

Ep #14: Creating a New Identity



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Dr. Sherry Price

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You are listening to the *Drink Less Lifestyle Podcast* with Dr. Sherry Price, episode number 14.

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. Can you believe it, that we are at the end of the year 2020? How do you feel about that? I know for a lot of people it seems like we were rushing to get to the end of this year, just to put 2020 behind us. We're kind of excited to leave it in the past. We've been through a lot this year. And now here we are, a new year is upon us. Have you thought about how you want to 2021 to be different for you? Have you thought about what it would be to have no regrets this coming year and what you want to accomplish?

And what do you want to leave behind and not have it follow you into this new year? Let me just tell you that I've been doing this kind of work on myself as I think it's so good because it sets the foundation of what I want for myself in 2021. And I really encourage you to do this work too. And that's what I want to focus in on today is how to create a new identity for yourself. And I'll tell you, this work has really helped me transform so much in my life.

In the past I used to see myself and identify as someone who drank, someone who over-drank, someone who just turned to alcohol at the end of the day. It was what I did, it was my habit, it was just part of my lifestyle. And whenever I began to cut back or change the habit my brain would feel like something was amiss, something was wrong, something is missing from my life. Even though I wanted to become a woman who could take it or leave it with her drinking, it didn't feel like I could or that it was possible for me every time I tried cutting back.

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And I'll share with you a big reason for this was because I still identified as someone who needed a drink at the end of the day to relax. So it was like I had this internal conflict because I wasn't giving myself the permission to relax unless I had a drink in my hand. It's like my mind would fret in the evening with no alcohol. My mind would think well, now what do I do with myself? And how are you going to enjoy yourself and relax now? And how are you going to get through the night?

And so when I had these thoughts my anxiety would creep in and I would worry that, Jeeze, maybe I am setting out to do this thing but maybe it's not attainable for me. Maybe I can't change my drinking habit. Now, of course there were many of nights where my mind would just tell me that this is a bad idea and would talk me back into having a drink because after all we can start this tomorrow. I'll be more prepared tomorrow.

Tomorrow it'll feel different. Yes, I'll start cutting back tomorrow. Months would go by and I'd be building up that tomorrow promise because I'd be telling myself, well, I'll just start tomorrow, not today, tomorrow's a better day. Thursday sounds better. Monday sounds better, it's the beginning of the week. I was always building up that tomorrow promise. But that promise never came because guess what? There's always another tomorrow.

Do you do this? Do you always put it off and say, "Tomorrow it will be better, tomorrow I'll start. Tomorrow's a new day." I would do this a lot with like, "I'll start exercising tomorrow. Yeah, I'll start that diet or that eating regimen tomorrow. Yeah, I'll stick to my drink plan tomorrow. Tomorrow's another day." And I just want to remind ourselves that when we do that we give our power away to some future time. And let's be honest with ourselves, the action we want to take really doesn't happen in that future time.

And I like to call that tomorrow based thinking; tomorrow based thinking never worked for me. I did this for years before I decided to really look at why I kept doing this tomorrow based thinking. And if you do this, let me tell you why the brain keeps doing this. First of all the brain believes any and

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all of its thoughts that it has, whether they're true or not. So the brain has the ability to believe any thought that you give it, which can be good or bad. So when you tell it, "Tomorrow's another day", guess what the brain believes? Yes, that's right, tomorrow is another day.

And second, even the bigger reason is that the reason you say you'll put it off till tomorrow is because there is relief in the moment. When you tell your brain you don't have to take an action right now. The brain sends a chemical cascade of neural transmitters and hormones in the body that signifies and feels like relief. So there is an upside to telling ourselves that we're not going to take action in the moment, we will just wait till tomorrow. There is immediate gratification and immediate sense of relief.

So this is what I learned and I just want you to know it's totally natural that the brain does this. Of course the brain wants to feel good, that primitive part of our brain loves to feel good and just likes to be at ease, it doesn't like to expend extra energy. Now, of course the more we repeat this pattern of putting things off until tomorrow, the brain gets better at putting things off. We get better at what we practice.

