more you pay attention, the more you see, "God, they're coming all the time."

That's why that San Pellegrino ad really stuck out to me. Because I was like, "Whoa, sparkling water. That's crazy. We don't usually see sparkling water messaged to us in that way." So the question for you is, if you want to change your drinking, but you are held back by the sense of 'oh, I don't want to be a fuddy duddy. I don't want to be a buzzkill. I feel like I'm at the kids' table,' what do you do?

And what you have to do is start to really challenge these beliefs, that not drinking somehow is plain or ordinary or unsophisticated or unrefined. You have to recognize that you, and everyone really, we've all been programmed to see drinking as this special, fancy, sophisticated thing. Because here's the thing, the fancier it is, the more sophisticated it is, the more special it is. It helps to sell it, right?

There's a reason why advertisers pick specific messages. These messages help sell alcohol. And listen, alcohol is a \$475 billion industry, and that's

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just in the U.S. It's a huge, huge industry. So, first, you have to recognize that alcohol is not inherently anything. It's neutral.

What you think about it comes from what thoughts you have. And what thoughts you have may come, in large part, from how you have been socialized to view alcohol. Not just from TV, not just from books and movies, but also from advertisers, right? What do they want you to think about drinking in order to get you to buy alcohol?

You also need to recognize that because in this country there is an age requirement in order to drink, at a young age most of us start to acquire thoughts that drinking is “adult”. So guess what happens? If you take a break, you're going to run headfirst into your thoughts about how you're doing something that is not “adult”. Right?

You're going to run headfirst into, “Oh great, so now I'm at the kids' table drinking a Shirley Temple,” right? So just expect that. And it's not because it's true, it's because we've been socialized to see it that way.

So if you feel like something is missing from a meal if you don't have a fancy drink, well, start to understand that what's really happening is the thoughts you have about drinking seltzer, drinking club soda, drinking sparkling water, instead of having a glass of wine or a cocktail. Not drinking only diminishes your adult-ness if you hold on to the thoughts ‘drinking is sophisticated, drinking is adult,’ if you don't ever question them or challenge them.

This is something I had to do. And it's something that, frankly, everyone I work with, who wants to really sustainably change their drinking, has to do as well. So the real thing that you have to start to question, and you have to start to recognize is, why do you think that drinking and alcohol is fancy or elegant or worldly or sophisticated? Where did these thoughts come from?

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What are you making your drinking or not drinking mean about you? What are you telling yourself when you're drinking sparkling water instead of a cocktail? What are you making that choice mean about you? And if you notice thoughts about how drinking is fancy, and drinking is sophisticated, and drinking is special, then you have to decide, do I want to be these things because of what is in my glass, or do I want to possess these qualities on my own?

Do I want to start to develop making things in my life special, being more sophisticated, making things fancier? Do I want to become these things, or do I want to outsource the responsibility to what I am drinking? Because that is what most people do. We outsource the responsibility of being special, being sophisticated, being fancy to what is in our glass, whether or not it's alcohol, or whether or not it's water.

The point is, it doesn't make a difference. It's just what you think about it. It's just what you make it mean. And this is a reason why it is digging into this kind of thinking, all of the messages that we have gotten so unconsciously from so many different places, that will help you sustainably change your desire to drink.

Because I will promise you, that dinner that I had with our friends? If I was four hours in that restaurant, through 14 courses, watching the sommelier bring drink after drink, if I had not done any of that work to really examine it for myself, to really question, what do I want to believe about drinking and not drinking? If I hadn't done any of that work, I would have sat through that dinner miserable.

But what I did was dig into those beliefs, to question all of those and to understand, "You know what? It's just my thoughts that make something fancy or sophisticated or special." Recognizing how I view a penny and how my father views the penny and how the rest of the world views a penny, that was a really big help.

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So start to dig into your own thinking about this. Start to really understand what you are making it mean when you have wine in your glass or a cocktail that you're sipping on or drinking a beer. When you don't, how do you see yourself differently? And why is that? Because if you don't understand that, you will get stuck feeling like you're just at the kids' table.

But there's no reason to let the messages that we get from TV and movies and marketers and advertisers be the messages that run our habits. All right everybody, go ahead and check out this ad. I loved it. I'll make sure that there's a link for you in the podcast notes.

I'll see you 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.

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.

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