

Ep #425: Drinking Less in Social Situations



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With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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You're out with friends. You want to enjoy yourself, and frankly, life is too short not to have that drink. Listen, if you want to drink less or not at all in social situations, but you're having a hard time keeping your commitment, I will show you why finding more discipline is not the solution.

This is episode 425, and I'm outlining two important steps that will help you release the temptation to give into your cravings without relying on scare tactics or willpower.

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, I got a question recently from someone who was working through the tools inside the Ultimate Guide to Drinking Less. They were making tons of amazing progress drinking less at home, but they noticed an unwillingness to try social situations without drinking. And so, what they told me was, "Basically, I'm drinking a lot less than I used to, but I still feel like alcohol has this power over me. I just can't seem to navigate social situations without drinking. I know I need to do this, but I make excuses to drink." And I tell myself, "I don't go out that much. I want to have fun," or "Life is short."

So, I want to talk about that today because I know how challenging social situations can be when you're trying to change your relationship with alcohol. They were certainly a very tricky area for me to overcome. Now, this most commonly shows up with three of the eight Drink Archetypes. There's the Connector, the archetype where you use alcohol to help create a sense of belonging or closeness with others. There's the Mask, the archetype where you use alcohol to help you feel confident or reduce anxiety in social situations. And then there's the Upgrade. So this is the archetype where you use alcohol to elevate your experience or make things feel special.

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Now, there are a lot of different approaches and tools that you can use when you notice that you're kind of holding tight to drinking in social situations. If it's the Upgrade, maybe you want to work on training your brain to really come back to everything that is special around you. This is something that happens with the Upgrade archetype. Alcohol kind of acts like blinders, and it makes it really difficult to take in or even notice everything that is enjoyable and special and amazing around you.

If, in this situation, the Connector archetype is activated, you can work on identifying the thoughts that create disconnection and make it feel like you don't belong. And if it's the Mask, you can start practicing how you respond to anxiety. So often, when we feel anxiety in social situations, the habit rushes us to have a drink. And what happens with this archetype is you don't realize how immediately going to the bar, immediately fixing yourself a drink or ordering a drink when you're out, can actually reinforce the idea that without alcohol, the anxiety that you feel when you're out and about just isn't going to subside on its own.

So, there's a lot of different routes that I talk about how you can start to tackle this. But in today's episode, what I really want to focus on is one excuse in particular. And that's what this person said to me. They said, "Life is short." Because it's true. Life is short, which means combating this excuse can be really tricky.

Now, I will tell you, I'm going to turn 45 later this year. I often kind of stop and think and look at my life and wonder, "How did this happen? How did I get so old?" I don't feel like I'm 45, but I look at my birthday, and I definitely am. I was also texting with a friend who I hadn't seen in a while, and she was asking about my two boys, and I told her that they're going to turn 3 and 7 this summer. And she was like, "When did that happen?" Which I also can relate to. I feel like it was just the other day that they were little babies that I was holding in my arms, and now here they are, growing up so quickly.

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So, life truly can feel very, very short. And we have no idea how long we have. The older you get, the days and weeks and months and years seem to fly by. So yeah, life is short. Why not just enjoy yourself? Why not have that drink? Why not have another? This can be a really tricky place when you're trying to change your relationship with alcohol.

Now, the counter-argument to an excuse like, "Life is short," is usually to focus on the perils of drinking too much. And so it might sound like, "Yeah, life is short, and drinking too much is going to make your life shorter." Or, it might be about focusing on how there are studies showing that regular alcohol consumption, even when you follow recommended guidelines, can shorten your lifespan. This is most often how we try to deal with an excuse like, "Life is short." We go to the place of trying to scare ourselves. We go to the place of, "You're going to regret this decision tomorrow," or we focus on how alcohol is bad for your health and poisoning your liver, and we just really kind of dig in on scare tactics.

The problem with this approach is that more often than not, our scare tactics don't work because the future, even tomorrow morning, seems very far away in the moment when all you really want is that drink. And not only is that the problem, but when you kind of double down on the negative health consequences of alcohol, you can very easily feel bad about yourself. You may start telling yourself, "I shouldn't want this thing that I know isn't good for me." And I talk about this all the time on the podcast, but anytime that you are trying to create change by shaming yourself, you're going to find that it's not going to work, especially long-term.

And so this is why leaning into the Drink Archetypes is so, so powerful for moments like this and excuses like, "Life is short." So, if you want to learn more about the archetypes, you can go to my website, rachelhart.com. I also have in-depth explanations inside the Ultimate Guide to Drinking Less, but I'm going to cover some of the basic, important points on this episode for dealing with this particular excuse.

