

Ep #54: Why It's So Hard to Drink Less



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Dr. Sherry Price

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You are listening to the *Drink Less Lifestyle Podcast* with Dr. Sherry Price, episode number 54.

Welcome to *Drink Less Lifestyle*, a podcast for successful women who want to change their relationship with alcohol. If you want to drink less, feel healthier and start loving life again you're in the right place. Please remember that the information in this podcast does not constitute medical advice. Now, here's your host, Dr. Sherry Price.

Well, hello my friends. Thank you for joining me today for this podcast episode. I really appreciate your time and for you just joining me and learning more on how to live a life where alcohol is just not that important. And I'm so excited to bring you today's episode. But before we dive into today's topic I want to let you know that you can still join Epic You if you want to learn about creating effective boundaries. That is the topic in Epic You this month is that we are going to learn how to set effective boundaries.

And I want to tell you one of the key points, it's not about other people. I know that many of us have learned to set boundaries and we put that on others. But then that leaves us powerless. We can't do that. And as I discuss in the program, that's more like an ultimatum where you give somebody, "Hey, you need to do this or else." That's not a boundary. So, if you need help in setting boundaries in your life, whether it's around people, whether it's around things, whether it's around substances, whether it's around screen time, whatever it is, I want to help get you there.

I want to help you because when you learn how to set effective boundaries your life just runs more smoothly and with much less angst. It really does cause less stress in your life, at least I find it does for me. So, if you want to join us, it's not too late. Go over to my website and you can join Epic You for the month and our next group coaching call will be tomorrow. So, I look forward to meeting you and seeing you on the call.

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Alright, so today I want to discuss why it's so hard to drink less. And I want to talk about this because if we can really understand the problem then we are more able to understand the solution. So, I want to break it down to five key areas that I find why it's so hard to drink less or maybe you want to be drink less, not drink at all. And so, the first way is what I described a lot in last week's podcast. And I think that's the messaging and the societal conditioning that we get around alcohol.

First of all, to say alcohol's a problem causes so much shame and anxiety and people are like, "Oh no, I'm a bad person." We internalize it to think we are bad, we are broken if we overuse alcohol. And it's not an area that most people will want to talk about. They want to seek help but they want to seek it privately, I know I did. I wanted to seek it confidentially, how can I get help without anybody knowing I'm getting help? I wanted to remain anonymous. And I didn't want to announce that I had a label and all of that.

So, we have these conditioned ways of thinking by society to say, "Hey, if you want to take care of it, here are your options." And many of us don't know all of the available options out there. There are quite many. And I didn't know this until I started researching it myself. And we get a lot of messaging throughout the years. Maybe we have had family members with alcohol problems that once an addict always an addict. I talked about that on my last podcast. You get things like abstinence is the only way when it is a problem.

So, we get these societal messaging that we grew up with. And maybe that was true 30, 40, 50 years ago but that's no longer the case anymore. And we propagate these messages because we just frankly don't know any better. So, if we don't know that there are other ways to take care of a problem, we don't share that with others because we are just oblivious to that or ignorant to that. I also mentioned that one, drink responsibly. Well, what does that look like?

For some person it might be just half a glass of wine, particularly people with gastric bypass surgery, they metabolize alcohol completely different

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since some of their stomach has been removed. So, we have to take into account different people, it's not just a one size fits all model which is what a lot of people talk about and what a lot of people think when it comes to drinking. So, we get this messaging and it's just propagated through the generations or through the years. And we think those are the messages that we should be following because that's what society says.

When actually society has been wrong a lot of the times because society is made up with a group of humans and we tend to fall into group think. There was a point in our evolution where humans thought that the world was flat. We didn't want to voyage out into the ocean too far because you might just fall off the cliff because that's where the ocean ends and then I don't know where you go, I guess to the land of just off the cliff, off the world.

So, we didn't know it was round, we just thought it was flat. And the people who said, "No, I think the world is round", were thought as lunatics, and crazy, and heresy, and yeah, those were psychotic people. We didn't want to associate with them. So, society was wrong there.

Society also thought before 1954 that you couldn't run a four minute mile or less than a four minute mile. But in 1954 that was proven not to be true. And we thought we couldn't land on the moon at one point in time. But in 1969 we've proven that to be false as well. So, society doesn't always know and we are conditioned to think and believe a certain way.

I know some people who have the, they think, logic that I'm too far gone to be able to get help. Let me tell you, you're never too far gone to get help, never. If you have a heart rate and a pulse you are not too far gone. There is always help available. The help might look differently depending on the severity of the drinking, and the severity of life's problems but there is always help. But I know I have been in circles where people talk about other people and their drinking habits. And they just say, "He's too far gone", or, "She's too far gone", or, "She'll never clean it up."

