

Ep #118: Stop Overdrinking Part 3



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Brooke Castillo

Welcome to the Life Coach School Podcast, where it's all about real clients, real problems, and real coaching. And, now, your host, Master Coach Instructor, Brooke Castillo.

Hi, and welcome to part 3, the final episode in "Stop Overdrinking." I know that this is the one that most of you have been waiting for because this is when we talk about how to actually do it. Now, if you haven't listened to part 1 and part 2, it's really important that you do because the understanding behind the processes that I'm going to teach you is imperative. It's like knowing how to add but not knowing why and not knowing how it works. You'll be able to memorize 3+3, but you won't be able to use it with any other numbers. So, I want to make sure that you understand the concepts behind what I'm teaching you.

Part 1 really dove into why we want to drink, why we like it, and why we have that desire. Part 2 is: Why is it so challenging to quit? What's going on in our brain that compounds the issue of wanting to reduce the amount we're drinking or quit the amount we're drinking. In this part, we're going to talk about the actual techniques that we are going to use to unlearn the desire that is causing us so much trouble.

In the last episode, I talked about the Pavlov dogs, right? I talked about the dogs that, every time that assistance came down the hallway in their clogs, they created a noise that they later retested with a bell, but they created a noise that gave the dogs the indication that they were about to be fed. Before they were fed, they started drooling. There was this conditioned response to drool that was associated with the clogs. This same thing has happened to us with desire. All of our thoughts about drinking have created this conditioned response. Our triggers are maybe in the evenings, maybe going to bars, maybe our thoughts about the end of the day. A lot of us don't have any trouble drinking in the morning or during the day. We don't have any thoughts about drinking or any associations with drinking early in the day. We have lots of associations in the evenings.

The way that they were able to condition those dogs upon ringing a bell, upon the clogs coming down, was the same way they were able to uncondition those same dogs to not drool by doing this. So, if they

hear a bell and then they're fed, they hear a bell, then they're fed, they hear a bell, then they're fed, eventually, they start to drool when they hear the bell. But, if they ring the bell and not feed them, ring the bell, not feed them, ring the bell, not feed them, they reverse that conditioned response. Are you with me on this? This is so fascinating to me.

Our conditioned response, our desire is our conditioned response. That's why it feels like it's out of control, right? It feels like it's just happening automatically. We have this desire. We don't know where it's coming from, but where it is coming from is from our brain. We have a thought about alcohol, we have that desire. We have a thought about alcohol, we have that desire. Now, the dogs couldn't think about their desire in that way, but we can.

So, the way that you unlearn anything on purpose is by using your pre-frontal cortex. All of the mental skills that I am going to teach you in this episode and in my membership is all about using that higher part of your brain to manage to lower part of your brain. I like to call that lower part of our brain a toddler with a knife. It's very innocent, but it can cause a lot of damage if it's not supervised, so you're going to supervise it. You're going to use that pre-frontal cortex to manage that lower part of your brain.

What we're going to do is think about it logically how we created this desire to drink, how we created this desire to drink, and how we have conditioned ourselves to want it more and more and more based on what I taught you in the last two episodes. Teaching yourself to not desire it is actually relatively easy, and what I find fascinating about it is you can take a dog that has been programmed to drool for years and years and years and you can unprogram that in a much less amount of time.

Think about it. For many people, it's taken them 20 years to create this desire for overdrinking. You can undo this desire literally in a matter of hours, and, if you're willing to put the time and the practice into unlearning something, you will be able to do that if you are someone who is overdrinking a small amount and wants to change that, overdrink less amounts or to completely quit drinking.

The way that we go about doing that is the exact way that they did it with those dogs, and it's kind of counter-intuitive, so I'm going to take you through the steps. You're going to interrupt that neural pathway.

So, right now, the neural pathway is you may have a trigger, so there may be the drive home from work or it may be walking into a bar, walking into a party, seeing a certain friend. That's kind of that circumstantial trigger. Then, you're going to have a thought, and it might be as simple as, "I want a drink." "I need a drink." Those are two of the main ones, right? "I want a drink." "I need a drink." "I need to relax." "It won't matter this one time." "Who cares?" "Screw it, I'm going to have one." There's a whole list of thoughts that you might have that will trigger that desire.