So if we get good at taking no action today and promising ourselves that we will take action in the future, of course then we get better at it. And then we solved the mystery of why tomorrow never comes. So I can't emphasize this enough whether I'm coaching my clients, whether I'm on social media, and blasting out there or whether I'm on the podcast, but our brain loves habits. Our brain loves to create patterns. And the brain doesn't care if the patterns are good or bad. The brain just likes things easy, it likes to not have to think all the time.

And think about it, we have plenty of good habits in our life, for me, I'll just share some of mine. I love waking up at the same time of the day. I wake-up every morning, I don't even need an alarm clock. My body just wakes up and to me that's a super exciting part of the day. I am such a morning person. Another good habit that I love is that I brush my teeth twice a day. I don't have to think about it, force myself to, I just kind of sort of saunter

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over to the bathroom sink and get it done. It's a good habit. My teeth really benefit.

I have another habit that I really love. I love waking my daughter up in the morning. I just love seeing her sleeping and then arising into consciousness and starting the day and I'm the first face that she sees. I just love that precious time that we have together. Another habit that we have in our family is that we're always together for breakfast and for dinner. So we're spending time with each other in the morning and we're ending our days together. And we just find that so fulfilling and delightful.

So these are just a few of the great habits that I have that I wouldn't want to change. They serve me, I love them, I love the way they make me feel. I love partaking in them and practicing them. And every time I do practice them it's like now an automatic, they're just on autopilot. The more you practice it the easier it gets. And what I like about those habits is what they signify in terms of my identity.

I identify as a good mom. I identify as a great wife. I identify as somebody who cares and loves my family. And that identity works for me. And so knowing that, that's the identity I want to create I actively pursue actions that make that result happen.

So when I have a bad habit or something that I don't want in my life, like when I had this overdrinking thing going on, I realized I had to break that habit. And how would I do that is that I'd have to get very intentional about now who did I want to become. I needed to create that shift and I needed to create a new identity for myself. Because when I was just taking the actions of drinking less without the new identity, I felt that there was a disconnect. I felt that I was causing more cognitive dissonance in my brain.

I felt that I wasn't fully aligned with who I saw myself as in the current present moment. My brain still saw me, Sherry Price, as someone who needed a drink to unwind. That was my identity. That was what I practiced for so many years.

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Now, I just want to take this outside of the drinking example because I think we can see things more clearly when we're not in it. So I want to bring up an example that I can so clearly relate to when I was graduating pharmacy school. So I graduated pharmacy school then I prepared to take the pharmacy licensure exam to get my license to practice as a pharmacist. I passed that exam and at the time I was working in a hospital as a pharmacy intern. So it was that one day everything switched, I now have my license.

Now, I have been practicing pharmacist activities with the oversight of a pharmacist watching everything I did. But now this one day that I magically got this license so it felt, I get to practice as a pharmacist. And now nobody's checking my work. And I'm like wow, I'm a pharmacist, I'm doing pharmacist activities, this feels so weird. I didn't feel like a bona fide pharmacist, even though I did all the things to achieve that. So it took a while for my brain to catch up and say, "No, you are a pharmacist."

It took weeks for that transformation, that new identity to come into my soul and to really feel and identify as that. How about you? How about when you started your first job? Did it feel awkward at first? You're like wow, now I'm doing the career that I set out to do and now it's just me doing it. And so it takes some time for your brain to catch up and say, "Yes, this is my new identity."

Now, this happened to me in other times of my life. When I first got married and people started calling me a wife I'm like wow, I'm a wife now. That word just seemed to weird, me a wife. I mean I've dreamt about it, I've thought about, I'm excited to be a wife but I've never identified as a wife prior. The same thing happened with the birth of my daughter, now people were calling me a mom and I was celebrating Mother's Day on a whole new level because I was one. And it felt so awkward at first, although I loved it, it just felt like wow, that is my new identity, yeah, I guess so.

And it took a while for my brain to catch up. And do you notice when you get to that place where you are that new person and you get these new

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labels like pharmacist, or mom, or wife? Your brain kind of has a little bit of a spasm. It's like are you sure you wanted this? Wow, you're finally a pharmacist. Are you sure this is what you want to do for the next decades of your life? And when I became a wife it was like are you sure you want to be a wife? Do you think this is a good idea? Do you think you could carry out the responsibilities it takes to be a wife for a long, long time?

