

DRY 18

THE WHY, HOW, &
WHAT FROM A
YEAR WITHOUT
BEER



ROB O'DONOHUE

Dry 18

***The Why, How, and What
from a Year without
Beer!***

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Introduction

The ludicrous idea of giving up ‘the drink’ for an elongated period of time started out as a bet between two friends (Richard McCaffrey & I). Like many wagers between mates, it was conjured up, ironically enough in this case, while we out drinking. It probably wasn’t the first time, nor the last, either of us had talked about taking a break from alcohol. But this one was a bit different. Having done Dry January before, we decided to add an additional eleven months to that. And so Dry 18 was born!

From the outset of the adventure, I planned to journal many of the experiences. To reflect regularly at various points in time during the year and highlighting certain lessons I might learn about myself (and others) along the way. How I managed to deal with specific situations, like nights out, holidays, birthday parties, and the like. All settings where previously I would have had the comfort of a few beers to help me through or add to the enjoyment.

What started to emerge was very surprising. After each milestone event or date, I found myself identifying new insights from the experiences. I was learning more about myself from the situations I was facing. Not only were these very interesting for me to reflect on and write about, I started to notice many useful benefits arising from the Dry18 challenge. Benefits I never expected when shaking hands on the bet we had made. This was giving me great impetus to keep going.

Another unexpected positive from the experience came when [Alcohol Change UK](#) connected in with me around April time, shortly after reading the post I shared on the first 100 days of Dry 18. They inquired about sharing out future posts on their website. If I ever needed an incentive to keep blogging, this was it. Just

knowing that my reflections could be read by and possibly help one of their followers was great.

So, as I kept learning, writing, and posting, and the end of the year was nearly upon me, another idea started to surface. What if I assemble all these posts together into one book and share it out? The accidental Dry 18 book was born. And here it is.

More to it than giving up Alcohol.

While giving up alcohol for a year was my focus, the messages shared during the chapters that follow are aimed at highlighting the amazing learnings and growth that can happen when you set yourself a big challenge, commit to it fully, and then follow the path. For me, the real personal development and advancements have come all the way through this year. Crossing the finish line at midnight on 31st December 2018 just marked the end of the year. It was more symbolic.

So, with that context in place, I hope you enjoy reading over the Dry 18 journey. One that has given me way more than I ever expected. Note that each post was written at a point in time during the year. Reflecting on where I was at right at that time. Some looking back, some looking forward, some in the moment, but all trying to make sense of what I felt important and useful to share. Much like myself, the following words will be imperfect. Sometimes in spelling, others grammatically, and I'm sure a bit of repetition, which can be good to get the point across. I can promise that it is always honest and the truth.

I hope by sharing it, you might take one thing away from it that could be of use to you.

If that happens, it would be amazing to hear from you on what stood out. As I'll mention probably a few times in the coming pages, this is me stepping again outside the comfortzone, learning and growing. Feedback is essential to me to improve. So,

at the end I have links on how to get in touch, share the book, follow, provide feedback or just say hello.

Right, enough of the introduction. On to the 'book'.

Enjoy,
Rob

Chapter 1 – Why Dry

#Dry2018



WHY



I had always planned to write about my experiences (or lack of) while going through the Dry18 challenge. I'd have a bit more time on my hands, so decided early on to keep a journal along the way! Initially, it was for my eyes only. When I put together the first 100 days piece, it was more for me than anyone else. I very nearly didn't post it at all. I always tend to have that internal battle, the voice inside the head shouting at me, providing me with many reasons not to. I experienced the same sense of resistance before releasing podcasts or videos too sometimes. But, I can't let that stop me, and I'm glad I didn't again with that piece.

The response from it was, and still is, very positive. It's always nice to hear from friends that it connected with. It's also nice to hear from people you don't know that it resonated with too. In many ways, that's even more powerful. So, when Maddy Lawson, from Alcohol Concern UK got in touch, to say the article was something they'd like to share, I was delighted. It made it all

worthwhile. Even better, Maddy asked if me I'd be interested in putting out a series of posts over the rest of the year on the Dry18 adventure. I was delighted to oblige. She suggested that I start with one that gives a bit more detail on my backstory and why give up alcohol at all. So, I put together the following piece to give some context on my 'why'. I hope you enjoy it.

My relationship with alcohol has been what you might call quintessentially Irish in nature. I don't drink Guinness (often), but 'the drink' has been part of my life for a long time.

I think I had my first drink at the age of 16. The guilt of breaking my confirmation pledge still sometimes floats into my mind (and has just now as I write this). For the first year, it was the occasional alcopop on a Saturday night (didn't like the taste of anything else). Then one night, that all changed. I was introduced to whiskey. That was the first night that I got 'drunk'.

For the following 23 or so years, alcohol has always been a part of my life – sometimes a big part. Too big. It was a prominent feature during my college nights (and sometimes mornings) in Galway. Throughout the rest of my twenties nights out, weddings, holidays, and any other social occasion always had a 'session' at the epicentre. Even sporting activities, like playing for my local football team, where you'd think getting and keeping fit was the main objective, had booze as a key component. We would often celebrate victories (and defeats) after the match on the Saturday, often into the Sunday, and I seem to recall a couple of Mondays too. Hardcore.

Somehow, I was able to juggle a busy work life with the busier social life and, for the vast majority of the time, I kept the show on the road.



I'm not hungover, I just got something in my eye!

While all this was 'only a bit of fun', the pain of the recovery after a heavy weekend, where I may not feel 100% again until Wednesday or Thursday, was outweighing the fun. That was a sign, but one that I mostly chose to ignore until I hit my thirties. I didn't have the self-awareness to realise, or maybe the confidence to make the change.

Then in 2008, I did. Job cuts where I worked, with the Big Crash looming, gave me an opportunity to leave with a few Euros in my pocket. I hit reboot, moving jobs and cities. My relationship with alcohol started to change too. Sure, they say don't run away from your challenges, but sometimes a change of environment does help. And it did for me.

Flash forward to 2017. I'd been living in Cork nine great years. I had settled in great with the city, the people and the culture. Work was fulfilling and I was in good place. I had made a lot of positive adjustments in my life, running half marathons, cycling

and eating better. Developing a practice for Meditation was a big deal for me too. Lots more on that on the [blog page](#).

Over the years, my relationship with drinking had softened but never completely stopped. There were still a few occasions each year when I'd drink far too much, and I'd feel demotivated and down for a few days as a result. As someone who loves to get the most of my time outside of work, being hungover on a Sunday had a double negative impact on my mood; not only was I feeling like crap as a result of the booze, I was missing out on getting good stuff done in my time off!

I had often contemplated going off drink 100%, but never been able to commit. But as my own life was getting busier, I just had no time for or interest in spending any time with a hangover. Developing Type 1 Diabetes at 35 was an additional wake-up call. I had a lot of incentives to make me want to quit. I just needed to do some experimenting.



Dry January is a Great place to start!

First up was Dry January in 2017. That was a relative breeze. I came through with flying colours. I learned that going dry wasn't so bad – the opposite in fact.

Then, on the weekend of my 40th birthday in November 2017, despite great fun and celebrations, I knew there was gloom and doom lurking around the corner. After two days/nights 'enjoying' myself, I felt like enough was enough. As we wrapped up the Sunday night, my friend Richie and I started to pick into the ridiculousness of our boozing and how it would impact our mood for the next few days. Richie started to explain how he heard a guy on the radio the week before detailing how he had given up drink two years earlier.

So, as this conversation developed, both Richie and I started to play with the idea of going off drink. Before we knew it, the idea

of a Dry18 was born. Both of us are pretty stubborn so when we make a commitment, we tend to stick with it. We added in some financial incentives that a charity would gain from if either of us were to break. The bet, even though made after numerous pints, gave me a lift.

