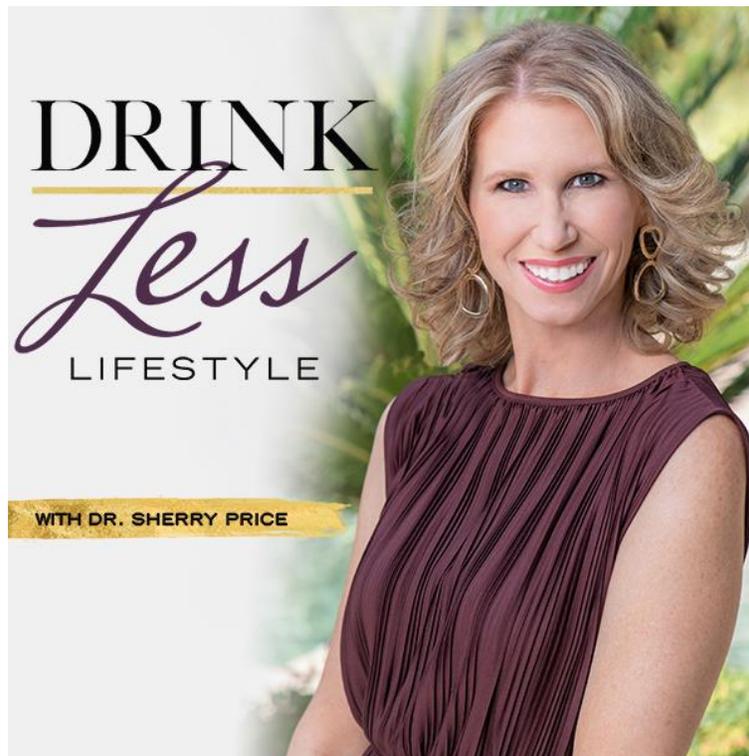


Ep #6: Cognitive Dissonance



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 6.

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. How are you today? I was just checking out the reviews on my podcast before recording this one because it is time to pick out our first winner of the \$100 Amazon gift card. And before I tell you who that winner is I just want to say thank you. As I was reading the reviews I just really want to acknowledge you and appreciate the time, the energy, the effort, and for your honest comments and feedback.

My passion is to really reach the women suffering in isolation, thinking that they are the only ones who are drinking more than they want and yet they don't feel quite like an alcoholic. And they really want the tools and the strategies to be able to conquer this, to get control back. To be in charge of their life so that they can feel better, healthier and be more giving and more loving towards themselves and towards others. And that's what I feel your review helps to do.

And I also invite you to follow me more. I have created a free private Facebook group called Stop the Overdrinking Habit. I will link it in the show notes. And you can follow us there to get more learning, more coaching tools and to connect with me through that medium as well. You can also follow me on Instagram, and my handle is @drsherryprice.

So today's winner is René. And I want to share with you what she wrote. She writes, "Thank you, listening to your first episode was so crazy for me. It was like I had written this myself. I am also a healthcare provider with a hefty desire to have wine to relax or reward myself ever for things not worthy of a reward. I talk negatively to myself every day about drinking.

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And then I fight with myself on the way home from work about whether I will stop at the store and buy wine if I don't have any at home.

I will often convince myself there is something else I need just to avoid going in for just the wine. I feel like a hypocrite talking to my patients about healthy relationships with alcohol. I have listened to all three of your episodes and really look forward to many more. Thank you so much for doing this.”

You are so welcome René. And I have been right where you are my friend, stopping for my favorite bottle of Chardonnay after work and feeling like a hypocrite around my relationship with alcohol, that's all very familiar to me as well. I just want to say thank you for showing up, thank you for your honesty, because I feel if we can shed light on what we experience that experience can go and help others. And I'm a firm believer that awareness and acknowledgement must be the first step towards making change, and congratulations René on being the first winner.

So if you haven't left a review go ahead and do so. I'll be picking winners and you'll hear who they are, announced in the upcoming episodes.

Alright, now we're going to move into today's topic and that topic is cognitive dissonance. So first, if you haven't heard of this term I want to describe what cognitive dissonance is. So cognitive dissonance is when we have conflicting attitudes, beliefs or behaviors. It's when you do something that you know is bad or wrong for you like smoking. We know smoking causes cancer but we still may do it. Or overdrinking, we know that drinking too much alcohol is not good for us. We know we get a lot of negative consequences from it, but we still choose to do it.