Once you trigger that desire, then you will act on it typically, and that will perpetuate that desire, right? It's just like the clogs or the bell, the drool, the feeding. The alcohol, the thought, the desire, the drinking. Remember, with Pavlovian dogs, the way they handled it is they still did the bell, they still had the drool, but they didn't give them the food, and, eventually, the drool stopped, and we're going to do the same thing. We're going to still have the trigger, still have the thought, still have the desire, but we're not going to drink.

Now, some of you are like, "Yeah, easier said than done. How do you not react to that desire? That's been my problem all along." Here is the trick. I want you to think about that desire as an urge, right? We use the word "urge" a lot when we're talking about food, and I want you to think about that desire as an urge, that you want to drink. Something has told you to drink, that you need a drink, that you want a drink, that you can have a drink, that it's no big deal if you have a drink. "Ah, screw it, I'll just have a drink." Right? And then you have that urge.

Now, there's three things that you can do with that urge. One, you can drink, and then you'll satisfy that urge. You have the urge, and then you satisfy it. The second thing you can do, and this is what most of you have been trying to do and failing is resist that urge, push against it, resist it, create a bunch of anxiety, create a bunch of cognitive dissonance, create problems for yourself. For most of you, that ends up with drinking because that ultimately relieves that urge.

But the third option, and this I really want you to think about doing, and this is going to solve everything for you, I promise, if you do it, is you allow that urge to be there. You do not engage with it. You do not negotiate with it. You do not try to make it to go away. That urge is the drool. That urge, caused by the bell, which is your brain, is the drool. You can't stop the drool with force. You can't stop that conditioned response with force. You have to allow it to be there. The only way we make the drool go away, the only way we stop that conditioned response, the only way is by not rewarding it with the alcohol, by not providing it with the dopamine rush that comes from drinking the alcohol, by not putting the alcohol in our brain.

This will not be difficult if you approach it this way, if you approach it from the stance that you going to allow the urge to be there and you're not going to answer it. You're going to allow the bell to be rung. You're going to allow the drool to come, and you're just not going to answer it. This process, being able to do this, is a skill, and I want you to listen to me very carefully. I mentioned this in the very first video, but I'm going to remind you of it. You may tell yourself that you can't do it, but the reason you can't do it is because you don't know how, and you don't know how because you haven't practiced.

I love the example of the unicycle. I use it all the time. You may say to me, "I can't ride that unicycle. I can't get on it. I don't know how." That's very different than, "I just simply can't ever do it." Do you see the difference?

If you're having trouble not resisting the urge, you are conditioned to resist that urge, and if you find yourself trying to resist it, it's only because you haven't learned how not to. If you find yourself reacting to that urge and constantly drinking every time you have an urge, it's just because you haven't learned how to allow it to be there. That is a skill you can learn. Right? It's not intolerable. It's not awful. And, in fact, when you learn how to allow an urge to be there, you will realize that that desire, that urge, is completely harmless. The only time it becomes a problem is when you give into it or you resist it. It is completely harmless.

There is a skill that you can learn that is only available to human

beings, that's only available with the use of your pre-frontal cortex, and most of us don't even know this skill. The skill is being able to watch yourself think, to be able to watch yourself feel, and not react. Can you sit here and watch yourself think thoughts and not react? Can you watch yourself feel a feeling and not react? When you associate with your pre-frontal cortex, when you go into the space where you are witnessing yourself think, witnessing yourself feel, there is tremendous relief in just doing that. So, instead of just being in your body feeling like you're being affected by this urge, it's almost like you're the witness watching yourself have an urge. You see what I mean? It's almost like someone else having that urge.

Now, you may not be able to do this the first time you try it, you may not be able to do it the first 20 times you try, but you will learn how to do it. You can learn how to do it in a matter of hours, in a matter of practice, being able to practice yourself, watching yourself have an urge, watching yourself have a desire and not act on it. That's very different than resisting it and pushing against it and fighting it and wishing it weren't there. That's something, if you join my membership, that I will really help you do if you're struggling with it. But I want to tell you that it's not worth struggling with it. You just need to practice it.