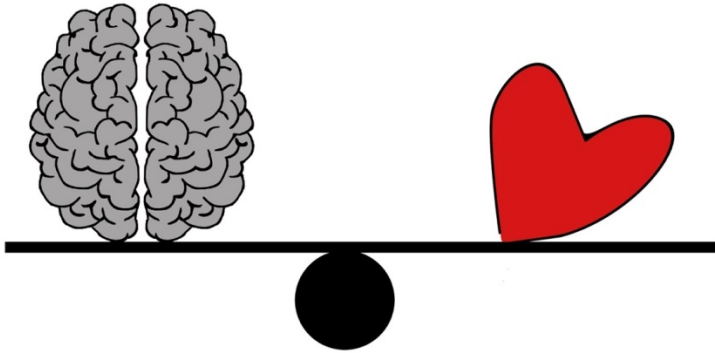
And so it came to be, that, at midnight on 31 December 2017, Dry 18 officially came into being. It felt right. I like to set goals at the start of every year and try to make them SMART, which stands for specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timebound. This one had all of these ingredients (even if my friends and family questioned the 'achievable' part). Plus I had a big incentive: zero days wasted in 2018 as a result of a hangover.



Testing SMART Goals to the limit

While the goal was exciting, I was under no illusion that it would be easy. Jumping from 31 days in January to 365 days is a bit of a leap. But I wanted the challenge and knew it would be the perfect year to try this out. With huge optimism, and a clear plan of attack for the year in place, I was ready for 2018. Time to walk the walk.

Chapter 2 – Goal Setting with the Heart & Mind



Consider the two options below for a goal I've set for myself in 2018.

A) No Alcohol for the entire year of 2018

or

B) Make each day count & Wake-up fresh in 2018, free of alcohol and hangovers!

I'll leave that sit there for a bit and return to it later.

So, it's that wonderful time of the year again. **Time to lock in on 2018 goals!** In truth, I've been in brainstorming & planning mode for a while. Now it's a matter of breaking them into categories and critically looking at which of them are really worth doing, which align to my core values, ensure they will be of benefit to myself and others and, lastly, which are challenging enough to take on!

This was the first year in which I was quite public about some of my personal and professional goals. The subject cropped up a good bit in the weekly podcast. I've also posted some articles in the last few months that touched on goals I set for myself in 2017. This was by design in lots of ways as I definitely believe that, by putting them out into the public domain, my own levels of accountability to them has increased, in a good way for sure.

Looking back at the 2017 goal list, I've completed almost all of the big goals. Buying a house, releasing 50 podcasts (originally the goal was 30), completing a diploma in executive coaching, spending 100+ hours in coaching sessions, sticking to a pretty strict fitness programme, forcing myself to get up at 6 am on weekdays and meditating every day have all been mostly nailed during the year. One final goal was to spend a week away around the turn of the New Year. This has been one I've failed on for the last few years but managed to make it happen this time around (I'm writing this from Sunny Gran Canaria – sorry!). Overall, I'd rate the year from a goal perspective at around 8/10.

Why only 8/10?

Well, two reasons. I don't think it's possible to get a 10/10. It would indicate perfection and that's not a thing in my view. I've taken the perspective in recent years that striving for excellence works better. It keeps things moving forward, focuses more on the journey, with less pressure and more enjoyment. The other reason I'm around the 8 mark? Due to multiple failings on a goal I set out last December, one I blogged about intermittently during the year, appropriately called **12 challenges in 12 months!** Bit of a mouthful but pretty self-explanatory. I endeavoured to either **stop, start or increase** a specific habit or activity each month of 2017. The first of which was a Dry January with a total alcohol-free month as the goal. This started the challenge off with a tough one considering I *probably* had not gone a full month

without at least one beer since the age of 18(ish). That said, it was the month that I was most successful. Surprising even myself. February's challenge; to resist reading work email on my phone/in the office before 10 am daily. The hoped benefit here was to instead focus on productive **deep work** prior to getting caught up in the email time warp the usually began from around 8 am. I didn't think this would be harder than the drink ban! It started well but fell off a little towards the end, however it did start me on a path to where I now don't have work email on my phone at all – that's a big achievement and has had a very positive impact on my productivity in the mornings. Some of the other months were quite successful (one was to go with my intuition more for decision making – I bought a house this month) but others I failed miserably at (some bulging disc issues so running 5km every day for one month didn't happen & I didn't swim 20 times another month to name just two). Overall, the challenge was an experiment but one I really learned from.

Ok, so now on to 2018 goals and back to the options I posed at the outset. As a reminder, these were:

A) No Alcohol for the full year of 2018

or

B) Make each day count & Wake-up fresh in 2018, free of alcohol and hangovers!

You might be thinking neither sound good with 365 days without even a glass of wine. But if you had to go for one, I'm hoping you'd opt for B! Can you explain why? Did B feel better than A?

Both goals you could consider **SMART**, referring here to the goal setting methodology where the goal you set is specific,

measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound (it's probably not smart, however – time will tell there). Up to a few weeks back, I probably wouldn't have thought of wording an option B.

What is different between A & B is not just how they're worded, but how they make me feel. **Option A** is very much a restrictive goal. Uninspiring, sounds very tough and can be termed as, what is referred to in the book Switch, a

"Black & White Goal" – Heath & Heath.

It's very much all or nothing and doesn't really connect in with much emotion. It's not one to get excited about and that makes this one all the harder to get motivated by.

With **Option B**, however, I've tried to look at it a bit differently. I've asked myself what goodness will come out of doing this. What is the Why? What could make this more exciting? The overriding feeling that is driving me to achieve this goal is joy and satisfaction. Not to have any wasted Sunday mornings/afternoons that invariably follow on from a night out where a few too many IPA's have been consumed. Another advantage of doing it would be the increased productivity that comes with a clear head. Again, taking great inspiration from the book Switch, I needed more than just a SMART goal.

'SMART goals presume emotion, they don't generate it' – Heath & Heath.

The goal needs to connect on a more emotional level and make it one that is full of feeling and hits me in the stomach. This was something I wouldn't have naturally thought of in the past when setting goals. I probably have always made them pretty clear and

time-bound but, looking back, lacking in inspiration, maybe slightly boring and not so clear on the value or benefit. They were SMART but lacking some feeling. For a year without a beer, I definitely needed to get clear on the emotional win.

So **#DRY18** (not sure if that hashtag will take off but feel free to use it) is my **BHAG** for 2018. Thankfully I'm sharing it with a good friend (hang in there Richie, we'll get through this) so I'm not doing it alone! It's a lofty goal and maybe, being Irish and fond of the occasional night out, the antithesis of smart! But with it worded as *Make each day count & Wake-up fresh in 2018, free of alcohol and hangovers*, it sounds more appealing. It still sounds difficult and I know it's going to be a challenge but I'm up for it. Serendipity had a role to play here too as if I hadn't read the book **Switch** in the last couple of weeks (it had been on my *to-read shelf* in the office for the last 6 months), I wouldn't have had the foresight to make the goal emotionally charged. That gives me further incentive to achieve it. The goal gods are smiling on me!

Some of the other goals on the radar for 2018 that I'll state publicly include the 12 challenges in 12 months again. First up in January is a 5km every day! February, I'm aiming to learn to swim 'properly' and feel comfortable doing it (just purchased the total immersion book & DVD so going all in with this). No cell phone between 10 pm & 7 am, getting up at 5:30 am and giving Bikram Yoga a go are just a few others that are lining up to make the monthly cut. Other goals that are more point-in-time include completing a Masters in Q3/4 2018, a 10-day silent meditation retreat, running the New York Marathon in November (fingers crossed with the lottery), complete Season Two of the 1% Better podcast (that will include some live podcasts with an audience) and a few more besides. Sure, sharing these out are scary and exciting. Less scary than this time last year, however. That's progress and knowing I might have a few folks reading this over the coming weeks really makes them more real.

How are your goals worded for the year? Are they **SMART** and in **Black & White**? Or in brilliant emotionally fuelled Technicolour? If you're putting the final touches on your own 2018 goals, take a closer look at them to see if they're **SMART** *and* are hitting you in the gut, bursting with **feeling** and **emotion**. It might be the difference between achieving them or not!

Chapter 3 – 7 Learnings from the first 100 Days of Dry18



7 learnings from the first 100 Days of #Dry18

Rob O'Donohue



The 11th April 2018 marked the 100th day of 2018! During that period, we've experienced (in Ireland at least) the #BeastfromtheEast 1, 2 & 3 (was there a 4th?) and a winter that seems to have lasted for roughly 18 months. It's not all been bad though. For me, it marked a milestone on my #Dry18 challenge. To go 365 Days without any beer, wine, or any other alcohol related tippie. I've had some positive new learnings and experiences too. So, I decided to mark the first 100 days of the journey with a retrospective on what I've learned since I had my last sip of beer (at around 8:32pm) on 31st December 2017. With #DryJanuary in 2017 being a relatively easy month, I decided to over 10X that and go for the full year. I felt I knew what to expect.