And oftentimes when we're doing the activity we have a dual conversation in our head. We have these conflicting thoughts on the topic. So you can have thoughts like when you start drinking, I know finishing this whole bottle is not what I want to do. And then you have the thought, but I just can't seem to stop once I get started.

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Cognitive dissonance can also look like a conflict with your own values where you say, “I really want to be healthy. I value my health.” But then you have a conversation in your head that justifies overdrinking because hey, you’ve had a hard day. Or I deserve this glass, and that glass goes on to become a few more glasses. And we know that wine or any alcohol, for that matter, doesn’t have any health benefits. So you see this cognitive dissonance, this dissonance is not being in harmony, or in disharmony, or discord with what we’re thinking and what we’re actually doing.

And this leads to incongruence. And the crappy part of all of it is how it makes us feel inside as well as mentally. So cognitive dissonance produces the feeling of mental discomfort. And this discomfort can eat us up inside. It’s like we don’t fully understand ourselves. And this causes us to retreat, sometimes hide, and quite frankly for me it lowered my self-esteem. Because our brains really like to know and understand why we do what we do. It wants to figure things out. It wants to take the unknown and turn it into the known. It wants to make reason and logic out of chaos.

This is how our brains are designed to work, it’s really a problem solving meaning making organ. So when we can’t figure out or understand why we’re operating the way we are it really feels icky on the inside. We feel shame and confusion, self-doubt. We lack that self-trust because we can’t trust ourselves to be around alcohol. And we just don’t know what we stand for. Because if we stood for healthy living, and living in alignment with our values then why the heck are we still overdrinking? It’s that internal conversation I would have over and over with myself.

And I know for me when I had this cognitive dissonance going on about my drinking it really made me feel like a bad person. It made me question, do I really care about my health or myself? It made me question am I lying to myself that I really care about health? Because if I really did then why am I doing what I’m doing? And then that became even more confusing because I don’t really identify as a liar and so this felt even worse. Actually one of

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my top core values is honesty. It's probably my number one if I was to rank them.

I am that friend that you go to when you want to hear the honest truth. And my sister would tease me about this growing up because she says, "You find that to be strength, and sometimes it's really not, because sometimes I really don't want to know your honest opinion." And I get it, sometimes people don't really want the truth and they don't really want honesty. They want us to tell them what they want us to tell them, which may not be exactly how we feel or how we perceive things to be.

So honesty is super important to me. I mean it's so important to me that if I'm hanging out with a group of friends and I feel somebody is not honest, I'm immediately turned off. I immediately want to disengage from that relationship. It is really one of my core values. So when I felt like I wasn't being honest with myself and saying I value health and why weren't my actions congruent with that. I became really confused and really disheartened with myself because I couldn't figure it out. I felt super confused.

So this cognitive dissonance around my drinking was a big deal for me. It really disturbed me on the inside. And I would see this play out over and over again, not living in alignment with my values, that it caused so much mental stress for me. During the day I would eat fairly healthy until I started drinking. It's like once I started drinking I gave myself permission to start eating unhealthy. If I'm going to do one unhealthy activity, Sherry, you might as well go and do many more. It really didn't make sense to me why I was doing what I was doing.

I would care for all the people in my life, not miss a birthday, never back out on my friends if I'm committed to meeting up with them, respond to work and personal calls right away. But I would just want to check out at the end of the day exhausted from giving of myself all day long. And I would even be kind and caring to my family all day again, until I started drinking then I just didn't care. I just wanted to be checked out. It was like now you're on

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your own guys, I'm the mom, I'll just be over here because I need some peace and quiet and just some more wine please, and I'll be happy.

Can any of you relate? The more I speak to moms that stay at home, moms that are working, professional women, it's like I feel that we all talk about the end of our day this way. We just feel so exhausted, so much about giving to others that we just feel spent. So what can we do about it? If the problem is the dissonance, the incongruence or the conflicting beliefs and behaviors then that's what we need to focus on to change.

We basically have two inner voices or two thought patterns that disagree with each other that are running around in our heads. We have the one thought a drink sounds really great right now. And another thought, yeah, it's not the best decision. Maybe you shouldn't start drinking because you know you can't stop. So I'm going to talk about two ways that I find that we can deal with and change the cognitive dissonance in our head.

