

Does Legal Project Management Beat Motivation?

By [Carla Landry](#) on June 4, 2024

Lots of people think that if you can just tap into the magical fountain of motivation – either for themselves or their employees – life would be a lot simpler. That may be true, but perhaps we give motivation a little too much credit.

After all, motivation isn't exactly sustainable. In the short term, it's easy enough to generate excitement and mobilize a new team. It's more difficult to keep the energy going indefinitely. Money is nice, but it's not unlimited and, in any case, is proven to be a poor motivator in the long run. Recognition is great, but it's fleeting, as well.

We're a fickle species when it comes to resolutions. The motivation to eat a healthy diet may wane when you catch a whiff of the pepperoni pizza brought in for a lunch meeting. The motivation to get up 30 minutes earlier to workout may dissipate by the time Monday morning rolls around.

Of course, motivation can certainly come from within. Internal motivation is considered more reliable than external motivation like, say, a bonus. You may be motivated internally by personal values, such as sending your kids to music camp, or interests, such as leveling up your area of expertise. The problem is that by definition, when it comes to other people, internal motivation is largely beyond your control. Further, internal motivation may still rely on external factors that also fluctuate.

What if instead everyone just followed a plan? Plan to bring your own version of a healthy pizza. Sleep in your workout clothes and put your shoes beside the bed. That way, motivation becomes less important.

Keeping it Simple

We wrote several articles about the book *Atomic Habits* where James Clear tells us that real change doesn't come from motivation. Sure, motivation is nice. But real change comes from making a few small decisions consistently and over time. But even that can be easier said than done when you're in decision overload.

According to the Harvard Business Review, the average adult makes between 33,000 and 35,000 decisions every day. Some of them are very small, such as what to eat for breakfast. But others can be monumental and life changing like whether to start a family. All of the daily brain gymnastics can lead to decision fatigue. This may manifest in the diminished capacity to make a high-quality decision when you most need it. It can also increase stress levels, leaving you less energy to focus on the things that really matter.

There are undoubtedly people in positions of responsibility that have to make even more than 35,000 decisions. Perhaps you're one of them. These decisions can have significant consequences for employees, your practice group, the client, or the entire firm. Every decision doesn't merit the same level of effort, however.

The late Steve Jobs was asked why he always dressed in black. He responded that it eliminated some of the trivial decisions in his life so that he could focus his mental energy elsewhere. He may never have perfected the whole emotional intelligence side of leadership, but the man certainly knew how to focus on simplicity and efficiency. Even though Jobs was a 40,000-foot visionary, he was also an advocate of effective planning, including the implementation of systems that would ultimately help Apple reach its goals.

Start with a Plan

Most amateur chefs consider themselves intuitive cooks. A dash of this, a pinch of that. But some traditional and highly technical recipes defy one's ability to remember all of the ingredients. The country classic, French cassoulet, for example, requires upwards of 20 ingredients. And that's simple peasant food. Alton Brown and Martha Stewart are not amateurs and they don't trust their reputations to produce the dish they perfected three years ago, or even yesterday. They both follow recipes meticulously to ensure that they consistently get the results they want.

A recipe is a plan, a blueprint to get the desired outcomes. It's no different in a law firm. Every viable firm has processes, procedures, templates, software and collaboration tools for communication and document management, risk management, resource allocation, etc. While the law can be quite complicated, many aspects of the management of legal matters can be made less complex with the right approach. That approach is LPM.

Legal Project Management ... It's Better Than Motivation

Even Jobs deviated on occasion from his signature style. He was said to have worn a suit at Apple's Worldwide Developers Conference in 2000. Of course, you don't have to reserve your brainpower for rare events, but the point is that if you can find a way to redirect your energy to the highest use, why not?

Any time you have an opportunity to free up some bandwidth in your brain by simplifying your life, whether personal or professional, it's probably a good idea to do so. That's what legal project management does. It provides a structured approach using techniques and principles that will improve your outcomes. Clients are more satisfied, risk is more manageable, resources are more efficiently allocated, and stress levels decline among the matter team.

Motivation definitely has its place. But, a good plan has crossed the finish line by the time motivation laces up its shoes. Legal project management is your planning tool that will greatly improve your ability to help the entire team align their interests and aspirations with the project objectives to get the results you want.