

What Do Atomic Habits Mean for Legal Project Management?

By [Carla Landry](#) on January 25, 2022

New year, new habits. You may have already abandoned your resolution to work out regularly, make healthier food choices, be a more empathic listener, whatever. But James Clear, author of "[Atomic Habits: An Easy and Proven Way to Build Good Habits and Break Bad Ones](#)," may have some advice that will strengthen your law firm this year and well into the future.

Of course, Clear isn't talking about lawyers or law firms specifically. He is, after all, a writer. But he does have some great insights that can help you go from zero to 100 with your Legal Project Management initiative.

[Clear explains](#), "Habits are not only the methods through which we achieve external measures of success... they are also the path through which we achieve internal change and actually become someone new." That's an exciting possibility for law firms.

The Thing About Habits

Habits aren't a matter of willpower and motivation. They generally happen because we do small things on a consistent basis. Whether we're talking about food choices or work processes, few people have the willpower to always make the best choices. Why is that?

It's because those good habits have a cost, be it time or effort. And the reward for making the best choice is often delayed. Who can blame you if you choose to eat the chocolate donuts on the conference room table rather than the organic apple that you left back on your desk? Forego the sweets under your nose and stick to your eating plan, you'll be healthier, maybe with lower cholesterol – in six months. The donut, however, is bakery-fresh and utterly delicious right now.

Plus, everyone wants transformational change immediately. Change is hard... and the small stuff is just too minuscule to bother with. We've been taught to go big or go home. But don't discount the value of small changes.

Chris Nikic personifies Clear's belief in atomic habits when he set a world record using the 1% better philosophy.

One Percent Improvements for Remarkable Results

Chris faced many physical and developmental challenges growing up. But his father, Nik Nikic, a business coach with more than two decades of experience, knew that he could overcome the limitations that others wanted to place on his son.

Nik got Chris to write down his goals and together they developed the "[1% Better Challenge](#)" to help the young man realize his dreams. Besides wanting to buy his own house, a car, and marry a "smokin' hot" lady, he wanted to compete in an ironman competition. That's not easy for anyone, let alone for a sedentary young man who had open-heart surgery as a baby and four major ear surgeries at age 17. But the 21-year-old didn't let that stop him.

Chris set his sights on Ironman Florida. For 10 months he had a goal to get 1% better every day. That meant establishing a

system of tiny habits. He didn't need any fancy technology or even an Excel spreadsheet to track his progress. Using a whiteboard and some colorful dry-erase markers, he plastered his visual aid to the wall to keep himself motivated and on task. Chris went from completing one squat, one sit-up and one push-up on day one to 200 of each exercise a year later.

In the end, Chris finished the 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike ride, and 26.2-mile marathon in 16 hours 46 minutes and 9 seconds, 14 minutes under the 17-hour cutoff. He set a Guinness World Record. But why? It's because Chris is the first person with Downs syndrome to complete an ironman. Of course, he's not done proving the skeptics wrong. His next goal? The 2022 Special Olympics.

Huh. That's quite an achievement for a young man who didn't walk until he was 4 years old. When the doctors said not to expect too much, that was Chris's clarion call. All he needed was a system of small and regular improvements.

Better Habits with LPM

Clear says it's simple math. But you may want to use a daily interest calculator. If you were to make a one percent improvement compounded daily for 365 days, you would be roughly 3800 percent better by year-end. "Habits are the compound interest of self-improvement," Clear says.

Bad habits, however, have the opposite effect. One way or another, we're making small changes all the time. Those variances can either help you build a sustainable law practice or derail your long-term prospects in an increasingly competitive arena. With no process in place, those tiny changes are likely to be detrimental.

This year, an investment in your LPM program can make a big difference. You don't have to make a sea change. You also don't have to go as small as one percent. LPM is nothing more than a formalized process to instill good habits that bring your firm better results. You don't need motivation and you don't need willpower. Plus, you'll make fewer cringe-worthy calls begging forgiveness for a bill that overran your client's budget with no fair warning.

There are no limits to what you can do. You just need to follow a plan. New year, better outcomes. Legal Project Management is easy once you get started. In the next few blogs, we'll explain more about Atomic Habits and how to build them at your firm.