So the first way is to change the behavior. Now, I find that changing the behavior is just one way of doing it and it's not always the way that works for most people. I find that relatively few people can do this successfully. So it looks like the smoker who just stops smoking and never looks back. Or it's like the heavy drinker who just decides one day she's done with her drinking. She's over it and she never thinks about pouring another drink again.

That's changing the behavior. Now, this does happen to people and it does break the cognitive dissonance, we change the behavior and so now it's in alignment with how we think and how we want to be around alcohol. But I don't find that this way is very common. And I really, really, really want to stress that because I was waiting for that day to happen to me.

Actually I remember hearing from a close friend of mine that goes to my church and she said that she just woke up in the middle of the night one night and it was like almost God spoke to her and said, "You're done drinking wine." And she never touched it again. She said that was her big

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moment and she just felt so relieved and then just never had desire for alcohol after that. And I kept thinking to myself, wow, that's so awesome, I want that to happen to me.

And I even prayed for that to happen to me. And that's what I did, I just waited, wishing and praying for that prayer to be answered. And I know a lot of women who are not taking any action to change their behavior because they might be saying stuff like, "Yeah, my drinking's bad but it's not that bad. It's only three glasses of wine or alcohol, three to four times a week, it's not that bad."

Or we're waiting for that moment, that turning point when things must change, when you get that dream at night, or that flash of premonition. Or you're almost praying that your doctor tells you that your liver enzymes have increased. Or that your family threatens to leave you, or heaven forbid, you get in a car accident, or hit some other form of rock bottom. We're all waiting for that impetus, that moment outside of us that we hope will just change the behavior for good.

And I think that's dangerous to keep waiting, to keep waiting for circumstances outside of us to change us rather than owning that responsibility for ourselves. So we wait for this moment but we all know that that's not necessarily going to guarantee that we're going to quit or change. I mean we all know people that continue to smoke past that first heart attack. Or people that don't change their ways around sugar even after they're diagnosed with diabetes, or just people that don't heed caution when we get the warning signs.

Because we know old habits are hard to change, hitting rock bottom or not, getting a diagnosis or not. And I'll tell you, the longer you wait to do something to make that change the more attached you become to the old habit, the more attached you become to the drinking. Because it becomes such a part of who you are and your identity, it becomes the part of this is what I do at night. This is who I am on the weekends. It becomes part of our identity and that gets hard to change.

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So while I find just focusing on the behavior one way to end the cognitive dissonance, I don't feel that that way works for most people. Another way to change the cognitive dissonance is actually by critical thinking and breaking down the exact thoughts and beliefs that are causing the dissonance. So for instance if we don't want to be the woman who overdrinks then we have to break down all the reasons why we are currently overdrinking. Why are we that woman who is overdrinking now?

So I'll give you the three step process that I work with my clients on to help break down their cognitive dissonance around overdrinking. The first step is really important.

So the first step is to state exactly what you want or you want to be doing. Again, state it exactly the way you want to be acting around alcohol. And you should be as specific and clear as possible. So I started out saying for me I just want to be a woman who didn't want alcohol on a nightly basis. So let me repeat that. I wanted to be a woman who didn't want alcohol on a nightly basis. Do you see what's wrong with me saying it that way? I'm focusing on what I don't want. I'm not focusing on what I do want. I'm focusing on what I don't want.

And guess what happens when you talk that way to yourself. The brain hears what you don't want but it can't determine if you want it or don't want it so it just thinks you want it so you become more of what you don't want to be. Whatever the brain focuses on that's what you'll create more of in your life. So again it's not about focusing on what you don't want. It's focusing exactly and specifically on what you do want.

So let me tell you this is what I hear a lot from women when I say, "What do you want to be around drinking? What kind of relationship do you want?" I hear this, "I don't want to want alcohol." "I don't want alcohol to control me." "I don't want to feel like I need another drink." "I don't want to keep doing this to myself." "I want to be a woman who doesn't think about alcohol all the time." Do you see in all of those examples we're focusing on what we don't want?

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And even when we say, “I want to be a woman who doesn’t think about alcohol all the time,” think about somebody saying, “Don’t think about a pink elephant in the room.” And what’s the first image that pops into your mind? The pink elephant, after we just told our brain, don’t think about a pink elephant. So the same concept applies. If we’re going to tell our brain what to do we should focus on what we want it to do, not what we don’t want it to do.

