

Ep #404: Not Liking Your Drinking and Not Enjoying When You're Sober



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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Have you ever felt stuck between a rock and a hard place with your drinking? So your intuition is telling you that something needs to change. Maybe you want to drink less, or you just know that some time away from booze would do you good.

But when you're not drinking, you're not having as much fun. Maybe you're not enjoying the people around you, and maybe you're just bored. This is really common. In Episode 404, I'm explaining why it happens and why there's a third option staring you in the face when you feel stuck between a rock and a hard place with your drinking.

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.

So it's that time of year when people start taking a hard look at their life, what they don't like about it, and what needs to change. If drinking less is one of your resolutions for the new year, I really want you to listen to this episode that I recorded many years ago called "The Veneer of Alcohol".

It's one of my favorite episodes. There is a super simple exercise in it that is a great jumping-off point for when you feel stuck, because you don't like how much you're drinking, but you also don't enjoy when you're not. Have a listen and make sure you do the exercise that I mentioned at the end. I will tell you, I have done that exercise so many times in the years since I've recorded this.

Alright, so I was thinking about my neighborhood the other day. Because a couple of blocks from my apartment there is a small parking lot behind this

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fast-food place. I'll tell you, the parking lot, it's nothing special. It's maybe 1,500 square feet; it's covered in asphalt, as parking lots are. There are no trees, there's no shade, there are buildings on either side; it's your standard, nondescript parking lot.

I never would have paid much attention to it until a couple of months ago when something changed. So a couple of months ago, the fast-food restaurant closed down and we noticed that a chain link fence went up around the parking lot. Now this is pretty normal, right? The restaurant was changing owners, they wanted to keep people out of the parking lot, so they put up this chain linked fence. Totally normal, right?

It went on this way for a while, nothing was really changing, but then a couple of weekends ago, my husband and I were walking by the parking lot and it was different. Now, the parking lot itself was still the same. It was the same asphalt. It was the same chain link fence. There were still no trees. There was still no shade. There were the same nondescript buildings to the left and to the right of the parking lot.

But now, in front of the chain link fence, there was a bouncer and inside the parking lot was filled with people drinking. And I realized, "Oh my God, they'd turned the parking lot into a bar." They didn't do anything to the parking lot itself. They didn't cover up the asphalt. They didn't bring in potted plants. They didn't even take down the chain link fence.

They just hired a bouncer and started serving alcohol there. They turned the parking lot into a bar and people were there in droves. I thought to myself, "This is the perfect example of what I want to talk to you about today." And that is alcohol's ability to turn a place into where we want to be. It's not just parking lots surrounded by a chain link fence. I can't get over it; it still cracks me up so much. I wish you guys could see it.

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This is the thing, alcohol acts like a veneer on our reality. Now, you know what a veneer is; a veneer is something that covers. It is a covering that disguises the true nature of something. It disguises the reality of something.

I like to think about veneers when I think about furniture. Now, walnut for example, is a very high-quality wood. Woodworkers love walnut. It's strong, it's easy to work with, it resists shrinking and swelling and warping. And you know what? It's beautiful. Walnut is a beautiful wood, but what about a walnut veneer? What about a thin covering on your furniture that looks like walnut, is that the same thing?

And, of course, the answer is no. Of course not. A piece of walnut furniture and a piece of furniture with walnut veneer, they are not the same thing. You can put a fancy walnut veneer on anything, but that doesn't make it walnut. A veneer doesn't actually make something quality furniture, it just makes the furniture look – it makes it appear like it is quality.

But it's like, "Hey, heck out this fancy walnut veneer on my particle board bed." The bed isn't walnut, it just looks like it is. But particle board, for those of you who are familiar with it – I am very familiar with it. I have had a lot of particle board furniture in my life. Particle board is a different story than walnut.

Particle board is not even technically wood, it's actually sawdust that has been pressure treated and glued together. And guess what, sawdust is not strong, it is not easy to work with, it is not durable. It swells and it warps and it falls apart after a couple of years. A walnut veneer on a particle board bed does not make it a piece of quality furniture; it just makes it look like it is. And I will tell you, that bed is going to fall apart after a while. Even if it looks nice at first, it will not last you.