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And that's just not true. That's just somebody's thinking about that person but it's absolutely not true. We know if people want to change they will change. So that's the first caveat I wanted to talk about. I think it's hard to drink less when society is telling us, "But drinking is fun and drinking is the way to go and you should have another." And let me tell you my friends, please, please if there's anything you take away from today's podcast, never tell somebody who you're hanging out with, in whatever setting, "One more won't hurt."

Do you know how many times I've been part of social gatherings where I hear women talking to other women that way, or men talking to other men or coworkers? I've heard that in my work environments, "One more won't hurt." Just because you may not be operating a car, one more can hurt. One more does hurt. One more does cause problems on your health. We know, we have now MRI scans that show when you drink it shrinks your prefrontal cortex. We now know it shrinks parts of your brain. It does hurt.

Why would we propagate this messaging? Why would we propagate lies and tell that to each other? Well, because I want them to keep drinking so I can continue to have fun. It's very self-serving and very selfish and we're propagating lies. I will never say those words to another human in my life. It's dangerous and it's wrong. And then are we shaming people into drinking?

I mean think about it, that is just one that has nails on a chalkboard kind of chills in my spine when I hear that. And I don't stay quiet when I hear that. I tell the other person, "No, that's not true, one more can hurt. Do you want evidence?" And you may call me a buzz kill but I'd rather do that and propagate truth in our society, and let somebody be able to determine, hey, I am done drinking rather than social peer pressure. That is unhealthy. And as adults we should know better and wise up. That's my feeling on it. I don't think we want more alcohol pushers or even food pushers in our life. We don't need that.

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Alright, so moving on to number two, drinking less is hard because we think it's just about saying no. And drinking less or not drinking at all requires so much more than just saying no. Think about why you want to drink. For most women it's to get to some other place or have some other feeling in their body. It may not even be about the taste or the experience of having alcohol. For a lot of women and men too, it's about the effect it has on their brains and on their minds. A lot of people say, "I just want my brain to shut off." Or, "I just don't want to be so unhappy or so angry."

Of course, saying no to the drink is not going to help you because it's like you're saying, "No, I don't want the effect that my mind enjoys it. My feelings enjoy it." Even if I don't enjoy the taste, I remember nights I drank when I'm like, "Why am I drinking? I don't even like the taste of this wine." Or I'd order a cocktail and it would be terrible but I'd be like, "I made my bed, I might as well lay in it." So, I drank because, it wasn't really about the taste sometimes, it was about the effect.

I know a lot of people who come into my program like, "I no longer enjoy it like I used to, even the taste." Some people say, "It's the taste that I keep drinking and I drink and I keep drinking because I love it so much and that's why I overdrink." And then I'm like, "Well, do you like any other tasting beverage?" And like, "Yeah, but it doesn't give me the buzz." So, when we break it down they're really not drinking it for the taste. They're drinking it for the effect. They're drinking it for the buzz.

They're drinking it for that altered mental state that they want to get to. And that highlights to them, wow, I used to tell myself it's all about the taste and it's not. Interesting, it's about the effect. Now we know the truth so that we can solve for it. It's a beautiful thing to know the truth, always. So, when you say no and you think drinking less just requires you saying no, you're going to feel like you're depriving yourself from this effect and that you're not going to be able to enjoy life the way you want. You feel like I'm not going to enjoy my life as much, who wants that?

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So having a strategy of just saying no will feel like you're decreasing the enjoyment of your life, absolutely. That's why giving it up completely is so difficult for many people to even wrap their heads around. They're like, "I don't want that. I'd rather be a drunk", or, "I'd rather be an over-drinker", or, "I'd rather be somebody who can't control their alcohol."

I know I used to think like that because drinking had been such a big part of my life and part of my enjoyment for a long time that I'm like, "Well, then what will I do? How will I go to a party? How will I hang out with friends? What will I be doing? Will I just have a life that's average and kind of not that fun?" I used to think, how am I going to experience even relief at the end of the day or relaxation? Because that was the way I gave myself permission to relax. That was how I did it. So, saying no felt awful.

It wasn't until I understood that, it's not about saying no, that's not the strategy. I needed to learn other skills like how else can I bring pleasure into my life? And think about it, when you're learning a new skill, whether it's bringing a new pleasure or the other skills that I teach, it's going to feel a little difficult at first. Of course, any new skill that you're learning takes time.

