

Ep #59: Why Punishment Never Works



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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 59.

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. I am back. You may have not known that I left but I just took an awesome coaching retreat. It was a week long and we coached our faces off. It was fabulous. When you get in a room with life coaches that love this so much and all is we want to do is coach, it's truly an amazing experience.

So when I say we coached our faces off let me give you a flavor of what that looks like. We were supposed to start at 10 o'clock and end by 5. And the first day we did that. But at the end of that first day all of us were sitting in the room going, "We want to coach more, can we coach over dinner? Can we coach into the evening? Can we even coach earlier in the morning?" So yes, that's what we created. We created this magnificent on steroids coaching experience. And we just kept coaching, learning new tools from the instructor and it was fantastic.

And what came out of that is that I'm currently looking at my programs and taking them up a notch because I've learned some amazing tools. And I've experienced as being coached in the room several times, that I had some significant breakthroughs. And knowing the strategies and the tools that got me there I cannot wait to institute this and implement this in both my Drink Less Lifestyle program and my Epic You program. So I am so excited to share these tools with the ladies in those programs and really create some massive transformation.

And I am so delighted that I took that week to elevate myself and elevate my training and also to delight myself in having more breakthroughs. I'm

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already seeing how I'm showing up differently this week after what coaching I have experienced. So I cannot wait to bring this to you. And if you are in the currently in the two programs, look forward to coaching on steroids. And if you are not, come join us.

This is so much fun, when you can let go of past hang-ups and past habits and build a life that you truly love and can experience on a level that brings you inner peace and freedom, I can tell you there is nothing better, absolutely nothing better. To be able to shed my drinking habit years ago and then step into this new version of me that I am desiring to become is so fun, so fun. And I want that for all of you. If that's what you're wanting, come along join us, it is such a fun ride.

And it's so fun when we get to see each other's transformations and learn what has held us back collectively because then we can collectively move forward. So I can't wait. And also some news I want to share with you is that I am hosting a retreat as well. I will be hosting this retreat the first week of February. And I'm offering it to the women I work with in Drink Less Lifestyle and Epic you. And it is going to be epic. It is going to be a breakthrough retreat. We are going to coach. We are going to have fun. We are going to connect.

And we are just putting the finishing touches on finalizing all the details and I will be announcing it to the ladies that I work with in my programs very, very soon. And who knows, you might even see the announcement before this podcast goes live. We are that close to finalizing the details and I cannot wait because I really want to offer transformation to women who are looking to break up with bad habits, create new habits and truly live a life that they love.

So as we move on to today's topic, I want to ask you because I'm seeing this in the ladies I'm coaching, a few of them. How many of you try to compensate for bad behavior? And what I mean by that is punish yourself. We have to out-effort or do something because we felt we were 'bad', because we felt we overate candy, or we overdrank on Halloween, or we've

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been overdrinking for so long. But we take out a compensation mechanism to feel better about that behavior.

So for instance, we might be feeling like I shouldn't have done that bad thing like overdrink or overeat. And so now I'm going to work it off at the gym. Or I'm going to compensate in some other way, usually meaning I withhold pleasure, or I punish myself, or I don't allow myself to do something because it's a punishment for my past 'bad behavior'. And I see a lot of women doing this. And I want to dive into that so let's take a look at it.

So you did something you didn't want to do like overdrink or overeat and that makes you feel bad about yourself. And then you go on to punish yourself by doing something else that feels bad because you did something you didn't want to do. So now your brain is telling yourself not only did you do the bad thing but now we're going to compensate for it by doing this next thing that doesn't feel amazing.

So I have two questions with this. One is do you feel good when you punish yourself? My guess is no. And the second question is does this actually change doing the bad behavior in the future? And I know the answer to that is no. It's like we get in this habit cycle of when we do something bad, we have to punish ourselves and do something bad on top of that. And here we think that the brain is going to learn not to do that by punishing ourselves. But we find ourselves doing the bad behavior again, don't we?