So remember this negative talk never works, and I hear it all the time from the ladies that I work with. So, start with what you do want and let me give you some examples of this. I want to be a woman who can take it or leave it with her drinking. I want to be a woman who drinks one or two drinks twice a week. I want to be a woman who rewards herself in healthy ways at the end of the day. I want to be a woman who talks lovingly to herself and invests time, energy and money into her health and wellness. That was a big powerful statement for me.

I did want to invest in my health and wellness. I always want to invest in my health and wellness, because if you don’t have that you don’t get to enjoy the other pleasures of life. So that’s step one. Again it’s about stating clearly exactly what you want.

So step two is to list all the reasons why you do what you currently do. So why is it that you’re drinking? And don’t say it’s just habit. Go deeper than that. Why is it that you’re drinking? What’s going on for you? Is there an emotion driving this behavior like entitlement, feeling like you need a reward, or is it boredom? Or is it you’re just exhausted at the end of the day from giving, giving, giving to everybody else and now you feel like you get to receive? And that’s fine if you want a reward.

But then I might ask deeper questions like, “Is this the way you want to reward yourself with a drink or a bottle?” So just start listing out all the reasons that you do over-drink. What this do will start to get out that cognitive dissonance that’s going on inside of your head and put it onto paper. And this is so helpful for the brain to see, because the brain when it

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sees it written with your hand will start to problem solve, will start to see the information a lot differently than if it's just swarming around in your brain.

Okay, so now we're going to move on to step three. So after we listed down all the thoughts this step three becomes very important, because now we know what cognitive dissonance is going on. We know all the reasons in our brain that we are overdrinking, or wanting the drink. Now we're going to just look at in step three and question all of these thoughts, gently prodding the brain with some questions. So here are three areas I like to use to question the thoughts that I've written down.

First of all I want to question if I want these thoughts to remain true. They might feel like truth but truth is something we assign to the statements in our head. Most truth is something that we just define as such with our brains. We know our brains love to problem solve. And we know that our brains love to attach meaning to things. So it likes to attach truth or false or maybe not total truth or partially truth. Our brain is always attaching meaning to sentences and thoughts in our brain.

So I really first like to just question if these thoughts, I want them to remain true. Next I like to say, "Okay brain, are there alternative thoughts I can have instead that would better suit me?" And then I also like to question my brain to see if maybe I don't want to think that thought and some other thought would be better.

So I want to go through an exercise and show you how this works in action. So let's use the example, I deserve a reward. So we can first of all question that thought and see if we want it to remain true. Do I deserve a reward? A reward for what, what's going on in my day that makes me feel like I deserve a reward? Is it because I put in a full day at work? Is it because I worked an 8, 10, 12 hour shift? Is it because I stayed and did overtime and so I deserve a reward for that? Is my reward of paycheck not enough?

We get a paycheck for our jobs and a lot of us get benefits, and additional bells and whistles that come as rewards for being an employee. But I get it.

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The nurses in my program will tell me, “Hey, I take care of people all day long so I deserve to take care of myself at the end of the day.” And the teachers in my program and the stay-at-home moms in my program will say, “Yeah, I take care of kids all day long.” And they’re just exhausted at the end of the day and need a reward.

So if you think you need a reward is it true that you need a reward? Or maybe you just need a break and some quiet time, or some space to breathe and to not think, or not be bothered. Because I think for a lot of us we’re just used to getting demands all day long from our jobs and our kids. And so, just having some time and space alone might be all the reward that we need, and would we even call that a reward? I might call that we just need some downtime. We just need some recovery.

We just need some rest because we’re on the go all the time. And we don’t need alcohol to give us permission to have some downtime. We don’t need alcohol to give us permission just to take a breather for ourselves and just to sit alone. The brain does need to recover after making a lot of decisions, after having a lot of inputs.

Okay, so if you’re still thinking, yeah, I still feel like I need a reward though, fine, you get to have a reward. Now we get to go and question is that the way you want to reward yourself is with alcohol or is there an alternative that we can use? What else would feel like a reward? What other affects are you looking for from the drinking that you can get from other sources, from doing other things? And I think a good question to ask here is that is there another way I can reward myself that will be in more alignment with my core values?

Can I just maybe give myself 5-15 minutes of deep breathing or something that feels good? Remember, it’s still going to feel good but maybe not as good as the alcohol. Because remember we talked about how alcohol works in the brain. And that’s giving us a large hit of dopamine and most other activities do not do that. The other things we’re going to choose are not going to be feeling like a huge reward. They’ll still feel like a little reward

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but they won't feel a huge reward. So we have to recalibrate our expectations there.