I oftentimes talk about learning to drive. That's not easy at first. There is a lot of fear, there is a lot of tension, there is a lot of nerves, there is a lot going on between parent and child in the car when they're learning to drive. It's not easy at first but the more you do it, the more you practice the skill it gets easier. I mean we can find hundreds of examples of that.

The first time you go to the gym after taking a year off, it's going to feel painful, and it's going to be hard and things aren't going to work the right way. And your body's like, I haven't done this in a while. But then you keep going and of course it gets easier.

Now, think about skiing, same thing, you go and try to learn to ski, a lot different than walking, a lot different than running. So now you have these things clipped to your boots and you have to stand a certain way, you have

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to push your weight forward. Although our instinct, especially if we're falling is to want to lean backwards but that will only accelerate you falling. And nobody starts off skiing saying, "If you want to get good at this just learn not to fall." There's no skill in saying no to falling.

So, it's silly to me when people say, "To give up drinking or drink less you just say no." Like it's some easy skill. You need other skills so that saying no becomes a no brainer, just becomes easy. When you take up skiing, your instructor doesn't say, "Well, just say no to falling." No, there's here how we're going to learn our turns. Here's how we're going to learn to slow down. Here's how we use our skis to stop. Here's how we use our skis to stop initially and then when you become advanced here's what you do with your skis to stop. Here's how to navigate getting off a chairlift." That's a skill.

So, there are skills, hundreds of skills to become good at skiing. And the better you get at it the easier it is to practice those skills, or vice versa, the more you practice those skills the easier it gets. So, drinking less or not drinking at all requires a lot more skill than just saying no, which brings me to number three.

A lot of people will think if I don't want to drink as much or I want to drink less then I just need to avoid it. They think then that's the strategy. And yes, not saying that this doesn't work, and you can do this if you just want to go to work and there's no alcohol in your work environment and you just want to come home and you want to make sure that your house is empty of alcohol. However, if you do want to go and socialize out in society or go to a restaurant, or be out and about, chances are there will be alcohol around.

So, if you want to live in a bubble where you avoid alcohol and anybody who drinks it, you can do that. It just doesn't sound like a satisfying life to me is if I have to avoid it. And also, that's also signaling to my brain that I don't trust myself being around it. I can't be around it and be confident and in control and trust myself that I won't drink it. So, it's also giving alcohol more power than what I want it to have in my own mind.

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So, if I'm out to a restaurant and maybe a friend of mine orders it, or maybe my husband has it, I don't want to be sitting there sweating bullets, wringing my hands at the table saying, "Oh no, I just have to use willpower and not order." I don't want that to be my default strategy because I know willpower wears out. I know that that is not effective for a long term behavioral change. And honestly, I want to hang out with people who drink. I don't want to write them off my list. I don't judge them if they drink or they don't drink. They're humans, and I want to hang out with the humans.

I just don't want what other people do to be a trigger for me. I want to clean all that up. I want to learn the skills on how to do that and I have. And like I said, I don't want alcohol to be this thing that I don't trust myself to be around. I want that confidence. I want that control because to me that means freedom. That means I could be around it and not be bothered by it. I don't have to have it. I can just take it or leave it. And that's why I think learning these tools helps see that just avoiding it is not a good strategy lifelong.

When you learn the tools, you know how alcohol feels to me now? It's like a chair in the room, I see it but it's not like I have to go sit on that chair. Look at that chair, it's calling my name. I've got to go sit in that chair. That chair would be delightful if I had sat in it. Can I sit in it longer? Could I have more of this chair? Can I order this chair? Can I have this chair delivered to my house? I just think of the way I used to act around alcohol. I want it. I want more. Give me more of it. Give me more time with it. That's how I used to react to it.

Now it's like no, there is alcohol, it's just like a chair in the room. I may notice it. I may not notice it. I may sit in the chair. I may not sit in the chair. I may order a glass of wine or a cocktail, I may not. It's just in the background of my life. I don't give it meaning that the night's better if I have it. And I don't give it meaning that if I don't have it the night's better or I'm a better person for it. I'm just a human. And so, when you learn these skills it

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doesn't matter if you are a person who drinks in the house but you can control it out of the house.

It doesn't matter because you've learned the skills, so you can be around it in the house. It doesn't matter if you're like, well, I don't have a problem when I'm at home. It's just when I go out and about that I overdrink, that's when I have too much. Well, when you have the skills you don't worry about that because you've practiced those skills and you're like, "Yeah, I can be around alcohol and it not be a problem." And that's why I say in my program that we break the habit. We break it, it's broken, it's gone.