And if you think about it, you don't feel good when you have to punish yourself. And what we know about human behavior is oftentimes punishment doesn't work. It's not the answer. So it should be of no surprise when you overdrink again, or when you overeat again, or when you overindulge or do something that you don't want to be doing because punishment is actually not the effective way to prevent that from happening in the future. And what it actually does which is quite surprising is it propagates the notion that you are a bad person that needs punishing.

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I find this very common among women. We punish ourselves for a bad activity or a bad behavior. And then that creates this internal dialog that we are bad people that need to be punished. And the crazy thing about this is it just doesn't work. It backfires all the time because like I mentioned we go on to do the bad behavior yet again. We go on to overdrink, or pass out, or black out. It doesn't stop that behavior from happening.

So I want to use an example from when I was coaching a client who wanted to weigh less. And she was using the methodology of punishing yourself thin, that's what I call it, punishing yourself thin. So every time you overeat you punish yourself by starvation or saying you're going to abstain from something for a certain period of time. And what you do along the way doesn't feel good. So the process of losing weight becomes painful. It's not fun because you're punishing yourself and practicing hating yourself along the way.

So again it's like hating yourself thin. And guess what happens to a person who hates themselves thin? When they get to the goal they're not happy because they've practiced hate for weeks, maybe months and then they get to the goal thinking that thinness is what makes them happy. But it's not because they have been programmed to hate themselves the whole way through. So if it takes three weeks, or three months, or six months, whatever they practiced along the way is what they get.

It's not like you do weight loss for three months, get to your weight and all of a sudden that habit of hating on yourself disappears. No, you've been enforcing the habit of hating on yourself the whole time. So then when you get to your goal it doesn't even feel good. This is the same thing I see in women who punish themselves along the way to being sober or to drinking less.

They make the process of getting there so miserable, and so fraught with punishment, and low beliefs about themselves, and terrible beliefs about themselves that they don't even appreciate the accomplishment once they reach the goal. Just think about how crazy this sounds. You get the goal

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that you want. You are drinking less. You weigh a certain weight. You shed some pounds. But then you get there and you don't feel good. Why is that? It's because you've learned to punish yourself along the way.

Practicing hate and punishment along the way makes the process so much harder, so much longer, and it turns out that you won't sustain it. Nobody wants to do something that feels miserable and like punishment long term. And then what did they tell themselves when they get to that goal? Oh, it must not be the right goal. I must want to weigh 10 pounds even less or I must want to even drink even less. Or maybe now I think it's something else in my life like my marriage or my kids. We move onto the next thing.

And moving onto another goal is not the problem. The problem is thinking that we will be happy when we get to that goal. Now, when I see this happen in the clients that I'm coaching I will always help my clients see that this is happening and start showing her how to stop this from happening. Because what we don't want is to get to the goal and we still feel crappy about our lives. Or we're still punishing ourselves in different ways because nobody likes to live with a mean girl in their head.

And I laugh because I have had a mean girl in my head all my life it feels like, just hyper critical, being mean to myself, and being so judgmental that I had to learn to clean that up. Because if I didn't, it didn't matter how many goals I set for myself, I would still be mean to myself. I'd still be hypercritical and I wouldn't be able to enjoy the delight of reaching that goal. I always thought my happiness would be on the other side of the next goal, or the next goal, or the next goal.

So this is what happens when we're super judgy and hypercritical. And we think that something outside of us is what's going to create the happiness. And then that judgement of ourselves actually gets in the way of seeing other solutions to the real problem. We keep trying this one way, this one way, this one way, hypercritical, super judgy, punishing ourselves. And we think that this is the way but it's not actually getting us to the result. And if

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we did get to the result we find it's not sustainable because nobody wants to live a miserable life, very obvious.