I was still curious to see how though the first few months would turn out to be. In no particular order of significance, here are 7 stand-out observations and learnings.



1. **The forbidden fruit (in this case drink) must NOT be tasted!**

First off, I'm still on track. Over 100 days done. I've learned I can do this. I was very staunchly no-beer from the outset. I even considered non-alcoholic beer off the table at the start of the year. But after consulting with my #Dry18 partner, **Richie McCaffrey**, who felt non-alcoholic beer was 'ok', I allowed it. You're probably thinking 'it's non-alcoholic' but there is still a trace of a percentage in some of the ones out there. A barman reassured me that there was a similar amount of alcohol in mouthwash. These guys know what they're talking about. So, while there have been a number of times that the temptation was there, at no point did I give in. I now know I can do this. Well, the first 100 days part at least.

2. **We talk about drinking A LOT!**

When I wasn't on a self-imposed alcohol ban, it never struck me how often alcohol or drinking comes up in conversation. It's just not something I was that aware of when it wasn't off the table. But, when you're dry, you begin to hear how intertwined it is in conversation and how much it's a key part of socializing. Maybe I'm stating the obvious. It's certainly amplified when it's off-limits. It's somewhat analogous to the situation you might find yourself in when looking for a new car. You identify a model that takes your fancy. One weren't aware existed before. Now you have this awareness of it and, ever since, it's the only car you see on the road. They are, literally, everywhere. Ok, what is called the '[frequency illusion](#)' maybe a poor analogy here, but my learning is that drink is still very much engrained in our consciousness. It may have been even more focal 10 years ago. Before the coffee shop boom, the pubs, instead of Starbucks, were busy on a Tuesday evening. That's progress I guess.



3. Three Perspectives

So, I have to be clear. At the point of starting out on the #dry18 challenge, I considered myself very much in control of my alcoholic consumption. Much more so than I was 10 years ago. So, going into it, my reasons for doing it were more to squeeze more out of my days and weekends than to detox. However, so far, it's been very interesting to see what others reaction to is has been. I've generally observed three responses.

The most common reactions was a raised eyebrow and a sense that the person I was talking with might have thought I had a problem upon hearing I was 'off the drink'. At which point, I'd find myself having to give a detailed explanation as to why I'm doing

it. I noticed I was having to be explicit and clarify that I didn't have a drinking problem. That seemed to be the default place many folks were going to when hearing I was giving it up for the year. The irony here is that I'd never been more in control of alcohol intake than I was leading up to the crafting of the bet.

The second most common response was it's just a bad idea in general! To deprive yourself of a relaxing wine or beer over a meal or at the weekend doesn't make sense to a good section of those I know. When you're in control of it already, why deprive yourself? Fair point & one I'm probably in most alignment with now!

The third and final category turned out to be more frequent than I expected. Those that think it's a great idea and have confided in me that it's something that they'd love to do themselves. It's probably the stage of life many are at. Around the 40 mark and keen to curtail or stop drinking altogether. That the downside or after effects outweigh the upside of a few drinks being the general view.

It's been interesting to see these different perspectives. Even in this short time, I've become a lot more relaxed saying 'no thanks, I'm on the dry', without having to give the backstory. Progress for sure.

4. Freedom through Commitment

For the last 22+ years, my self-imposed ban probably lasted 4-5 weeks max. Prior to Dry January in 2017, I hadn't abstained much. So, going into the start of the year, I was interested to see how this experiment would play out. What I've learned about my own decision making over the last few years has played out again with this challenge. It can take me a long time to make a decision or commit to something. Especially when it's a big one. But once I

made a decision, and also opt to tell everyone I know about it (whether they care or not), it really ups my level of accountability to it.

This has been very true for #Dry18. Without question, I've had a few really shit days so far in 2018. Days that would have, in 2017, 100% lead to a bottle of red wine in the evening, just because I could. No real justification needed either. With that choice off the table, I just had to look for an alternative activity to focus on. Which I did. That has been a big learning. Maybe validation is a better word.



5. St. Patricks Day Overthinking!

Probably the most notorious day in the Irish drinking calendar is that of our patron Saint, Patrick. The 17th of March is typically the day where a large percentage of our population celebrate. It's a day for the pubs and a lot of Guinness or whatever your favourite tippie might be. Some even manage to get drunk twice in the

same day. So, it was to be expected that I'd see this as the first big challenge to my 2018 sobriety.

As it transpired, this St. Patrick's Day was to be a 4-pronged attack. I had a Friend's 40th Birthday to attend. If that wasn't bad enough, the location was to be Galway. Anyone that has been to the *city of the tribes* knows that it's not a quiet place. Finally, to really put the icing on the cake, the Irish Rugby team were playing their last game of their Grand Slam winning 6 Nations against the old enemy England. Kicking off. At 2:30pm. On St. Patrick's day. The 4-leafed clover was complete. Arriving in Galway in time for the match kick-off meant I had a solid 10 hours in packed pubs ahead. I had this already played out in my head as a big struggle!

My anxiety levels were at their highest in the minutes after arriving into the packed pub before the game started. In truth, even when I was drinking, these initial moments would always have been somewhat uneasy. Being more on the introverted side, a crowded bar in the early afternoon would make me a little edgy. In the past, I'd have masked this with a couple of quick pints in the first hour to 'settle in' to the atmosphere. That was the norm. This time around, I had a couple of non-alcoholic beers, and started to chat one-to-one. I must say the placebo effect of just having what looked like a beer in my hand helped. As the day progressed, I was expecting a lot more push back on being the 'non-drinker' of the group. It wasn't to be the case. It was proving to be easier than I'd expected. Come 6pm on St. Patrick's day, you start to see the first wave of drunkenness emerge. Many out since noon start hitting the wall. It was a sight to behold and was nice to be on the other side of that for a change.

As the night came to an end, and after switching from zero percent Pauliner to Apple juice, I decided to make what's known as [an Irish-Goodbye](#)! As I left the pub, the party was still in full-swing. I had survived the day. Survived might be too strong a

word. I enjoyed a lot of it to be fair. And had made the effort to be there for my mate. We all are keen to do the right thing and keep everyone happy. But it's key to make sure you're happy first. Nobody else really can do that for you. I had built up this day in my mind for a few weeks as the first real big test! I am often guilty of overthinking things and this one of these occasions. Anyone could try to hide away for a year but then that wouldn't really have tested out the experiment. Galway on St. Patrick's day could be considered an extreme test. But it was one I learned a lot from.



6. The Fear still exists. Just way less.

As I've progressed in years, my resilience or ability to recover from a night out or an 'all day session' that many of us have been on, has taken many steps backward. You might remember the time when you could *socialize* two nights at the weekend and be fresh on the Monday. Well, for me at least, those days/nights are **long gone!** Over the last few years, one night out would take me a few days to recover, and it would need to be a Friday night, so I'd be able to fully function again by Monday. Physically, I'd be

pretty ok. Emotionally and Mentally, I'd be fragile. What is known as the **fear** is just not fun at all. So, I was very much looking forward to not experiencing this phenomenon in 2018.

What I've learned here has been interesting. In the past number of years, I would have blamed a moody Monday or even a terrible Tuesday on an excessive night out over the previous weekend. I'd give myself an extra hard time over those days and resolve 'never again' and all that goes with that self-defeating attitude. Since the 1st of January, I can now say that **sometimes** the Mondays or Tuesdays (or even Wednesdays or Thursdays) can still be tough. Never full on fear but still be dotted with anxiety, stress and mild overwhelm. My default, in the past, was to blame it on partying at the weekend. This would/could spiral into self-defeating territory again. Now, with that variable out of the equation, I've concluded that it's ok sometimes not to feel ok. That's part of being human. Bad days will come. Just accept it and move on.

7. **Win the morning with the rule of 3!**

Over the years, wasting mornings, days and time in general has become a big annoyance for me! The older I've become; the more appreciation I have for the time I have and how much I can get done with it! So, without doubt, one of the benefits I was expecting and looking forward to with zero days wasted during 2018 was that of increasing productivity and learning new things.