And I work on a three pronged approach for that. We break down any emotional drinking or situational drinking. And we look to break any habitual drinking that occurs, the same time of day or every weekend or whatever habitual drinking is not serving you, we break that. And we break down social drinking. For some people they don't have a problem at home. They just have a problem when they go out with others. Maybe they don't pay attention. Maybe they just get caught up but they don't understand why they overdrink. And so, we help break that.

So, these skills will help with all types of drinking. Because it's focusing on your life more than it is about the alcohol. It's focusing on these life skills to obtain so you can be the woman you want to be.

Alright so number four reason it's hard to cut back is because we have so much fear. So, I already addressed one fear which is I'm not going to have that much fun, what else do I do for my pleasure and enjoyment? And I cover that and I give you skills and tools that you can look to improve the level of joy in your life because we don't want a joyous life without alcohol. We want to bring in the joy to your life. And so, we have other fears that come up, the fear of missing out or the fear of what will I say to my friends when they want to continue drinking and I don't?

Or for me I had a fear of how will I get through the night because I have temper tantrums and bad time and all these things that I didn't really want

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to be doing as a mom because they felt painful and they weren't enjoyable to me. Some of the women that I help it's their fear of being with themselves or fear of being bored. If I don't drink what else am I going to do?

And for other it's fear of connection. Well, this is something my husband and I do, we sit on the couch, we watch a movie, this is how we connect or we go out on date night. We get a bottle of wine, it's how we connect. Or we just drink together, it's how we connect. It's the only thing we do in our marriage that brings us together. If I take that away how will I connect?

And I shared how I brought that to my therapist in the past and she told me to drink more and to join social clubs where people just go out to restaurants, meet up groups and couples groups where they go to restaurants and try fine wine. And I thought wow, I want to cut back, I don't want to drink more. And so, our mind confuses it.

Our mind will say, "Well, I can't have connection if the wine or whatever alcohol I drink, beer, or cocktails, or scotch, or whisky, or Manhattans, or old fashioned, whatever it be, or sip tequila, I've heard some women do with their husbands. Whatever it is, don't confuse that activity as the thing that's driving connection. And so, we break down that and how else can we build in connection time. Because truly I am all supporting healthy marriages and supporting connection because that's the lifestyle we want.

There's no human out there that doesn't want connection. It's a basic human need, and so it's something we certainly address. I know for me I'd be like, "Well, how am I going to calm myself down when I get so angry?" That was one of my coping mechanisms. So, I had fear, if you took this away, what would I do, break more plates? I didn't want to be that woman. I also didn't want to be the woman who overdrank or relied on alcohol to solve my problems. I wanted to learn how to solve them.

And so, this is what I help women do. Women come to me, they have maybe neurodivergent kids, or maybe themselves, ADHD, or ODD, or OCD

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or some other condition that they feel, or anxiety, that's a big one too. Depression, they come and they say, "Well, this kind of helps with that, although I know long term it's hindering that, in the moment it feels good." And I've worked with women who have autoimmune conditions, who have pain from those diseases and then they look to alcohol and the drink to reduce the pain.

Or women whose marriages are crumbling right now, and they want help pulling it back together. And what part can they control and what part can they deliver on because they want to save their marriage? So, it's so much bigger than just about the alcohol. It's really about improving your life and that's why I call it a lifestyle.

Because here's the thing. When we're combatting fear, fear of our marriage breaking up, fear of not being able to handle the anger, fear of how will I unwind at the end of the night, any of those fears, we have to look at what's driving the fear. And that's what we work to dissolve. We can work to dissolve it because sometimes it's just a fear that needs to be dissolved or solve it. And there are other actions we can be doing to take that is going to solve the problem.

I know last night my daughter came into my room and she said, "Mom, I have fear, can you help me dissolve it?" And I love how she phrased it because she knows that I've been teaching her some actions to do that's going to help dissolve her fear. It's just going to minimize it. It's going to start taking it away. She has stress around going to school, stress around performance already at such a young age. And I love being able to teach her these tools where you can dissolve the fear because you want to make a difference in your life.

You want your life to feel better. You want to get the life that you want. And here's the problem when people think it's just about knowledge. If I just know the thing then I'll be okay. And so, we get caught up in consumerism and just buying things, and buying things, and buying programs and reading books. But consuming is different than executing. Consuming is

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different than taking action. And I had a previous podcast on this. You've got to take action. In my program I call that actions with traction because it's not enough just to have the knowledge.