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A veneer disguises the reality of what is actually there. And let me tell you, this is exactly what alcohol does; it disguises the reality and the true quality of your life. It makes you think that whatever you are doing is better than it actually is, and it does this with everything, not just with parking lots. It does this with strangers and potential partners and current partners and friendships and your free time and your hobbies and weddings and holidays and dinners and your emotions, and basically just your life.

Alcohol can act like a really effective veneer on your life, making it seem better than it really is. Now, here's the thing, there is nothing wrong with that. There's nothing wrong with making your brain think who you are and who you're with and what you're doing is actually better than it really is. But here's what I know: if you want to change your drinking, if you want to take a break, you are going to run into a very common problem.

When you strip away the veneer of alcohol, what you are left with is your real life. And a lot of times, that real life isn't so appealing. The people and the places and the things that you do and how you spend your time are not all that you thought they were cracked up to be. And for a lot of people, it seems like there are two choices. One, go back to using a drink to make your brain think that where you are and who you are with is better than it really is, or be unhappy, be bored, be uninspired, lead a lackluster life.

And I will tell you, these are awful choices. Who wants to choose between these two things, right? I mean just think about it, being stuck in between knowing that the way your drinking is right now, you are not getting the results that you want, right. You're not liking the results that you're getting from your drinking; so feeling like you're stuck there. And, once you strip alcohol away and you look at the reality of your life, then the other place you're stuck is, okay, well now what? Now I'm unhappy, now I'm bored, now I'm uninspired, now I just lead this lackluster life?

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So many people can get stuck here when they try to take a break from drinking. So many people feel like, okay, great, now I'm in this no-win situation, what do I do? What I want to tell you is that there is a third choice, and it is a choice that most people do not consider. And that choice is this: you can upgrade your life. You can choose to make your life better on purpose. You do not need the veneer of alcohol to fool yourself into thinking that where you are and who you're hanging out with and the things that you do are better than they really are.

You can decide that you want to go after, you want to create a life that is actually amazing, it's actually great. Now, if that idea freaks you out, I get it. I really, really do because when I stripped away the veneer of alcohol from my life, I was like, "... I don't know about this." Right, like where do I even begin?

There was so much, when I stripped away the veneer of alcohol, when I really got to see my life for what it was and I was like, "This is a lot. There are a lot of things here that I don't feel great about." And it seemed overwhelming. And I see the same thing happening all the time with my clients. When I talk to them about upgrading their life, people are like, "That seems like a lot of work. I think it would be easier to just open up that bottle of rosé." Right, it would just be easier to have that glass of wine, have that drink and make my brain think that it is having a good time.

And the truth is, that is easier. It is, because there is a very good reason why alcohol acts like a veneer on your life. And it's because of the big dopamine reward that your brain gets when you drink it; that's it. That's why it acts like a veneer. That is exactly why people in my neighborhood are spending their weekends hanging out in a parking lot, right. Nobody says to their friends, "Hey listen, there's an amazing parking lot. You know, it's covered with asphalt, it's surrounded by a chain link fence, there's no trees

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there, there's no vegetation, but we should definitely spend the afternoon there.”

Right, nobody says that. No one would be doing that, no one would be hanging out in a parking lot unless they had a lot of dopamine making the parking lot seem awesome; parking lots – not awesome. Okay, they just aren't.

So, here's the thing, if you strip away the veneer of alcohol and you discover, you know what, in this life of mine, it's not exactly what I want. What do you do? And that's what I want to talk to you about. I want to show you where you can start, how you can begin to create the life that you want instead of feeling stuck between, well I can just go back to drinking – I can just go back to making my brain think that where I am and what I'm doing and who I'm with is better than it really is. Or I can just be stuck in this place of being unhappy and bored and uninspired and leading this life that is pretty lackluster.

There is a third place, and that is upgrading your life. And if you are going to do that, you need to really think about what you want. And this is going to be a challenge for your brain. It really is, because you have to let yourself go big. You have to let yourself dream. You have to really open up all this possibility.