Nobody's raising their hand listening to this podcast right now saying, "Yes, I want to live a miserable life." It's a universal truth, nobody wants it. So I bring this up because it happened on yesterday's coaching call with one of the women. She was berating herself for the bender that she had where she blacked out for part of the evening. She hasn't done that in months. She was mortified. And she didn't know if she'd have to go and apologize to everybody at the party because she didn't know what she said or what she did. She had no clue. She blacked out for part of it.

And it was so embarrassing for her and so uncomfortable, she didn't even want to ask her friends or her husband about the night because she didn't want to admit that she couldn't recall parts of it. And many of us have been there. There are times where we have overdrunk and we're like, "Whoa, I don't remember the conversation, or what did I say, or what could I have said? And I hope nothing bad went down." Now, she could go and apologize but here's the thing. She doesn't even know what she's apologizing for so it sounds like kind of an empty apology.

And apologizing is like a form of punishment. And is that going to make a difference for this woman? Will it stop her from doing this again? Most likely not. So if she took these actions it was clear to me that she'd head down the path of repeating this behavior. And here's the funny thing, she even said she's done this before where she's had to – felt she had to give everybody an apology for her behavior but she didn't even know what behavior she was apologizing for.

So she was apologizing to the people without knowing what she should be apologizing for and why she should even be apologizing if that was even necessary. And she was beating herself up over this as a punishment and if she delivered that apology, again it would be an empty apology. And nobody really enjoys getting an empty apology because there might not be anything to apologize for. So the brain goes into this mode of thinking it

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needs damage control but we don't even know the damage that's been done, if there's been any damage done.

And then every person you walk up to and you have to apologize for, how is that woman feeling? Terrible. It's like she has to repent for her behavior and she doesn't even know the behavior she's repenting over. It's completely meaningless. There is nothing good that will come out of that. And what it's doing is keeping her trapped in the moment to the past thinking she has to rectify something in the past that she doesn't know has happened. Now, what she truly wants is to move on from the experience and not have that happen again. That's exactly what she wants.

And this, of apologizing is not on the path to get that. Actually it stunts getting that. So instead of going into damage control which meant so many of us think is necessary, a better way to handle this is preventing the damage from occurring at all in the future. And this is what nobody is doing. Nobody is tackling it from that perspective. And that's what's going to change the behavior and the habit. And when you change the behavior and the habit you cure the problem because now you're not going to take that same action again.

So what I'm highlighting here in this story is that punishment is ineffective for breaking bad habits. When we're focused on damage control, cleaning up the mess we've made we're not looking at how to prevent future messes. It's totally backward thinking. And it's thinking that you can erase what happened, you cannot, it happened. So stop looking in the rearview mirror about how to make that incident prettier because you can't. And that's the wrong way to be spending your time and it's not focusing on strategies to actually change future habits and events.

So think about it, whether you apologize, work out at the gym, however you punish yourself, you actually don't erase the number of drinks you've had, the amount of cookies you've had, the amount of Halloween candy you ate. It doesn't erase the 15 chocolate bars. The effect on your brain and your body has already been done. And actually punishing yourself just adds

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some more gasoline to that fire. It's taking the pain up a couple of notches. So now you feel miserable from the event and miserable because you keep analyzing the event. And no one wants to feel more miserable.

And when you feel more miserable what are you more likely to do? Yeah, overdrink, overeat, keep doing the same activity that made you feel miserable. It doesn't make sense especially when we punish ourselves. So this is something we absolutely do not do in my programs because there is no upside to it, nobody benefits. And it doesn't create behavior change, it actually reinforces the behavior that's already occurring. And you may be looking at your life going, "Yeah, I do that." Because I know I did that for years thinking that would change my drinking habit, it never did.

So what we do in my programs is root out what doesn't work, what hasn't worked. And we put in what does. So think about when you overdrink, or you overeat, do you punish yourself or do you try to out-effort a bad behavior? Do you get in an extra workout when you eat or drink too much to try to shed the calories or shed what you've already done to the body? And if so, what signal is this sending to your brain? I'm not saying not to do an extra workout.