If you don't move on that knowledge, if you don't take different actions, if it's not coming out in your behavior it's not going to change your experience of your life. It's going to be knowledge that's quite honestly wasted.

It's the equivalent of somebody going to Harvard, or Yale, or some ivy league school and how are they using that knowledge? Well, maybe they're sitting at home on their parent's couch watching TV and not doing anything and they've accumulated all this debt and they're saddled with it. And they're not getting a job. They are not utilizing the skills that they've learned. So, it's all about applying, or executing, or taking the actions so that you get the results that you want.

And that's why in my Drink Less Lifestyle program you watch videos to learn the knowledge. There's a whole online course that you get access to and then it breaks down to what are the actionable steps. Here are the skills you need to practice and you get worksheets to do that. And then I engage with you so that you're taking the actions through coaching calls, through groups, through personal coaching, what you need in order to be taking those actions to build those skills.

Because think about it, when you study to get your driver's license, you get the driver's license, you get the manual and you take the test. But consuming that information and taking the test does not mean you know how to effectively operate a car. That's a whole another level of skill. That requires action. And that requires practice. And that's the thing that will get it done, not book knowledge, not have you watched all the videos. It's have you gotten control over the car? Do you know how to control the car?

Because we control everything in our life. We control how much news we take in, how much social media we take in. We control cars. We control things. We control things at work, if we show up to work on time or not.

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That is in our control. All of our actions are within our control and I love that and that's what we build on, taking more actions that give you the results or taking those actions with traction.

And then number five reason it's so difficult to drink less is because of all the emotions that come up. We want to escape some of those emotions in our life and we don't know what to do with the stress, the loneliness, the boredom, all of the things I've kind of touched on before. But I forgot to mention it's emotional regulation.

So, looking at strategies, tools to help our emotions better regulate. That doesn't mean get rid of them because oftentimes there are emotions that are going to be present and they're going to want to be there because they want to be processed so they can leave our body. Think about grief. If you don't grieve in the appropriate time and give yourself that time to grieve it will follow you around like luggage. You constantly carry it with you.

So, we need to process these emotions which means we need to emotionally regulate. Don't hear that as we get rid of emotions. No, we help our bodies move the emotions, process them so they don't stay stuck in our bodies. That's what trauma is, is emotion that gets stuck in our bodies. And if we don't learn to process these emotions we carry them around like heavy weights, like luggage.

And that could be a reason some people drink is to get rid of that emotional baggage that they're carrying around rather than focusing on the skills to process that, to heal from that and then develop strategies when those feelings come up, the strong feelings come up, what do we do with them? And I like to call that effective coping mechanisms because a coping mechanism as I've described on a previous podcast is something that actually helps dissolve, fix or solve the problem.

Drinking is not a coping mechanism because the problem doesn't change, it's still there. We just get to distance ourself from the problem but that's not actually dissolving it, helping it or fixing it. So, it is not an effective coping

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mechanism. It's just a numbing mechanism really. And so, when you drink that does not give you the opportunity to think of other ways to dissolve it, solve it or fix it. And that is really step number two in my program is we are looking at what's causing the drinking. Why we drink is step one. Step two, fixing it, dissolving. What's going on? Let's clean that up.

And when we clean that up the desire for the alcohol falls. Now, it's a shame we haven't learned these tools as a youngster in our school system or anywhere. A lot of this is now being discovered and hopefully change can be made in our school systems and in our youths so we empower them rather than just brush emotions under the rug. because that doesn't serve anybody, not the caregiver, not the person experiencing them. And it can actually work against the person because now they internalize the emotion and now they carry it around like baggage.

If you want a good book in this area, I recommend Susan David's, Emotional Agility book, I found the book to be very good. She's a Harvard professor and she works on emotions. And the way she approaches it is something that I value and I agree with. And so, I do suggest that if you need help in this area. But again, you can't just consume it, you have to apply it and execute it in order to get the change in your life.

So those are the top five reasons why drinking less is so hard my friends, it is. But if you have strategies in place it doesn't have to be hard because now you know how to navigate each of these obstacles with the strategy. Now you are empowered. And that's what I love helping women do is getting to their empowered place so they can execute control and confidence around any area of their life, especially drinking.

Okay my friends, thank you for joining me on the podcast this week, and I will see you next week.

Thanks for listening to the *Drink Less Lifestyle*. If you're ready to change your relationship with alcohol, check out my free guide, How to Effectively

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Break the Overdrinking Habit at sherryprice.com/startnow. That's sherryprice.com/startnow. I'll see you next week.