In the last few months, I've been able to stick to my morning routine without fail. This has been hugely satisfying. Not only have I been able to get up at 6am (5am for April as it's the April Challenge), I've developed a habit of getting real/deep work done every morning before leaving the house for the day job. This really sets me on fire for the day ahead. I've developed a habit, which I'm calling *the rule of 3*, and it's paying great dividends. 3 tasks before leaving the house. 2/3 are typically the same and

one varies. Like writing this! This has been a big win. Consistently getting stuff done and winning the morning.

#Dry18 is my *BHAG* for the year ([check out my post on goals for the years from December here](#)) and, as I finalise this piece, I'm well into the century. Overall, I've been surprised at how smooth it's been to cut it out. Not easy but totally worth it! In the vast majority of cases, I've received great support and words of encouragement. I wanted to challenge myself, first and foremost, to see what life, especially nights out and social events, would be like without any alcohol as the focal point. I wanted to learn or maybe re-learn how to actually have fun and enjoy myself when I'm out completely free of alcohol. It's been an eye-opening experience so far. Almost 1/3 of the way through, and with the summer sunshine, beer gardens, cold cider, vacations, and many more temptations coming in the next 100 days, I'm sure new challenges and learnings are ahead! Maybe it's a good thing after all that Ireland didn't qualify for the World Cup in Russia!

One nice observation that has come in just in the last couple of days is that I seem happier. Much like meditation and its benefits, I think others close to you see changes before you do. Upon hearing it, and taking a moment to process it, I would have to agree. That would be number 8 and probably the most important if I could dare include it.

Thanks for reading. I hope you enjoyed it and learned something from it too!

Chapter 4 – Dry18 Half Way There!



***WOAH, WE'RE HALF WAY
THERE
WOAH, LIVIN' ON A PRAYER
TAKE MY HAND, WE'LL MAKE IT
I SWEAR
WOAH, LIVIN' ON A PRAYER
LIVIN' ON A PRAYER***

I'm sorry for the above Bon Jovi reference & lyrics. I'm now even more sorry for implanting the tune in your head, which you're now probably humming. Maybe even playing air guitar? If so, stop! The other day, when I realized I had passed the half-way point in the Dry2018 journey, it was the first thing that jumped into my mind. I'm showing my age, I guess, with the choice of song!

In truth, I'm surprised that the half-way marker crept up on me so quickly. When starting out back in January, 6 full months seemed like a long way off. Never mind the full year. The fact that it has arrived so quickly is definitely a positive sign. And still going strong sans-alcohol is very encouraging. I decided to mark this milestone with another bit of reflection on more learnings & challenges overcome since the 100 days mark was passed ([check out the 7 learnings from first 100 days here](#)). For anyone going through a similar year or period without indulging, some of these might resonate. For those of you considering a stint off the booze, they might even be helpful. Just know, it can be done.

The Business Conference



Zwei Bier Bitter Ohne Alcohol

I've attend a good few of these over the years. They generally are great fun and excellent for networking. But pretty much have always included some 'free drinks' receptions which I would have always taken advantage of. So, when I signed up to attend a Project Management conference in Berlin in early May, there was a mix of excitement about the event as well as a slight anxiety knowing there would likely be 'networking' events that involved large German Bierkrugs full of Weissbier just crying out to be drank! As an introvert, the '*dutch-courage*' helps!

I was right, there was free German food, beer & wine. But they also provided some non-alcoholic beers too. And they're allowed. It still feels more comfortable when in this environment with a beer bottle in your hand, even if it's not real beer. Having a diet coke in hand just feels wrong. I'm happy to say though, that the event was a great success and as I was recording content for the PMI podcast that put together, that gave me a real reason to chat and network with others. It forced me outside my comfortzone to talk and engage more. Something that I might, no actually, I know I would have used alcohol for in the past.

Best Friends 40th

It's the year of the 40th Birthday Party and another very close friend was celebrating theirs towards the end of June just gone. This was the first time that I was out with my oldest/longest group of friends since taking up the Dry18 challenge. So, of course, it was going to be another hurdle. Another new experience. My dry 18 partner-in-crime (or in this case zero crime) Richie was in attendance also. That was a good thing. The extra support helped.



#Dry18 Partners Zero-Heroes

Again, there was a sense that it was going to be a challenge. But things are always worse in your own head than what actually happens. That's how it was here. An added benefit to others was my ability to play chauffeur on the night. And as the group all were very much up-to-speed with the #Dry18 challenge, it was well respected! Nobody tried to spike our drinks with alcohol. If this was 10 or 20 years earlier, I have a sense we wouldn't have got a way so lightly.

But how times have changed. As both Richie and I have taken a shine to the Heineken Zero, we actually had to smuggle bottles of

it into the bar as it wasn't being served there. Now, that's a first. For many a year, as broke students, we might have been guilty of hustling in some cheap vodka from an off-licence into a pub, saving a few €/£ and getting drunk cheap. Now it's non-alcoholic beer. As you can see from the image, we're both enjoying it though.

Summer Holiday

Another potential challenge came directly after my friends 40th. The very next morning my girlfriend and I were heading away for a week's holiday. The first proper break from work so far this year and the first holiday of Dry18. I'd imagine if we selected Ibiza as the destination, the temptation levels would have been a lot higher, but nevertheless, a week off, with nothing to get up for the next morning, and that sense of freedom from responsibility, would have given me the perfect excuse in the past to have a few drinks every day or evening to help me 'enjoy' the time off more.

Instead of Ibiza, we opted for Eastbourne. Instead of Techno and Clubbing, we opted for Tennis and Jogging. A nice relaxing week to soak up the sun and digitally detox. Not putting myself in the line of fire either helped for sure. You can still have a great holiday, without having to go wild. And that doesn't mean going out of your way of having fun. You don't want to be in the middle of a wild party atmosphere every night. That could only torture yourself. Do some planning & find a balance.

So often in the past, I'd return to work on the Monday after a week off, thinking & feeling that I need another holiday to recover from the one I was just on. Yeah, you know what I mean? This time round, there was none of that. It still didn't mean I couldn't wait to get back to work. But at least the extra dread of alcohol withdrawal wasn't there. It took me a while to listen to my own advice. But it can be done.

Halfway Home



For every long run I've ever set out on (long would probably be anything over 8 miles), I've always found the first half mentally more challenging than the second. Even though I'd be fresher and have more energy. But as soon as I just get to that half-way point, I feel different. I've turned the proverbial corner and I'm now on the homeward stretch, even if that is still 13.1 miles when in marathon mode. It feels like every step I take I'm getting closer to home and, psychologically, that gives me more impetus. It's just something I've always noticed when running. So, I thought, now that I'm on the return leg of Dry18, that it would might like that too.

To be honest, it doesn't. That's not a bad thing. In fact, the reason it's not such a big relief is because I don't have that same sense of struggle as I do when running long distances. So, as a result, I'm not getting that great sense of relief that I've turned the corner and am homeward bound.

Don't get me wrong either. It's great that I've less days now to do, than I've already done. It's just not as momentous as I thought that half-way mark was going to be when I started out!

The rise of the not-drinking culture?

The first 100 days were definitely harder than the last 80 or so. As I wrote in the [first 100 days](#) post back in April, a number of interesting insights emerged during this period. It was a time of adjustment, pushing myself outside the comfortzone in many ways and experience things in a new light.

Since then, despite my concerns over the summer coming, longer days, beer garden weather, and the world cup football feast coming at me, all of which would have been ingredients that would make for a great day/night's boozing, it's been pretty easy going. My levels of social unease when not boozing has dropped and I'm not overthinking these nights out as much as I was at the start.

Taking this beer break has been great. I've gained confidence, my blood sugars are in better shape, I can predict with near certainty what I'll do the next morning and how I'll feel, and I've even been able to share the learnings with folks from other places through these blog posts and with the Alcohol Concern UK group. If any of the above words and insights help someone else on their own expedition, then that's awesome too.

I've also started to notice a lot more non-alcoholic betters and even an alcohol free Gin hitting the shelves. Could there be a bit of a movement starting to move away from drinking too much? I read somewhere about another sober campaigner who is trying **'to make not drinking cool'**. That's not my goal, but there certainly seems to be an emerging trend towards a less reliance on it. And that's such a good thing. Till the next one. Cheers!