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The very first thing that you need to know about the archetypes is that each one works differently in your brain and teaches you something different. So this is something that I'm talking about all the time: What is your brain learning from drinking? Learning from alcohol. So often, we assume that our brain learns a lesson like, "Well, I was stupid," or "I was irresponsible," or "I don't have a lot of discipline," or "I don't make good choices." But the archetypes really break down not the shaming and blaming that often happens after we drink too much, but truly what your brain is learning. What it is learning when you say yes to the drink, and by that, I mean what the drink represents.

The second thing you need to know about the archetypes is that each archetype has a deeper desire that is connected to your craving. So, when we think about cravings, we often think about them at a very superficial level. So we tell ourselves, "I'm craving the taste because I really like the taste of the drink," or "I'm craving the feeling because I really like the feeling or the buzz." But there is a deeper desire, and different ones for each of the archetypes. And so understanding these two pieces are really going to help you here when you start working with an excuse like, "Life is short."

So, what I want to suggest is that when you encounter an excuse like this that feels very challenging to disprove because truly, life is short, what I want to suggest is that you actually embrace the idea rather than trying to talk yourself out of it. And by "embrace the idea," I mean saying to yourself, "Yeah, life is short." And the desire for pleasure and enjoyment is universal. It's totally normal. So, you're starting from a place of acceptance. Starting from that place is so much more powerful than trying to scare or shame yourself into saying no.

So, once you do that, you can use the excuse as a jumping-off point to dig deeper and understand the habit at a deeper level, to really uncover what's happening beneath the surface. Now, I am going to recommend that when you're working with an excuse like this, that the work that I'm outlining

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today, you do *before* the excuse strikes. It is very tricky, if not impossible, to do this in the moment when the habit is activated. Right? So what I want you to think about is when you do this work ahead of time, you're using your higher brain to help prepare you for how you can respond differently in the moment.

So, let's talk about what this would look like. I want to use the Mask archetype as an example, but as I said, the Connector and the Upgrade can also show up here. And interestingly enough, all three archetypes can use this excuse. But when you run through them, through the two questions I'm going to walk you through, when you run through them, you see that they are going to create very different learnings and outcomes for you. So that's always the most important thing: You have to really understand which archetype is activated for you.

So, with the Mask archetype, let's say you're in the situation which was the situation of this person I was working with who said, "It just feels like alcohol has power over me in social situations." So, you can't find the nerve or the will to navigate socializing without drinking. And you know, in the moment, when you're out with people, all those good intentions that you had earlier in the day, you've seen how they go out the window because you're telling yourself, "I just want to enjoy myself. I just want to have fun. Life is short. Why should I deprive myself?"

So, the work then is not to scare yourself into saying no. The work is to explore the desire that you have to say yes through the lens of non-judgment. And then to get clear on what your brain learns when you find yourself unable to say no in social situations. So, it's not about scaring or shaming; it's about being able to answer these questions from a place of openness and curiosity. So, you're not trying to pinpoint what you're doing wrong because you're not doing anything wrong. You're trying to peel back the layers so you can understand how the habit works.

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Okay, so let's talk about how the Mask archetype might unfold in this situation. If the Mask is activated, you might be thinking to yourself, "Oh God, it just feels so awkward. I just want to be able to relax. I just want to be able to have fun." That's where the excuse, "Life is too short," might come up.

The reason that these things feel difficult, the reason why relaxing, having fun, opening up, the reason why all of this feels difficult when you're in a social situation, is not because fun and ease are impossible without alcohol. The reason all of this is difficult is because you're dealing with an overactive inner critic. That's what shows up again and again for the Mask archetype, which means the deeper desire when the Mask is activated is actually self-appreciation.

Because when you truly appreciate yourself, the musings of the inner critic have a lot less traction. And when the musings of the inner critic are not able to kind of sink their teeth into you and take hold, it's so much easier to relax and have fun. Now, to be clear, I am not suggesting that the solution here is to get rid of your inner critic. I don't think that is possible. We learn how to manage our mind, not to erase every negative thought, but to know how to evaluate and respond and be less reactive to them.

So, the actual solution is not about getting rid of your inner critic; it's about knowing how to manage it and also developing a practice of self-appreciation. That is a practice that most people don't have because frankly, we're not taught how to do that. It's not modeled to us, and we get a lot of negative messaging around the idea that we shouldn't think too highly of ourselves, that having a lot of positive thoughts is actually negative.

So, what I'm talking about here, when you're developing a practice of self-appreciation, is simply the idea that you can feel secure with who you are without needing to always fix yourself, without needing to try to be someone else. Because without a foundation of self-appreciation, you are

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going to fixate on all of your perceived flaws. And your brain is really good at doing this, not because you have a lot of flaws. Your brain is really good at doing this because it has a lot of practice scanning for what's wrong with you. And then if you take that thought pattern and bring it into a social situation where you have other people to compare yourself to, your brain is going to be really good at coming up with all the ways that you are somehow different or don't measure up.