So we talked about how we question the thought and if we still want it to be true. Hey yeah, I still want a reward. Okay, then we look for alternatives, how else can we reward ourselves? Is it by quiet time? Is it by taking a walk? And then finally we can even question our brain even further and say, "Gosh, is there a different thought that would serve me better than I need a reward?"

So in this case I like to take the situation outside of ourselves and just make it a blanket statement to the general public. So if we're saying to ourselves at the end of the day that I deserve a reward for doing x, y and z, say working a 10 hour shift or being with the kids all day. So does that mean everybody who works deserves a reward at the end of the day? We take that statement and we generalize it to everybody.

So if we're not just looking at ourselves and we're just considering everybody who works, we just might pick out a few people we know in our lives. We might say, "Hey, does that mean my pastor who works a 10 hour shift, he gets to drink at the end of the day to reward himself?" Or the person that picks up my trash, the trash collector, he gets to have a reward at the end of the day and so he can go home and have all the alcohol he wants, or she wants? So does that apply to everybody who works?

And then what do you consider working? What do you consider hard work or a long day? So that can even pertain potentially to our kids who are in college learning and doing the hard work of learning and mastering topics then taking exams. That they can reward themselves at the end of a long study session or at the end of a break with just getting obliterated with alcohol.

I just like to take this example and apply it to everybody, because then my brain starts to get some distance from the thought from myself. And it starts to see how I can start thinking of this thought in other ways because if I'm

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just applying it to my life I'm not so sure I'm going to see it differently. And then it begins to open up the conversation around the other stories I have such as I had a long day. Because every day is the same, we all get the same 24 hours.

One day is not longer than the other but we say that to ourselves because we want to feel good that we've put in the work. But we also don't want to use it as a means of self-sabotage where we then give ourselves permission to go and over-imbibe. I'm thinking to myself I sat at a desk all day or did x, y and z all day. But there's so many other jobs that are more physical or more manual, or just for me would be so much harder to do because I'm not equipped in those areas. So I'd begin to question did I even have a hard day? Why am I thinking about it as being hard?

And there are plenty of other jobs out there that I would find much harder. So it starts to give me some distance from this thought where I can begin to analyze it and begin to question it. And begin to say, "Okay, if I keep thinking the same way I'm going to still generate desire for myself for the alcohol and that's not what I want." So maybe I just need to change that dialog going on inside of my head. And that's how we can start changing that cognitive dissonance going on inside of our head because that's what's causing is so much internal turmoil.

So as I mentioned, even in the last episode, our brain will tell us all these ways that we get permission to drink. So we have to analyze these thoughts because when we analyze them and we can begin to change them we can start to dismantle the cognitive dissonance going on in our brains. And when we dismantle that cognitive dissonance that's when we can start to live in greater alignment of our values. And we can actually be doing what we say we want to be doing and what we truly want to be doing.

So the second way of breaking down the cognitive dissonance I find is so much more effective for more people. And so I hope you found these three steps to changing the cognitive dissonance going on in your brain, helpful. Go ahead and work through those questions that I offered here, write them

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down. Look at them on paper, it really does begin to shift how you're going to start to think and that will start to shift how you start to behave. And that way you can start freeing yourself up from the shackles that alcohol feels like it has on us. It feels like it has all this control over our lives.

And I want to give you back your control so that you can be in the driver's seat so you can go and live out that drink less lifestyle and feel more amazing about yourself, feel connected to yourself, feel like you truly are acting the way you want to be acting around alcohol. And when you change how you show up for yourself, it certainly changes how powerful, and loving, and kind you begin to show up for other people. Okay, my friends, that's what I have for you today.

Before you go, I'm excited to celebrate the launch of this podcast by giving away four \$100 Amazon gift cards to lucky listeners who subscribe, rate, and review this show on Apple Podcasts. Of course, I do hope that you love the show, but it does not have to be a 5-star review. I want your honest feedback to make sure I continue to provide you tons of value. So, visit sherryprice.com/podcastlaunch to learn more about the contest and how to enter. I'll be announcing the winners on the show in an upcoming episode. Bye for now.

Thanks for listening to *Drink Less Lifestyle*. If you're ready to change your relationship with drinking now check out the free guide, *How to Effectively Break the Overdrinking Habit* at sherryprice.com/startnow. See you next week.