And the same thing when my daughter came into the world it's like wow, you are with her for at least 18 more years, are you sure you can do this? Are you sure you wanted this? There is that bit of seizing moment for your brain that's like you got what you wanted, here it is. And then your brain has an identity crisis. It's like is this really what you wanted? And I just want to tell you that's totally normal for the brain.

The brain is transitioning to this new role, this brain is transitioning to this new identity. So of course it's going to feel a little awkward or different in the beginning even though it's exactly what you wanted.

So I want to dive a little bit more into these examples because what I want to point out is there is a preparation phase ahead of the time of transition. So before I became a pharmacist there were years and years of studying and pharmacy school, and the boards to take. So there was this massive preparation time.

And think about when you enter into marriage, there's preparation time as well. There's the dating. There's the falling in love, there's the engagement period right before you actually get to the wedding. So there's this preparation phase, the same thing with becoming a parent. There is pregnancy, there is that preparation phase already built in to help you start to transition your brain into this new role that you are going to identify as.

So I want you to ask yourself, now who do you want to be as you enter into 2021 particularly when it comes to your drinking? Who do you want to be around alcohol? What's going to be your new identity? Maybe you're like me and you don't want it to be a daily habit. You don't want to drink on a

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regular basis because it truly feels out of control. Maybe you just feel like you imbibe or ingest too much because it's preventing you from being that version of you that you really want to be.

Maybe you desire more motivation at night or more energy in the morning, or you want to have more meaningful connection with the people in your life. And you feel your drinking is getting in the way of that. Or you want to shed some of this weight and drinking too much has been preventing you from feeling good in your body, or obtaining the weight, or the size that you want, or how you want to feel in your clothes. Or maybe it's now just this time that you want to invest in yourself, healthier relationships with alcohol, or healthier relationships with food, healthier relationship with yourself.

Because we can only neglect ourselves for so long before we feel out of sync, out of whack and just not understanding why we're here and what our purpose is. We can't be giving ourselves as women to our family so much, to other people so much, our communities, in every way that we give because we only wind up feeling depleted inside. And that leads us to seek pleasures, outside substances that don't benefit our bodies.

So what do you want to focus on as your new identity as it relates to alcohol? And I'll share with you, this is the work that we do in my Drink Less Lifestyle program and it's one of my favorite questions to ask women. And it is this, "What if you didn't have your past or the desire for alcohol, what would your life look like?" I think that's such a fun and powerful question to answer because everybody lights up over this question.

It's like wow, if I didn't have alcohol as constantly on my mind and constantly in my life what else would my life revolve around? What else would be in my life that I feel alcohol is robbing from it? What other joys would I have because I find that drinking consistently is not bringing me the joy it used to bring me?

So go ahead and answer that question for you, what would your life look like if you had no desire for alcohol, what would your identity be then?

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Would you be more energetic and motivated maybe just to get things done or just to feel better about yourself? Would you want to learn how to relax and unwind without feeling like you need alcohol to do that? Would you feel proud because your desire for alcohol is gone? Would you be able to make amends with some family members who have judged you for your drinking? This is a big one for some of the women in my program.

Or would it allow you to be at a healthy weight, feel in control and have peace knowing that you're not on the road to a severe alcohol use disorder or engaging in self-destructive behaviors anymore? Or would you just stop the ridiculous petty arguments that happen when you over-drink? Or would you feel proud because you don't forget conversations that you've had and you can show up fully as you and not feel like you need alcohol to be somebody different than who you are around your friends and family?

Or one that comes up a lot in my program is, "I just want to find some happiness again. I feel that alcohol doesn't provide that anymore for me. And I don't feel joy in most areas of my life and I want to find that joy again." And I get that totally because as I aged, I know my body couldn't metabolize and break down the alcohol as fast as it used to in my 20s. And those affects from the alcohol used to last a lot longer. I mean if I overdid it one night it would take me a day, sometimes a day and a half to recover.

And also as we age as women we get these hormone fluctuations. So what used to serve me now didn't serve me so much, or I became more ornery with the alcohol just because of the hormonal interaction. So for me I visualized my new identity as becoming a woman who can take it or leave it with her drinking. That meant to me that when I choose to have it, it's totally on my terms, I am completely in control of it the entire time.