Chapter 5 – Dutch Courage & The Introvert Inside

#Dry18



Dutch Courage
&
The Introvert
Inside



RobooftheGreen

When I hear the saying ‘**Dutch Courage**’, it always brings me right back to my mid-to-late teens. To a time when I started to frequent over-18’s discos (I looked a bit older than I was and didn’t have fake ID..honest!). I can’t say it brings back all happy memories or nice feelings. Some, but more a reminder of that awkward time when peer pressure was very real, and, most likely, you had to take a drink to fit in. Even though you didn’t like the taste perhaps.

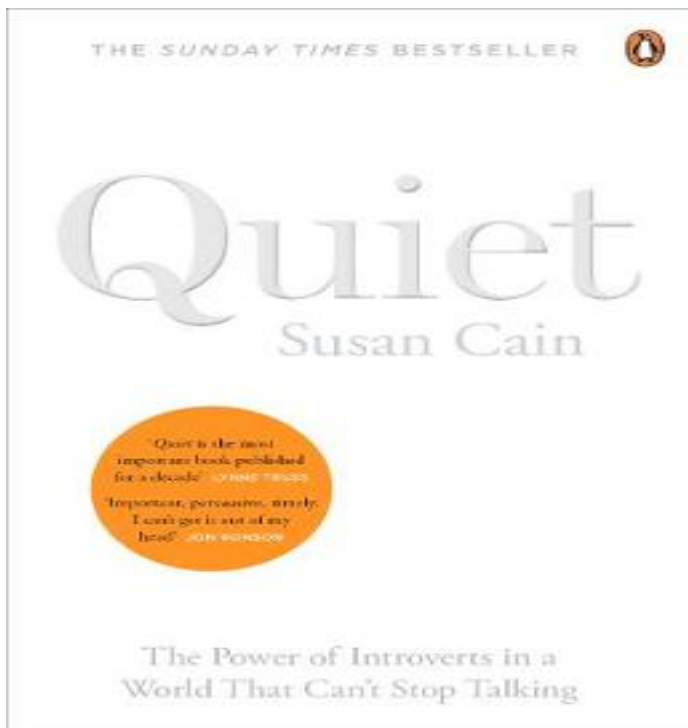
‘Get that into you, it will give you some Dutch Courage’, might be commonly heard on nights out.

I’m not sure if it’s a saying or phrase that’s universally known. Maybe only in Ireland and the UK (and maybe the Netherlands). Back when I heard it first, and for years since, I never actually wondered where it came from. It’s one of those saying that you just take on board without wanting to know the meaning behind it. But it’s one you intuitively understand even without an explanation.

Having developed a fascination for etymology for words & terms over the last couple of years (I generally like to know the background on something I write about as it makes me feel like less of a bluffer), I did a little bit of research on it.

The [explanation](#) behind it is worth a look. In brief, it involves alcohol (Gin to be precise) and English & Dutch Soldiers at War!

Anyway, when I look back now to those early drinking nights out, how I acted pre-drinking v post-drinking was very much different. The freedom, reduced anxiety and relaxed inhibitions that accompanied copious amounts of beer and shots really helped with ability to chat, dance, and generally behave very different to what my normal state was. I know this maybe is the case for nearly everyone after a few drinks. But for a more naturally predisposed introvert, even more so.



Introvert Inside

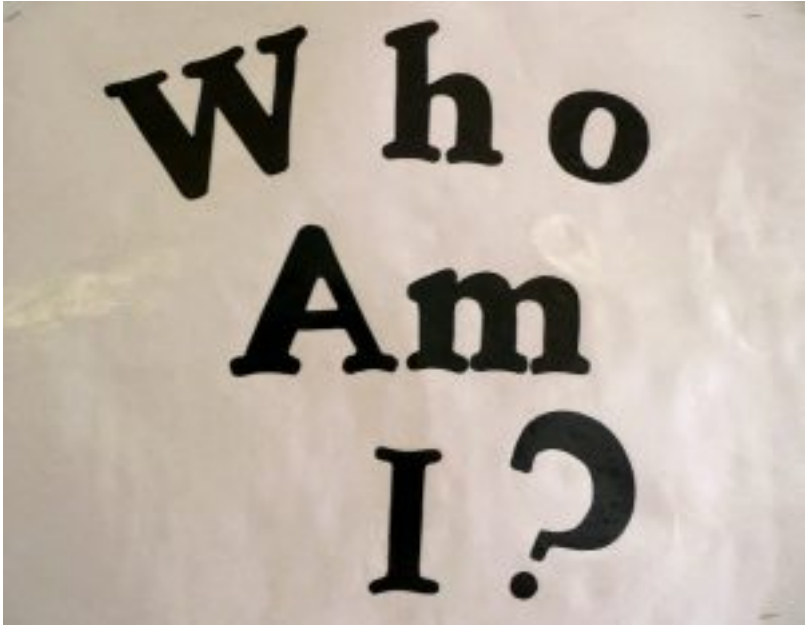
I've always felt that I was more at ease in 1-1 situations and more comfortable in smaller groups. I wasn't sure why but it just felt that way. Over the last few years, thanks to work I've done through coaching on self-reflection, developing my own self-awareness, and, more recently, from learnings taken out of Susan Cain's book [Quiet](#), I've come to the conclusion that I fall, at least more predominantly, into the Introvert category.

For many years, that stretched well into my twenties, I felt the need to fit in, which meant being out, about, and having 'the craic'. And where there is [craic](#) (just in case anyone isn't familiar with this word, it's not a form of heroin, but an Irish word used for having fun that, for the most part, has some alcohol consumption closely connected), there was booze. The outgoing me would emerge, could fit in, feel popular and generally be comfortable in the surroundings. But, in the main, it never felt fully right. Deep down, I always knew this, but wasn't mature enough, or ready to push back. I didn't have the tools or strength to go against the grain (is there a pun there?). Now, just to note, it wasn't all bad. Over the years, there were many great times. But, as the twenties became the thirties, the feeling of fun and newness waned. I wouldn't have changed it though. Everything that happened was all part of the learning.

Turning Curve, not a Turning Point.

I'm calling this a turning curve rather than a turning point as my own change and realisation wasn't a single event, but more a gradual process. The reoccurring pain point that dotted out points on this curve was dealing with the aftermath of a night out. Not only did I find that the sense of anxiety normally accompanied

with the withdrawals was getting too much, on top of that I would also have to deal with that fact I could have done or said something that 1) was not me in my *normal* state and 2) sometimes couldn't even remember what that might have been. That Extrovert that lived inside me and came out full guns blazing when boozed up would retreat, leaving the more reserved and quieter introvert to deal with the clean-up. Which sometimes would be very difficult to cope with indeed. Especially if the introvert didn't have a clear memory of what the extrovert did or said on the night before. That horrible feeling when someone says, "do you remember when you did this?" or "what did you say to them last night?". If you know, you know. Not fun! You might be familiar with the phrase 'Never again' or 'I'm never drinking again' or something along those lines? Well, I had been saying that for years but never sticking to it. It was time for a change. And that's what it came down to. Timing.



Who Am I?

Definitely over the last 7/8 years, the tide turned. I've worked hard on my own sense of identity, values, purpose and that whole 'who am I' question. I've developed a comfort level around being an introvert. I've been able to find more of a balance. And, again to reference Susan Cain's [Quiet](#), I've gained a deeper understanding of the traits and characteristics that are more on the introverted side of the spectrum. The stories, research and findings in Susan's book have struck more of a chord than just a note for me, helping make sense out of some of those feelings I couldn't explain but always was aware of. Like why I would be more at ease in smaller groups or in 1-1 situations than in larger groups. It helped me understand why I preferred to talk about deeper subjects first and small talk last in conversations. Extroverts prefer it the other way around it seems. It's in the Science.

