

LPM in Practice: Bringing Atomic Habits to Law

By [Carla Landry](#) on May 2, 2022

When it comes to forming new habits, everyone wants instantaneous results. But habit formation is not a matter of simple execution. According to James Clear's bestseller, *Atomic Habits: An Easy and Proven Way to Build Good Habits and Break Bad Ones*, habits are developed via a four-stage process: noticing, wanting, doing, and liking. In parts two and three of this five-part series, we covered [noticing](#) and [wanting](#).

At last, we have arrived at the place where the good stuff happens: doing. This is the point where the intellectualizing and the theorizing stop and the real action begins.

Doing the Thing

Doing begins with taking that first step. If you're moving through the phases of atomic habit-building, this means that you have created the right environment. When you fall out of bed and into your New Balance FuelCell's, what are you going to do? Go for a morning run. You could leave it to chance, but when you take the steps to ensure that making a good decision is easy, you'll automatically do what you need to do.

Once you get started, you can refine the skill by putting in the repetitions. In other words, do the thing over and over again until it becomes a habit. Still, before you can do that, you need to repeatedly make a conscious decision until you no longer think about it. Consistency matters, as do the number of reps.

Clear uses the example of [choreographer Twyla Tharp](#), who choreographed *Hair* and *Amadeus*, among other famous movies. She put herself through a rigorous two-hour workout each day. How did she do it? It's a mental game. Tharp's habit was not the workout. It was going down to the street and hailing a cab. Once she hopped in the taxi, it was a sure bet that she would go to the gym and put in the work.

When you're trying to build a habit, Clear tells us that the focus is not on the outcome, it's on the beginning. Commit to the first step and then you can focus on keeping it going. As Clear says, "You want your habits to act as an entrance ramp to a bigger routine."

Execute with a Plan

Beyond getting started, successful execution takes a careful and planned approach. Of course, there are many factors that can stand in the way of success once you get out of the starting blocks. These factors in a legal services setting include, for example:

- Redundant processes
- Inefficient division of labor
- Under- or over-utilization of resources
- Communication snafus
- Schedule delays

- Bottlenecks due to poor planning
- Changing or miscommunicated scope
- Inaccurate budgeting
- Reinventing the wheel
- Poor risk management

This is why a good plan is key. Legal Project Management (LPM) is no magic pill. You still need to put in the work. But LPM can eliminate some of the unforced errors. And the work will be easier and less reliant on the faulty memories and scant availability of busy professionals. LPM works because it makes it more difficult to default to bad behaviors or do things that haven't worked well in the past. It consistently nudges everyone in the right direction and makes it easier for them to focus on value-added work.

Baby Steps of LPM

Best of all? It's a gentle way to get one percent better every day. LPM helps you get started with small steps. You don't have to change everything at once. Nor do you need to have immediate overnight success. You just need to get started with practicable, useful processes that make the lives of your lawyers and professionals easier. Demonstrate a few successes and more will follow. That's the compounding effect of atomic habits.

One way to think about it is that with LPM you are:

- Systematizing many of the things you already do;
- Removing the pieces that add no value; and
- Avoiding the surprises that mar the client experience and cause you to lose sleep at night.

The Execution Basket

Clearly, execution – doing – is critically important. If you want to outperform the competition and deliver the best results, you put lots of your eggs in the execution basket. Execution, however, is never easy. When it comes to legal matters there will always be a certain amount of ambiguity. However, that ambiguity shouldn't come from the routine and repeatable processes that underlie important legal work. LPM provides the information needed to execute.