And I also wanted to not want to have it most of the time. It would be something that I did from time to time and I get to decide when that time is. That would make me feel so proud, so confident and in control of my own desires and my own behavior. Okay, so now you've got that part. First we

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have to state who we want our new identity to be, what we want that to look like.

Next I want you to think about what it would take to achieve it. So let's go back to some of my previous examples. If I wanted to become a pharmacist, I have to look into what it takes to get into pharmacy school. I'd have to understand what pharmacy school look like, what was the coursework, what was the curriculum. Is this what I'm interested in? Do I think I could be successful? Am I willing to make this commitment?

Now, in the case of getting married, if I wanted to get married, well, I had to be willing to go on dates. I had to keep putting myself out there and say that I'm available. And I had to let people know I'm interested in getting married. Also I felt to me it was very important to show up as me, not some perfect version of me, or some fake version of me, or some inauthentic version of me. Because what I wanted to do was attract somebody who liked me for me, not the perfectionist side of me, not the best side of me, but all sides of me.

So I had to be willing to put out the real me. And I had to be willing to show up on those dates as the real me. And I also know that being married I have to be willing to compromise in certain areas because when you put two people's lives together, there's going to be disagreements. There's going to be things that we don't agree on and we have to be willing to work through that and know that I'm going to have to compromise on some things sometimes. And I was willing to do that. I knew that's what it took to get married and make the commitment and I was willing to do that.

When I looked into pharmacy school, I saw the curriculum, I was willing to do that. I was willing to do what it took to achieve it. So do your homework and plan seriously on what you want to achieve and how you're going to do it. Now, this is what I'll hear a lot of women say is, "Well, I don't know what will work. I don't know what will work for me." Then what I say to that is, "Staying in that confusion does not help you. Go and find your answers. Go

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out and find what will work. Who resonates with you? What resonates with you?”

First of all you have to say who you want to become, what kind of relationship you want with the alcohol because that's for starters, because that will start narrowing down your options. And then you just have to get in touch with yourself, what type of learner are you? What does work for you? Where have you set out a goal and achieved it? And what were the components of that that really helped you? Are you the type of person that needs an exact road plan or road map to follow?

Are you someone that wants someone else's help who has been there before who can tell you, “Hey, to expect this, this is a road bump. No, that's normal and par for the course, just keep going?” Do you need a lot of accountability along the way? Does that resonate with you? Does that help you? Does that help keep you on track and keep you progressing, or does it not? Do you want to have a coach? Do you want to have a mentor? Do you want to have guidance while you're going through achieving this new identity for you?

Or are you the type of person that you can just do it on your own. Just show me the key components and I can take care of this. And then you go out and find these resources. You go out and find the programs that you know can help you. You go out and find the resources or the tools that you think can most help you get to achieve your goal. Maybe you're the type of person that can just get information from a book and you think that's going to help. So go find books that resonate with you.

Maybe you're the type of person that you know you need to invest in this on a more substantial level so that you stay committed. Well, go do that. Maybe it's not even about the investment. You just want to find a place where you can connect and you feel safe, you feel heard and you feel supported the entire way. Go find it.

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And I also like to ask especially women that I work with is, “What have you tried and why didn’t it work?” Because I think that’s key to knowing exactly how you learn and process information and it gives just an opportunity to find out why it didn’t work. Because the last thing you want to do is spend more time, energy, resources and money into something that if you found out in the past it didn’t work, than to try that again.

So I talked with a woman recently who was sharing with me that she used Allen Carr’s book on how to stop smoking and it worked tremendously well for her. She stopped smoking and she feels amazing.

And then she also shared that she tried his book to stop overdrinking and she said it didn’t work for her and I asked her why. And she said, “I don’t know why.” And I said, “Wow, to me I think there’s such a missed opportunity to learn more about yourself here. Why didn’t that approach work? What was it about the approach that didn’t work? What didn’t you like about it? Was it the book? Or was it something you weren’t willing to implement?” So really getting diving deep on saying, “Okay, this hasn’t been working, why is that?”