So, taking on a challenge like doing completely off any alcohol for a full year was going to put my Introversion to the test. But it's one I was up for, even if my Extrovert buried in there somewhere wasn't too happy. Now in September of Dry18, I've gained even more of an appreciation for embracing who you are, rather than who you are trying to be. As I mentioned in the previous couple of #Dry18 [pieces](#), I've been attending social events, work nights, conferences, parties, and have been on holidays\vacation, all booze free, and have been in many situations that certainly thrust me into a zone of discomfort. That was part of the purpose of this whole adventure. To face the fear and do it anyway. To learn and grown. To notice what if felt like to be in a situation of unease, be ok, and even develop ways to enjoy it. To discover a level of comfort with yourself and the surroundings. And with the choice or the option of a beer, to help ease the situation, taken out of the equation, it has made things much simpler.

In my coaching work, I often focus on identification of personal or a team's Core Values. My own 6 core values are well formed, and, ironically enough, one of them is Courage. It's been one that I've had to rely on when making tough decisions over the last 20 years. Courage is something you can practice and develop over time. Over the last 9 months, I feel I've had to continue to develop my own courage in a real way, without the need for the Dutch part.

Chapter 6 – Gamble Responsibly & When the fun stops, Stop!



On 16th November 2017, I celebrated my 40th Birthday. In the weeks and months leading up to this, I experienced some dread! Not what you might expect though. I actually didn't mind too much about the age thing. Something that many people make out as a move into middle age. In many ways, I was looking forward to the milestone age. I was in the best place I had ever been. Mentally, Emotionally, and not too far off physically.

What was my greatest cause for anxiety was the potential blow-out it would bring. The two nights (at least) on the booze. Even though I was fully responsible to keep the partying under control, I knew that it was going to be difficult to just have a few and take it easy.

Looking back at other big milestone birthdays I've had, they've always been big sessions. My 18th in Dublin was a total blow out. My 21st, I seem to remember lasted a few days. My 25th,

something similar. And my 30th was all set to be another big session, but with the passing of my grandmother on the weekend of it, that was shelved, or postponed for a few weeks at least. It's safe to say, birthday's and booze were synonymous in my past.

I didn't want the occasion to pass without a gathering, and it was a good excuse to persuade some of the close friends and family from home to come to Cork to celebrate with friends I've made in the previous 9 years. That was my overriding reason to go ahead with it. I kept telling myself, I'd take it relatively easy, but knew deep down that would be hard. The internal battle had started.

The Birthday weekend started off on the Thursday (the actual day of my birthday) where my Aunt, Uncle-in-law and I met up in Dublin to go to the Killers concert. While this started off very civilized, with a nice meal and some wine, it quickly escalated to JD & Coke and whatever else we could drink during the concert. The excitement was too much for me and the bouncers in the gig agreed. After a few attempts to calm me down, they asked me to leave. I obliged of course but the separation from the family resulted in a messy end to the night. Both of us arriving back to the hotel separately. A great start to the weekend, eh!

The next day, I woke feeling 'ok' but a strong sense of gloom lingered for the day. I knew I had a long day ahead too so that didn't help. Oh, and with Saturday and Sunday also to come, I was feeling a bit edgy. 'I should be enjoying this' I thought. Something had to give. But when & how!

Having successfully navigated the drive home, via Longford to meet the rest of the Family, I was pretty wrecked come bed time that night. Honestly, all I wanted to do was chill out for the rest of the weekend. But plans were made, and I couldn't let everyone else done.

One of my best friends from home (Longford), who was now living in Wales, flew over for the weekend. It was Michael's Birthday the following week (7 days later exactly) and we had arranged to have a 40th celebration in both Cork and Cardiff. So, with Mike in Cork on Saturday, we met up early to have some 'brunch'. Now, you might guess that brunch was code for a sambo and some pints. I remember walking into town that morning. Feeling ok and looking forward to the day ahead. Catching up and having a laugh. While that was my plan, my inner chatterbox was having none of it. That voice was pushing for more than just a few! We had a few beers in town then got some to bring back to my house where we could relax for a few hours. As others arrived down from Home, the atmosphere built up over the course of the day. Naturally, I was delighted to see so many good friends come down and was in flying form as the evening rolled around. At this point, all was going well.

When we did make our way into the venue where the party was held, I was feeling good but knew I had to keep myself together. As a type 1 diabetic, diagnosed in mid30's, I always had to keep myself in check from a blood sugar perspective. The diabetes was a big wake up call and turning point for me when I got diagnosed in 2012. It definitely came at a time when I was beginning to figure out myself more. It actually helped accelerate that. Anyway, this night, while I did my best to keep things in check, there is no doubt that I was acting like a normal person for the evening. With Champagne popping, and the drink flowing, I was beginning to let loose.

As the Party moved from the pub to the nightclub, the levels of excitement increased. Anyone that knows me, down the years, are aware of my unique ability to convince myself that I was (and am) a cross between John Travolta in Saturday night fever, a Russian Army Cossack Dancer and A Professional break-dancer when I had a large amount of alcohol consumed and with some classic 80s music blaring. This was the case again the night. And

after numerous attempts from the bouncers in the club to persuade me to refrain from spinning around in perfect (or so they felt) 360s in the middle of the floor, one spin too many was had. So, they politely asked me to leave AKA escorted me outside. Another night that ended not how I had hoped.

I woke up Sunday morning with a fogginess. Another familiar sense of gloom and anxiety. But this time, a little bit different. I had got through the night. In one piece. And while I didn't exactly do myself proud, I had a sense of relief that it was over. No question at the time, anyone looking in, would have said I was really enjoying it. And they'd be right. However, inside, I wasn't dancing. That extrovert me that emerged, as I've said in a previous post, was more the chatter box letting loose. The real me was the one that was left to pick up the pieces the next day. For years, I real me had to take that onboard and get through it. That had to stop. And while Alcohol was in the picture, it wouldn't. It couldn't. The party had one night left. But one that I didn't expect to be such a defining moment in my future year, and life.

6 of the group that came down from Longford, two best friends, their partners and my Aunt and Uncle-in-law stayed down for the final fling. They were right to make a proper weekend out of it and I was glad to have them down. We decided to take a more relaxed approach to the day. When we met up around 4pm, we decided to go on a mini-pub crawl of Cork. It was also the evening where the Cork Christmas Lights were officially switched on. Adding something different into the mix. And keeping us out of the pub for a bit.

As we wandered from pub to pub, casually taking on a drink here and there, and including some food, the conversation inevitably turned to just how bad we would feel the next day. How we were all dreading it so much. Talk of the 3+ hour drive back to Longford the next day was already causing anxiety to rise. For me, I was already expecting to wake up every 5 minutes during the night

not only seeing, but having full blown conversations with dead people. As you can suspect this was not the first time we had these chats. Anyone listening in would think we were either joking or that we were on a day release from a mental institute. Neither were the case!

Then we got to the classic conversation about 'giving up the drink!' How great it would be. But equally how difficult. I had completed Dry January that year. It was tough but very rewarding. Richie then said he heard a guy on the radio a week or so before talking about his 2+ year journey of being 'drink free'. How difficult it was initially but, after some tough nights, and near misses, he started to enjoy himself on nights out. He had to 'relearn' how to enjoy himself. Bit by bit, it got better. He started to find himself. To know himself a bit more. It could be done. The reconditioning was possible.

That's when it happened.

"Let's do a year off the drink?" I suggested (or Richie did..that part is foggy too).

We started to tease it out. Firstly, we put an incentive on it. A €500 wager. If one of us broke it, the €500 would go to a charity of our choice. Then it became more real. Others in the group were laughing. Eyes were rolling! It was the drink talking seemed to be the general impression. But I felt something different this time. It felt real. I had said it a thousand times in the past 20+ years, 'never again'and then proceed to drink again within the hour or day. Never again, followed by a laugh. But in this moment, it felt different. Not sure why but, like many other events that happen along your journey, it can be a question of timing.