However, if we're doing an extra workout because of punishment that's going to feel awful. And it's also going to signal something differently to your brain rather than exercising because you enjoy it. And when you practice beating up on yourself, what do you get more of? Beating up on yourself, more of the negative self-talk, more of the hypercritical-ness and ultra-judgmental voice in your head.

And when that occurs oftentimes we just keep going down the rabbit hole and continuing those bad behaviors because we tell ourselves it's just too hard to change, or I just don't know how to change, or I just don't know why this keeps happening. Again none of that leads to effective long term habit change because when you feel bad about yourself it's really difficult to take the next right action, the action you want to be taking but you just can't muster up the energy.

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And this is programming I have had to change. This could come from being punished hard as a child, having parents with super high expectations. And if you didn't meet them the consequences were great. Or it could come from having a perfectionistic mentality where you think things need to go a certain way, look a certain way and there's no room for learning along the way. There's no room for setbacks along the way. There's no room for failure or error. And living a life like that feels like you're in prison.

You're so kind to others who goof up or make a small mistake but when it comes to yourself and you're berating yourself over, and over, and over, it's not going to prevent future mistakes. So it becomes the most ineffective thing to do. So if we don't respond well to punishment, what do all humans respond well to? Universally we respond well to praise. Doesn't it feel good to get accolades, to get a standing ovation, to get told you're doing something well?

Think about children or your spouse when you praise them, how do they receive it? How does their face light up? How does their body language change? You will see that human's delight in receiving praise, it's universal. And if the human doesn't delight in receiving praise it's because they might be skeptical if that praise is really true. So it has to be true praise, it can't be just something to inflate one's ego or something nice that's said, but we truly don't believe it. But authentic praise is really what changes human behavior.

When I'm parenting my daughter from a place of judgment and being ultracritical, this has the opposite effect of what I'm wanting. She shuts down. She doesn't want to listen to me. She has her own thoughts that are going around in her head that I'm not enough, or that I'm inadequate, or I don't know enough, or I can't learn something, or my mom is withholding her love because I didn't get this part right. I'm showing her that my love is conditional. It's not, it's unconditional.

And so by getting her to be open, and open-minded, and thinking about things on a more critical level for herself I have to create that environment

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for her. And the way I do that is through praise. And the way I also do that is through curiosity. And when I used these tools in my own life for my drinking it radically changed because this is what gets it done.

I don't know how many women I have talked to who say they can't lose the weight and keep it off. They can't change their relationship with alcohol. But then they use these tools and they go on to do just that. It's sustainable. Punishment doesn't get us there, ladies, it's praise, it's enjoying the journey along the way so that you learn to be that woman ahead of time, before actually achieving the goal. And it's also what creates more momentum on this process.

I am no stranger to fear and I'm not saying I embraced the fear because that is too simplistic of terminology to use. I have used tools to say, "Okay, this is where I want to go and I want to be the woman that enjoys getting there so when I am there I can truly enjoy the accomplishment." And I could truly be proud I have accomplished it and I am there. And it's also valuing where I'm going. It's a meaningful goal to drink less. It's a meaningful goal to get weight off your body.

These activities, these goals, these things that we do for ourselves help us feel so much better in our lives. Our bodies function better, our brains mentate and think better. We have way more energy if we're not dousing our system with these sluggish factors like alcohol and sugar. It doesn't change one area of your life, it changes every area of your life. So knowing this is just the start. It's practicing it because when we practice it, that's what gets it done. It's not just thinking about it, it's doing it.

And you know I'm not a big fan of just gaining knowledge to have knowledge, it's in the execution that it changes our lives. And if you want help practicing these skills and other tools to kick your bad habits of overdrinking, overeating or over whatever then I invite you to work with me in one of my programs. They will change your life for the better.

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Alright my friends, it has been amazing to be with you today and I look forward to seeing 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 Break the Overdrinking Habit at sherryprice.com/startnow. That's sherryprice.com/startnow. I'll see you next week.