Here are 3 things you can do with the urge. You can drink, you can struggle against it, or you can allow it to be there. Now, here's the way I want you to think about it. I want you to think about noticing, allowing, paying attention to all of the thoughts that are creating that desire. The first thing you're going to do is allow the urge to be there without fighting with it and without reacting to it. You're going to learn how to do that, and we're going to practice it.

Now, if you fail at it a hundred times, it doesn't matter. Keep practicing. Keep trying. A unicycle takes 12 hours to learn how to ride. Up until that moment when you learn how to ride it, all 12 hours is failure. That's what I want you to think about with this urge. I want you to think about, "How do I allow an urge? I know, if I feel tense, that I'm not allowing it, I'm resisting it. I know that, if I drink, I'm not allowing it, I'm obeying it. How do I figure out how to just let it be there without freaking me out and without obeying it?" That's going to be your process.

Then, you're going to watch the thoughts that create it. You're going to watch yourself think. You're going to watch every thought that comes up. You're going to allow those thoughts to be there. Now, some of them you're not going to like. Some of them are going to be illogical. Some of them aren't going to make any sense. It's totally fine, just allow them to be there. I like to write them all down. I like to just be the witness. I like to observe my own thinking. I like to think, "That's really silly that I think that. Oh my gosh, that makes no sense that I think that," or, "Wow, no wonder I want to drink because of all these thoughts I have about it!" and just witness those thoughts.

Now, the more you're able to witness your thoughts, feel that urge, and not drink the less and less that desire will show up in your life. If you're able to do it 20 times, the desire will probably be down by half. Now, this is not the same as, "I'm not going to drink for 20 days," and you go like this against that desire and you use sheer willpower not to drink for 20 days. That will have no effect on your desire lessening. In fact, it'll probably increase your desire. So, do not try and white knuckle it. That is not the skill I'm teaching you.

The skill I'm teaching you is how to allow an urge to be there, how to allow that itch to be there without scratching it, and to be at peace with it. That is the skill that we have to learn. It's not difficult, but it does require practice.

Note the sentences in your brain, and notice how it comes up with more and more sentences trying to increase your desire to drink. Now, your brain is only doing this because it thinks it will die otherwise. It has been programmed that, if there's dopamine involved, get it no matter what, and we're going to die. Go, go, go. Get it. Your brain will come up with lots of different sentences to try and get you to drink. It's totally fascinating. If you can observe it with your pre-frontal cortex, observe that lower brain trying to do that, you'll be able to do it from a place of peace and interest and curiosity and fascination, and you won't get wrapped up in the drama of all of it.

Now, when you allow these sentences to be there, this will create desire, but that desire is completely harmless. Desire is completely

harmless until you react to it or try and fight it. Practice allowing it. Don't be allowed, upset, annoyed, or frustrated by the sentences creating that desire. Allow them to be there and just witness them from a place of peace. The reason they're there is why. Your brain created them because it thinks you're going to die if you don't drink that alcohol. It literally thinks it's part of your survival. It's not trying to hurt you, in fact, the opposite, it is trying to save you.

All right, let's move on to the third piece that I want to teach you. The first thing you're going to do is allow an urge to be there: not fight it, not react to it. The second thing you're going to do is really pay close attention to all of those thoughts that are causing that desire. You're going to be a witness. You want to become conscious of those sentences in your mind. Those sentences are powerful. Those sentences are the clogs coming down the hall. Those sentences are the bells ringing, so you want to know what they are so you can expect them. Those are creating the desire. At this point, they're probably really unconscious.

The third thing I want you to do, and, again, this is a tool for your pre-frontal cortex that only your pre-frontal cortex can do, is we're going to use its ability for planning. We're going to use its ability for decisions ahead of time. Now, one of the things that's so amazing about this part of your human brain is that it's the only thing on the planet that can really do it. It can really like plan on purpose and decide on purpose. As humans, we can do that.