As we continued on with the night, Richie and I started to formulate the terms a little bit more. When to start? From

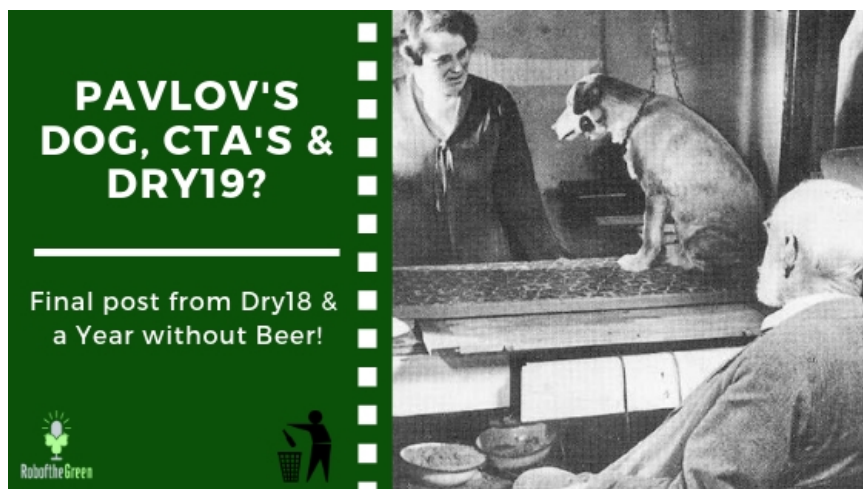
tomorrow? No.....how about from 1stJanuary? Do it for the full 365 days of 2018? That seemed to fit better. For the rest of the night, with that bet in focus, I felt clearer. Focused. Certain. Committed. This time I was going to do it.

As I write this, it's 365 days from that discussion. A year on from the handshake and nearly a year on from the complete alcohol cull! I've been sharing what I've been learning on the journey so far in these posts. So many new perspectives. So much less embarrassment. A lot more self-worth. Improved confidence. Impending Fatherhood. Getting Engaged. Zero escorting from nightclubs. Zero conversations with dead people. Zero attempts at breakdancing. Zero lost jackets.

It's funny though. When I was more frequently out at the weekend and suffering from a bad Monday or moody Tuesday, I would blame it all on the booze. Not just that. Anyone that knows me, is aware that, on occasion, I can sneeze literally hundreds of times a day when my allergies are on fire. In the past, I would always blame that on my excessive night out at the weekend before. It was the obvious thing to do. Which would result in me giving myself a harder time and feeling worse. Now, I'm happy (not sure that's the right word) to say I still get the allergies without the beer. I also still get anxious. Feel uncomfortable. Question myself and other insecurities emerge. But I know that's normal. It's just part of life. And I can't now blame it on the beer. Which makes it more acceptable.

I don't gamble often but this is one bet that I'm glad I wagered. One that I've won on every day since. It maybe is the epitome of gambling responsibly. The fun, for the most part had stopped with drinking. And when the fun stops, stop.

Chapter 7 – Pavlov’s Dog, CTA’s, and Dry19?



Dry18 – Pavlov’s Dog, CTA’s, and Dry19?

Right now, this very moment, as I write this, I’m fighting off a very strong temptation to begin this final piece of the Dry 2018 post series with an inspirational quote (from someone way more inspirational than me) with the key word ‘impossible.’ How else do articles start these days anyway? Especially ones that cover such a mammoth challenge as an Irish person giving up alcohol for a year.

A part of me is wants to go with the famous Mandela quote “it always seems impossible until it’s done.” Another part of me prefers the one from Audrey Hepburn “nothing is impossible, the word itself says “I’m possible”, and yet another tiny voice in me is championing one from a book I recently read by [Yogananda Paramhansa](#) with “nothing is impossible unless you think it is”.

But no, I'm not going to go there. That would be way too predictable.

Why 'impossible'? Well, 12 months ago, giving up drink for a full year did seem a little like that. Not just to me. Many that know me thought it too. And maybe a little bit outrageous. The Questions coming at me were "Why deprive yourself of it?" or "You work hard so why not have a few now and then?" followed by reassuring encouragement of "It's not as if there was a problem with it. Enjoy it."

To be fair, while I sensed deep down it wasn't impossible, to go through a full calendar year without having any alcohol was a bit daunting. Even if I had become a much more occasional drinker in the last number of years, giving up that glass of red on a Friday night after a busy work week, or asking for diet Coke instead of a Beer when out for a Meal or at a work gathering was not going to be easy.

Thankfully, as the first few months flew by, I realized this task was far from unsurmountable. Like any Big Goal, if you chunk it up into smaller pieces, it becomes very doable. So, an elaborate quote stating the 'impossible' doesn't seem apt. As the year progressed, I noticed other words coming up that were more fitting. Words like 'choice', 'options', 'simplicity', 'commitment', and 'freedom'. By removing the choice, and making the commitment, the freedom came, and life became simpler. I'm still working on how to make that into a profound quote to inspire but maybe this could work:

"Simplicity and Freedom comes when you commit to the choice"
– O'Donohue (various times during 2018)

Ok, not in the Mandela or Hepburn league but it's one I've gone back to a number of times this year. I've noticed too that this approach can be applied to other Big Goals too.

So, as I finalize this post now, early in 2019 and reflect back, what are some big learnings that stand out?

Reconditioning



Are you familiar with [Pavlov's Dog](#) – the experiment that became famous over 100 years ago by Ivan Pavlov. He studied the behaviour of dogs and developed a theory of classical conditioning. It explains how people associate two stimuli in their minds and react to one of them as though it was the other. Every time, after the right conditioning, Pavlov's dog heard a bell, it would salivate more expecting food.

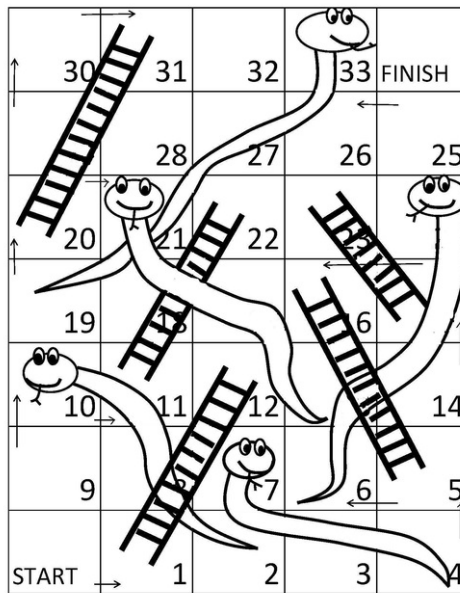
For the longest time, when something momentous happened, something exciting, important, and worth celebrating, associating a few beers or a night out with that event was the norm. Getting a promotion, completing a marathon, a holiday away, watching an Arsenal match, and so on. All would bring on the Pavlovian response in me. Instead of salivating expecting food, it would be a signal to get the Beers in! I'd been conditioned that way.

During the year, one of the biggest 'A-ha's' has been how this conditioning has begun to alter. I've been reprogramming myself to associate the excitement with a different response. Maybe that was to go for a nice meal, or to the cinema. Or do nothing at all and just enjoy the moment. It's been an eye opener as I look back. Breaking habits can be tough, yet reconditioning is possible. Leading to a better outcome. And thankfully, no Dogs were harmed in this year-long experiment.

"You must feel great?" – asked by many all year!

My short answer is yes, absolutely, but not in ways you might expect. Physically, I'd feel ok a couple of days after a big night out. So that's not been hugely noticeable. In fact, I've probably had more head colds this year than I've had in the last decade combined. The real improvements have been more Emotionally & Mentally. Having zero hangovers during the year has been amazing. It allowed me to stick to my routine and get more done. It also allowed me to do nothing more often too. I haven't created more time, I've just been able to put it to better use. The Inner Critic, my Gremlin in my head, that lovely voice that's always been there to give me a hard time after a night out. Well, he's had a bad year. A quieter one for sure. I now find myself having the 'Fear' (which was explained in a previous post here) only when I think about actually having the Fear!

SNAKES AND LADDERS



I've often compared my life in my twenties, when my social life was full on, to a game of Snakes and Ladders (for those millennials, it was a physical board game popular a long time ago – forgive me if it still is). I'd manage to make great progress up the board, ladder by ladder, skilfully navigating the many snakes there to set me back. But always before too long, the snake's charm would be too much to escape. The snake here would be the alcohol of course. Or maybe it's that Gremlin again enticing me into places where it knew I'd regret later. Either way, it led to a fall. Back down the board. Setting me back. This year, while there have been temptations, I've managed to navigate my way up the board much more mindfully.



“I personally believe that the majority of people who have down moments in their lives, they can actually trace it back, quite often, to alcohol. Perhaps the only days of my life that I feel lethargic is instead of having two glasses at night time I had five or six”. – Richard Branson

Dealing with downers!