It’s like when I share with you all that I tried dry Januarys and sober Octobers ad nauseam, every year there I was not drinking on October or January for years. And then I started to think wow, why aren’t they working for me? And what I found is it’s not just a drinking thing. For me it had to do so much with the way I was thinking about it and my over-desire for it. And every time I entered October and January and I didn’t drink all my brain can focus on was the time that I could drink again. Because I knew I didn’t want to cut it out completely, I just wanted to drink a lot less.

So I wasn’t focused on the relationship and who I wanted to be around alcohol, I was just focused on the alcohol which robs us of the opportunity to be a different person around alcohol if we’re focusing on the alcohol. Because it’s so much about us and so much not about the alcohol.

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And then it might be helpful to say, “When am I willing to invest? How much am I willing to invest in terms of a financial commitment?” If I knew I could get over this, what would be the value I’d put on that? For me it was priceless, it simply was because I was just wasting money, drinking, paying it out drinking, paying it out, and it wasn’t adding to my life anymore. The drinking was just so habitual that it wasn’t feeling joyful most of the time. So for me I was like I am willing to do what it takes to learn to overcome this, to learn how to be in control of it.

Because we know if we want something bad enough we will invest in it. Think about the people who spend oodles and oodles of dollars trying to get pregnant because they want a child so much. Think about people who spend tons of money on a wedding because that’s so important to them, it’s what they value. Whatever you spend your money on signals what is important to you, it’s what you value. Also what you spend your money on signifies what you’re committed to.

Remember, money is just a means to an ends, it just helps get you what you want in life but it’s not the ends. So when you spend money on alcohol you’re signaling to your brain that you are committed to learning how to still be a drinker, particularly if you’re doing it on the daily like I was. And if so, I say own it, be with your truth, because if you’re not with your truth you can’t get free. If you keep denying who you are, if you keep denying that you have this issue, you keep denying your relationship, your current relationship with alcohol you won’t be able to change it.

And this is where I see so many women suffer in isolation and don’t know what to do and just stay stuck because I’ll tell you, lying about what you like, who you are and what you do, only causes you to feel shame because you’re not admitting what you are, who you are and the relationship you have. And it doesn’t make you a good or bad person, the relationship you have with alcohol. That is created in your mind. And the more you lie to yourself about something, guess what? You cause more cognitive dissonance.

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So now your brain feels totally messed up and I know because I've been there. I'm like I want to get a handle on this drinking thing but every day I'm spending money on alcohol. It's like wait, if I'm spending money on alcohol that is suggesting that I don't want to get a handle on it. That means I am giving money to something that I value and I value the alcohol, I'm not valuing myself. I'm not valuing learning the tools, what it takes to change that relationship.

So that brings me to my next point. How committed are you to the process, to this transformation? How committed to do you want to be? And what are you willing to do? Because my friends, you get to decide, commitment is an inside job. It's not a feelings job. It's like I don't feel like doing it today, I don't feel like doing the commitment thing. No, if we base it all on our feelings we're going to be up and down all over the board. What human goes through life feeling the same all the time? That's a robot.

When we are human we have good days and bad days. We have lots of feelings in those days. There's not just four or five, we go through a whole cycle of different feelings but guess what? Feelings don't last forever. And I don't think we should be doing things all the time based on how we feel, that's not necessarily getting us the result we want in our life. Commitment is about doing what it takes to get the results that we want. That's it. We're either committed or we're not. And we get to decide how committed we're going to be to accomplish something.

When I entered pharmacy school I didn't feel a 100% committed all the time but I kept going. I kept going because it was important to me to get to that goal to be a pharmacist. I wanted that. When I met a lot of jerks out on dates, I kept going. My goal was to be married, I kept going. And when we didn't get pregnant the first couple of times we kept trying. We kept going. We were motivated by the goal. That's commitment. That's keep doing what you need to do in order to get the results that you want.

That's it. That's what commitment is. I was willing to do whatever it took to learn to be in control of my drinking without giving it up completely. And

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that's what I wanted to be and that's the woman I've become. So as you move into 2021 who are you becoming? What are you no longer willing to put off anymore? What are you wanting to accomplish this year? I'll have more to share with you on this topic next week.

Alright my friends, have a wonderful New Year, stay safe, stay healthy and I will see you next week.

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.