Now, some of you may say, "Well, I've tried this before. I've tried to decide ahead of time that I wasn't going to drink," but that's before you had tool 1 and tool 2. Now, you'll really be able, with the tools of being able to allow urges to be there, you'll be able to allow your decisions ahead of time, and I have many tools that I will have you use to supervise yourself and set yourself up for success and to really plan ahead and have a strategy and have a way of planning things so you will never be at the effect of your brain.

One of the most important things I can tell you, please don't forget this no matter what, whether you join my course or not, I really want you to remember this: under no circumstance should you ever, if you are someone who wants to stop overdrinking, you should ever take a

drink that isn't planned. All drinking has to come from the pre-frontal cortex. You cannot let any of the planning come from the clogs or the bell ringing because that will perpetuate that unwanted desire.

First and foremost, I teach my students to plan their drinking. And you can plan as much drinking as you want. I'm going to drink on Tuesday, and I'm going to drink two bottles of wine. Fine. Plan it ahead of time. I have a worksheet that I think is really important to do that I have my clients use, and it basically has you think about, "Okay, what do I want to drink? Why do I want to drink it? What would be the consequences? What will be the obstacles?" Really anticipate and plan in a really deliberate way what you're going to drink and why.

For example, you might be going to a wine tasting. Plan how many glasses of wine you want to have, and don't limit yourself. If you want to drink 20 glasses of wine, 20 tastes of wine, that's fine. You just have to plan it. Your pre-frontal is in charge. None of this responding in the moment or reacting on that unconscious desire.

Do you understand the difference? It's really, really important. You don't ever want to have that knee-jerk conditioning driving our actions. We always want our actions to be driven from the pre-frontal cortex when it comes to anything that has something with concentrated pleasure. That includes shopping, it includes achievement, it includes gambling, it includes pornography, alcohol, drugs, cigarettes, anything. It has to be something that you are managing from that pre-frontal cortex, never something that you're allowing to be managed from that lower brain that's basically in a thought air of neurological junk because it thinks it's a survival mechanism, and it's not. So, planning and making decisions ahead of time.

So, whenever you want to drink, starting now, you have to plan it 24 hours in advance. You need to plan what you will drink, you need to plan how much you will drink. Period. I like to add, and I have a worksheet for this, what will be the consequences that you will be experiencing and what are the obstacles. Make sure that you plan that ahead of time and you make that decision from a place of a clean mind. That decision has to be lock solid. You have to commit to that

decision 100 percent.

One of the things I tell my students is don't underestimate how much you want to drink because you don't want to get in a position where you're letting your lower brain take over, because then you're creating more drudgery. You're creating more conditioned response. You have to stay in charge. If you say 3 drinks, that's it. If you say 15 drinks, that's it. You're the one managing that from your pre-frontal cortex. It's always 24 hours ahead of time, and it's always decided.

Now, if you put yourself in that situation and you have an urge to drink that isn't planned from your pre-frontal cortex, you do not, under any circumstance, drink. You do not resist that urge, you just allow it to be there.

Now, some of you may say, "Okay, well that's very challenging, because, once I start drinking, I lose the ability to allow for that urge," and that is true, but you will be surprised at the power of that pre-frontal cortex even when your brain is inebriated. You will come at some point where you will lose control, and so I want you to really think about how many drinks that is for you so you know that you can always stay in pre-frontal control for any drink that you have. That's first and foremost. All decisions have to be decisions ahead of time. When you plan for decisions ahead of time, then you must honor them. The way that you will honor them now differently than you did before is by using your pre-frontal cortex to manage your own urges to allow for those urges to be there without giving into them.

The other thing that I always want you to really think about is: What do you want your regular drinking life to be? How often do you want to drink? What do you want your regular protocol to be there? What do you want to drink and why? And making those decisions from a place of your pre-frontal cortex and not from a decision from any kind of conditioned response, not from a belief that you don't have control but from a belief that you do have control. It's really important.