So one of the exercises that I use with my clients is called 25 Wants. And it's pretty simple, all you do is write down 25 things that you want in your life. And now look, you can want anything. There are no restrictions, there are no parameters. You can want things that are big, you can want things that are small, you can want things that are tangible, like a new house, or you can want things that are intangible, like more excitement. You can want objects, you can want feeling states, you can want anything.

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You can want things that you already have right now or things that you hope to have in the future. But what you have to do first is let your brain run with the idea of allowing it to want, not just a little bit, but a lot; 25 things. I will tell you that one of the reasons why it's 25 Wants is because for so many people, when they look at that, when they think, "25 things, I have to want 25 things? That's a lot, isn't that too much? I don't know how to want that much." And a lot of people I work with, they get stuck around ten. "Like I don't know, Rachel, I got to ten, isn't that enough?"

And I always say it's not. You've got to let your brain go big. You really have to if you want to start creating the life that you want, creating a life that doesn't need the veneer of alcohol. Because if you discover that alcohol has been acting as a veneer on your life and you want to change that, you have to identify what new things you want to create.

So many of you aren't doing this. instead of identifying what you want to create, you are just thinking about life as it happens to you. Right, life doesn't feel like this thing that you're creating, life feels like this thing that is just unfolding, it feels like this thing that's just happening to you, and that's why really challenging your brain to come up with 25 things that you want, 25 things to go after, it starts to give you a new direction to head in.

It is okay if you're feeling a little freaked out by this exercise, I get it. Your brain is so used to thinking about all it doesn't have that wanting things on purpose can seem almost dangerous. Like I don't know, should I let myself want that much? Is that too much? If I allow myself to want all of these things, am I just going to end up disappointed? But that's just because you haven't understood how to use the think-feel-act cycle to create your life.

Now, we've talked a lot about the think-feel-act cycle throughout all the episodes of this podcast, and one of the ways that I have focused on how

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to use this cycle is how to understand why you do the things you do, why you feel the way you do, and why you're stuck in your habits.

And that is an incredibly powerful thing that the think-feel-act cycle can help you start to understand. But here's the thing, and this is why I love it: it is not just a tool for understanding, it is also a tool for creation. Because one thing that is so important about it is that this cycle shows you how to start to take different actions, and your actions are always giving you your results in life.

Once you understand that how you act, how you behave, is driven by how you feel, and how you feel is generated by what you're thinking, once you start shifting your mindset to think about, "Okay, what do I want? What do I really want in this life? What do I want to go after?" this can be a tool to help you get it.

But before you can do that, you have to actually allow yourself to want. And not want a little bit, to want a lot. To want 25 things. The other thing that you can do in this exercise, when you're writing down this list of 25 things that you want, you can also want things that you already have.

Now I love this idea because so many of us want things from a place of scarcity. We want only the things that we don't have. And when you want the things that you already have, you start to want from a place of abundance instead of feeling like, "Oh I want all these things that I don't have. I wish I had them. There's not enough," right?

You get to move to, "You know what? There are all these things in my life that I want, that I actually have. I want a home, I want a family, I want clean water, I want electricity, I want a car, I want a job." Whatever it is, you don't have to just think about the things that you don't have, you can also think

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about what you do have. You can start showing your mind how to want from a place of abundance.

So I really want you to do this exercise. I think it is so transformative. I want you to write down 25 things that you want. Don't do it in your head, write it down. Let your brain go for it. Let yourself see what you really want in your life. What do you want your life to look like?

You don't need the veneer of alcohol to make you think that your life is better than it really is. You don't need to hang out in parking lots, right? You just need to understand that it's possible to create a life that is better than what you have ever imagined.

Don't have a particle board life. I've had a lot of particle board furniture in my life. It looks great at first, and then slowly it starts to fall apart no matter what that beautiful veneer is on it. You don't need a life that looks great, you need a life that *is* great. And that starts by understanding if right now alcohol's acting like a veneer on your life.

And if it is, that's okay. That's actually really good information, because that is information that you need if you want to start to change it.

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*.

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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.