This is why with the Mask archetype, fostering a sense of self-appreciation is just as important as learning how to manage your cravings. This is something that I'm always wanting you guys to understand. It's not just about, "How do I say no to the craving? How do I manage my desire?" You're not going to get the long-term change if you're not also doing the deeper desire work of your particular archetype, whatever happens to be activated in that moment. Because otherwise, you may learn how to say no, but you're always going to feel like you're missing out. You're always going to feel like you're unable to access this thing that you crave, that your brain tells you is only possible if you're drinking.

So, if you want alcohol to stop having power over you in social situations, you need to focus on developing both of these skills. And this, by the way, is why making rules for yourself about how much you can or can't drink in a social situation falls flat or works only temporarily, because you're not getting to the root cause of why you're saying yes and why you're going back for more.

So that's step one. It's really about investigating the deeper desire for the archetype that's activated. Step two is to focus on what the brain learns from that specific archetype. So, I break this down inside the Ultimate Guide to Drinking Less. But for the Mask archetype, what your brain learns is that alcohol is necessary for fun. Which, when you understand how the think-feel-act cycle works, you start to see—and I really pull this apart inside the book—you start to see how this belief actually makes your anxiety worse in the long run. And I say this from a lot of experience

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because the Mask was one of my main archetypes, and I spent a lot of time working on trying to dismantle it.

But when you start to see how the archetype works in your brain, you start to very quickly understand that the very thing you're trying to avoid—which is feeling anxious, feeling awkward, not having a good time—you're actually creating more of. Drinking over or attempting to drink over your insecurity just allows your insecurities to fester and grow. It's like giving a free pass to your inner critic to just say and do and tell you whatever it wants to.

Now, notice how focusing on the deeper desire and what your brain learns is just worlds away from trying to use scare tactics or shaming yourself to say no to your cravings. Life is short. That is true. And life is too short to let your inner critic run the show. Life is too short to go your entire life not appreciating yourself or telling yourself that you don't measure up. Life is too short to constantly be scanning for all of your flaws and everything that's wrong with you, instead of recognizing what's incredible and amazing about you. Life is too short to not like who you are and to see that you matter and you have so much to offer, and there will never be another person with your thoughts, your ideas, and your insights.

So yeah, you want to make the most of your time. You want to feel good. You want to prioritize things that bring you joy and fulfillment. But when we zoom out and we look at this excuse through the lens of the archetype and understand the deeper desire and understand what your brain is learning, we start to see the flaw in this thinking. The flaw in telling yourself, "Well, life is short, so I'm going to have a drink. Life is short, so I'm going to have another." That's what this is really about: How do I really connect with what I think is a very normal and valuable idea that life truly is short, and we want to make the most of it?

What happens when you do this work, you step back and see that with this particular archetype, with the Mask, the thing that truly is most valuable—

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which is enjoying yourself and appreciating yourself—becomes harder. Because if you can't enjoy yourself, what can you really enjoy? Your enjoyment starts with you. Your ability to appreciate starts with you.

And so suddenly, working with your cravings in social situations, it takes on a new meaning and importance. It's not about scaring yourself straight. It's not about being more disciplined. It's not about having unlimited reserves of willpower. It's about doing this work because you want to become more of who you want to be and realizing that your current relationship with alcohol is actually standing in the way.

Again, I'm not saying that your next social outing, once you do this work, is going to be easy-peasy. It is going to be challenging, but you'll start to see a deeper purpose for that challenge, and you'll be able to go about it so much differently. So, the next time you're headed out somewhere, maybe you will challenge yourself not to drink. Not because you're telling yourself, "I'm going to regret it tomorrow," but because you're committed to learning how to use this moment as an opportunity to manage your inner critic.

Maybe you'll head out and decide that you do want to set a limit on how much you're going to drink, knowing that the craving to have more is going to come. That's fine, because it's an opportunity for you not only to name and notice the craving, but for you to create a life that isn't led by your inner critic. Doing this work with the archetypes, it really begins to show you the deeper purpose behind changing the habit.

What I'm proposing is that the work of changing your relationship with alcohol and finding a relationship, by the way, that works for you, whatever that looks like, it's not about scaring yourself straight. It's not about forcing yourself to be on good behavior. It's not about becoming more disciplined. It's about unearthing what's beneath the decision to obey your cravings and where continuing down the path that you're on is going to take you.

So listen, if you want to learn more about your specific archetypes and how to use them to help you drink less, check out the Ultimate Guide to Drinking

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Less. You can find it at rachelhart.com/guide. It's available on the website. It is 200 pages and just chock-full with so many tools, so much information, and it is the foundation for transforming your relationship with alcohol.

Alright, that's it for today. I will 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.