I have another worksheet that I use and that my clients use for challenging situations where you don't want to drink. Let's say you've decided you do not want to drink and you're going to a wedding or you do not want to drink and you're going to a work party and you

know that there's going to be tons of drinks there. We have a whole plan and you should have a whole plan for how you're going to handle all of the urges that'll be presented.

How are you going to handle all of the conversations that you're going to need to have? I find it fascinating that alcohol is one of the things that you have to justify not eating. It's the same with sugar. So, if someone says, "Hey, do you want some champagne?" and you say, "No," people say, "Why not?" Nobody says that when they offer you water. "Want some water?" "No." "Why not?" Because they don't want any water, right? When you're not having alcohol, people want you to explain yourself. "You don't want a cupcake? Why not? Explain yourself." Is it because you have a problem? Is it because you have an issue? It's because you're alcoholic? No.

My answer is always I just prefer not to. I just prefer not to have it. Thanks. I used to spend hours figuring out how I was going to answer that question. It's just so brilliant. I just prefer not to have it. Really, really important to have plans for challenging situations, decide ahead of time, anticipate those obstacles that you're going to be faced with.

Now, some of you right now are thinking, "Oh my God, this is so tedious. This is going to take so much work. This is so much time." That's part of the problem, because the brain wants to be efficient. It wants to delegate to the lower brain. It wants to delegate to the brain that's already programmed, that's already efficient. The last thing it wants to do is think about all of this stuff and expend all of this energy planning. "Why should we do any of that? Let's delegate everything." But you know what happens when you delegate. You get that automatic Pavlovian response of drinking, drinking, drinking, drinking, drinking that makes you feel completely out of control.

I want to acknowledge that, yes, this will take effort, and especially in the beginning. But, once you unlearn the desire, it's effortless. But it's just like riding a unicycle. It takes 12 hours to learn how to do it, and that's a lot of effort, but, then, once you know how, then you know how forever.

I want to promise you that this work and this practice and this

repetition and this falling off and falling off and getting back on and falling off and getting back on is absolutely worth it. There's no such thing as, "Oh my gosh, you had a drink. Now, you have to start all over again." No! That's not how it works at all! But I will say that, in the beginning, the more you can deny that automatic response the easier it is to unlearn, and the only time you want to drink is when you've planned it ahead of time and it's a conscious decision that you're managing with that pre-frontal cortex.

The other thing that's really important is that, anytime you make a mistake, anytime you, say, maybe you were only going to drink 3 and you end up drinking 4, that you take tedious and deliberate time to study exactly what happened and how you can prevent that from happening next time and what went on with your brain and what went on with your pre-frontal cortex versus your lower brain. It is such an amazing opportunity for you to learn from.

Now, a lot of people will say, "Oh, I just fell off the wagon, it's no big deal, and I want to get back on it." Do not do that. Do not just blow it off, because that is exactly what your lower brain wants you to do: not pay attention, not be conscious. You want to use your pre-frontal cortex to pay attention, to be conscious, to dissect every little second of every little thing that went on. What were the triggers that happened in this situation? What were the thoughts that happened in your brain? What was the desire? Why did you have a hard time allowing it? Why did you fight it or why did you give in to it? Really, I have a whole worksheet on how you can like unravel those. The more time you spend on doing that the more desire you're going to unlearn.

You see, what's happening is what happens in that lower brain is completely unconscious, and it's the point of it because it's efficient. It doesn't have to be in your conscious brain. But, as soon as you bring it to your conscious brain, then, you can evaluate it and change it and unlearn it and decide on purpose, and that's when you're going to feel in control. The longer you leave it unconscious the more it's going to feel like it's out of your voluntary control.

We're not going to do anything punitive ever. I want to highly encourage you to never beat yourself up, to never bring up negative

emotions, to never tell yourself you're out of control, to never say, "This is never going to work," to never say, "This was too good to be true," never say, "Oh my gosh, I can't figure this out. This works for some other people." All that negativity will be very tempting.