I vividly recall hearing the above from Richard Branson in a podcast with Tim Ferriss in late 2017. It was around that time I was thinking about cutting out the booze totally and his words stayed with me since. As I reflect back on the years when I did drink, while alcohol been a catalyst for many great nights, I can relate to Sir Branson’s experiences. I’d safely say that 99% of the nights/days where I’ve felt very low have come very soon after alcohol. Combine that with a pre-disposition to overthinking, giving myself a hard time, and a lean towards anxiety and you have a dangerous mix.

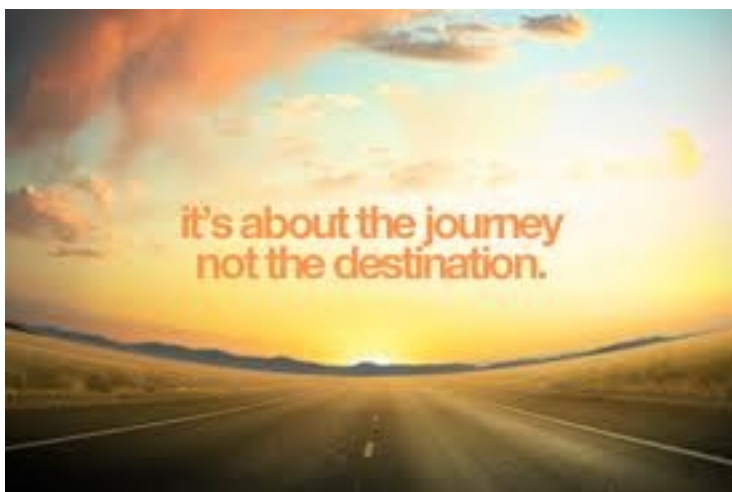
Over the course of 2018, and none more so than in the last 8 weeks of the year, I’ve had to face tough times and deal with very real-life situations. It was difficult to look for positives, be optimistic, and try to reign in that very disruptive and over active critic in my mind. Difficult but manageable. I have no doubt, if I

ever added a hangover to that mix, I'd have been in a different darker place altogether. So, from that perspective, my Mood, Emotional Agility and levels of Grit have improved this year thanks to less time on the rollercoaster that accompanies booze.

Other Hidden Benefits



At the very end of 2017, I wrote a piece called [‘2018 Goal Setting with the Heart & Mind’](#) where I focused on setting goals that weren't just [SMART](#). They also had to have Heart or a real sense of Emotion woven in. Instead of ‘No Alcohol for the full year of 2018’ (which starts with a negative as well so not really that positive to begin with), I went for *‘Make each day count & Wake-up fresh in 2018, free of alcohol and hangovers!’*. For me, the second option has much more feeling in it. I can really buy into making the days count more and getting up with a clear head is always a good way to start the day.



Goal Setting for me has always been an activity I did around Christmas time for the Year ahead. For the most part, it's been very much focused on the result or the outcome. Laser focused on the finish line. Sure, I've bought into the saying of 'enjoy the journey, not just the destination' but never really fully appreciated it until this year. Through many of the conversations I've had with guests on the podcast, time and again, it became very clear that so much learning, growth, and personal development comes through the suffering and challenges faced along the path. That has been so true with Dry 18.

As I've journaled and kept track of the year sans-beer, it's been a real positive when I realise how many unexpected benefits have come from it. When I took a step back from other goals I've been following, the same has been true. The unexpected fringe benefits from Podcasting, learning to Swim, writing more frequently, creating Video content, and others, have all been arguably more significant and pleasing than completing whatever SMART goal I had signed up to.

Other takeaways I've noticed? There have been many. I've touched on these in the previous posts over the year so far and that's been a great way to track my progress. Not losing a phone

or having to get its glass repaired this year has been a nice perk too. I noticed very vividly too the growing numbers of non-Alcoholic Beers on the shelves of Supermarkets and in the Pubs? Could this be a sign of things to come?

Dry 19?

‘So, are you going to go back ‘on it?’ – Asked many People in late 2018

In March, I interviewed [Jim Breen for the podcast](#). It was the morning after St. Patricks Day. A day when a lot of Irish people might be not in the mood for recording a podcast. Both of us were in good form having had a booze free March 17th. During this conversation, which I would say is one of my favourites from the year, the topic of mindset came up. Jim shared something that has stuck with me to this day.

Jim shared a simple example on Jogging and how, many times, it’s difficult to get yourself on the road. He suggested to listen to the language you use. Do you say ‘I HAVE to go for a jog’. What if we changing this to ‘I GET to go for a jog’ or ‘I WANT’. It brings on a whole different feeling. It’s a privilege to go, not a chore. As I write this, this idea comes up for me as I apply it to drinking. It’s more of a ‘Get to’ than a ‘Have to’. It’s something I feel I can choose to, or not.

The reconditioning that’s started during 2018 has helped me adjust my attitude. Right now, I’m not sure I even WANT to. I’m happier than ever without it. We’ll just have to wait and see. I’ll start with Dry January and go for there.



CTAs?

In early 2018, someone connected with me over social media after reading one of the posts.

“It’s a really good post but what’s your CTA? That needs to be more clear!”

She commented.

I’m ashamed to admit it but I had to google CTA to find out it was *Call To Action*! It’s hard to keep up with these acronyms.

I’m ashamed to admit it but I had to Google CTA to find out it was Call To Action! It’s hard to keep up with these acronyms.

My approach to writing is evolving. 2018 has been fun as I’ve been able to share the experiences with Dry 18. I hope the message from these posts have provided some encouragement to readers in setting & following their own Goals, Alcohol related or others. The CTAs might have not been very explicit, more implicit but still useful I hope.

Now, in the first few days of 2019, let me make my CTA a bit more robust! I can guaranteewhatever Goal you set for 2019,

even if it's just for January, or February, or maybe just even a week, you will gain a lot more following the path than you every imagined. That I can promise. You just need to commit, take action and stick with it.

2018 has been a huge year in my life. I've got engaged, become a Dad for the first time, developed greater self-belief, improved my decisiveness, and been able to deal with anxiety and stress better than ever before. Can I attribute all of these great experiences, events and learning to Dry18? Probably not all, but some! There is no doubt it's made life better. And that was the best outcome I could have hoped for.

My CTA may not be as grandiose as how Tony Robbins, Tim Ferriss, or the like may put it. I'll just keep it simple with these key points to refer to when setting out your goals. (I didn't try to create an acronym for it either!).

- **SMART** – For each goal, make sure it meets the specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timebound criteria
- **Emotion** - Make sure they excite & scare you a little
- **Chunking** - Break them down into days, weeks, smaller tasks and manageable chunks!
- **Value** - Get clear on the outcomes you hope to achieve? (is it worth doing?)
- **Reflect** - Check in regularly and reflect on what you're learning (the unexpected benefits)
- **Kindness** - Don't give yourself a hard time if you fail. Be kind to yourself. You can always reset the goal if it's not working out.

Sometimes we go for Goals that are about completely stopping something Cold Turkey. Or even starting something without ever having done it before (like running a 5km when you've never run 1km before). This is why all of the above points are key. And the

Goal could be as simple as doing more of something or doing less of another. Having Goals give you purpose. They're worth the effort.

What's your Goal for 2019? Good luck with it. Let me know if I can help.

Happy New Year!

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Footnote – A very special word of thanks & congratulations to my good Friend Richard McCaffrey who has been my co-pilot on the Dry18 voyage. We've both come out the other side better. Well done, Richardo. We did it!!

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Just in case you are looking for a handy Goal setting & tracking calendar for 2019, I've added a simple one to the website you can download and use to track progress. You can even add a new tab for lessons learned or benefits you didn't expect. Tweak it however you feel necessary. It's been useful for me over the last year so go for it.

Here's the link - <http://robofthegreen.ie/goalsetting/>

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About the Author:

Rob O'Donohue is a qualified Executive Coach and has been Mentoring and Coaching over the last decade in various roles held during his career. In 2017, Rob launched the [Rob of the Green Platform](#) which hosts the [1% Better Podcast](#).

Rob currently is a director of Project Management and Leadership Coaching at Dell in Cork, Ireland.

Rob also publishes articles on productivity, goal setting, meditation, and other topics.

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2019 Goal Setting Tracker

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