I really want to encourage you not to do anything punitive to yourself, not to hang around with anyone that doubts your ability. You are not powerless over this. You are completely powerful. You know why? You have a pre-frontal cortex. You are a bad ass. You can use that to manage your mind, especially your animal, primitive brain. It has no chance against your pre-frontal cortex. Don't forget that. This is a skill that you need to learn, but, once you learn it, it will be effortless.

Then, ironically, and here's what's the most ironic, powerful thing of all of this: Once you unlearn desire, then you delegate that lack of desire to your lower brain. Then, the very thing that was creating all of that desire will now create the opposite for you just as efficiently, just as effortlessly as it currently creates desire. Once you get on that unicycle and practice and practice and practice and practice, then, eventually, you'll delegate it to that lower brain, and you won't ever have to think about how to ride it again. Just like in a car, you first were trying to figure out how to drive; now, it's completely delegated to that lower brain.

That's how we do it. We bring up what's happening automatically in that lower brain area, we make it conscious, we change it by unlearning it, by allowing it, paying attention to it, un-Pavlovianing it, and then we re-delegate the lack of desire around alcohol to that.

It doesn't mean we don't have to never drink. We can drink, but we only drink accordingly to the pre-frontal decision. We never drink as a reflex, as a reaction. We never decide in that moment to drink. It's always planned ahead of time, and you can plan it ahead of time as much as you want and for as many drinks as you want, but you have to do it from a clean, sober mind. You have to do it from a place of deliberateness, where you anticipate the obstacles, you anticipate any kind of negative response you're going to have to drinking, and then you officially decide that you want to do it anyway. You will never make a decision that will lead you into harm's way when you make those decisions from your pre-frontal strategic brain.

Your brain, your lower brain, will inadvertently make decisions that will harm you, not because it wants to harm you but because it literally believes that your survival depends on it. It's just like picture a toddler who doesn't get that candy bar, like that toddler literally thinks they are going to die if they don't get the candy bar. They are on the floor, they think they're going to die if they don't get it. You know they're not going to die. It's all going to be fine. They're going to pull through. They're not going to eat the candy bar, and they're going to pull through.

That's what you have to do with your lower brain. It thinks you're going to die if it doesn't drink the alcohol. In fact, the opposite is true. If you continue to drink too much alcohol, you could die on that direction. But you just let it have its fit, you let it freak out, you know that it's very serious, you know that it thinks it's very important, you let that urge be there, you allow it to be there, and then you move on.

One of the things that's really powerful for many of my clients is, if you find yourself in a situation where you have a tremendous urge to drink, all you have to tell yourself is, "You can have that in 24 hours." You can have it, but you have to wait 24 hours until the pre-frontal can make the decision. We can't make any decisions based on our lower brain. That's been a huge relief for people and prevented them from drinking in the moment and encouraging that bell, Pavlovian response, that desire response, that increased learning of desire.

Remember, desire is learned. You have taught yourself to desire alcohol. You can teach yourself to desire it less or not at all. I promise you, if you apply these tools and you practice them, you can learn what I have learned. You have a powerful brain. There is nothing that even comes close to your human brain, nothing on the planet that even comes close. You can utilize it if you apply this skill.

I really want to encourage you to join me. We are going to have an amazing group of people, and we are going to go through this process of unlearning desire. The way that the program works is you will join for the first month. There will be a series of videos that will be required for you to watch. They will go into detail of every single one of these tools. It will include the downloadable worksheets that you

will then print off on your printer or keep on your computer, you can fill them in online, that you will be required to do in order to unlearn this process and manage how much you want to drink.

Then, after that, every month after that, there will be 2 coaching calls a month where you will be able to be coached directly by me, ask me questions, share what you're being challenged with. Any situation you're faced with, I will be able to help you. I will be able to show you how to manage your brain. If you don't believe this is possible, if you have a lot of thoughts that are in your way, I will help you with all of it.

So, I want to encourage you to join me in our membership at stopoverdrinking.com. Simply go there, give us your information, sign up, get started, and let's do this. I believe in you! I know that nobody's told you about these tools, but I am going to tell you all about them. I am going to teach them to you. And, yes, for sure, you can lessen your desire to overdrink. I'll see you there. Bye.

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