

Using Atomic Habits to Bolster Business Development

Last year in this publication, we offered advice about [forming new habits](#), particularly those that can have a positive impact on a lawyer's business development efforts. In the months since that article ran, I've had several "ah-hah moments" about habits, thanks to the ideas in the book *Atomic Habits* by James Clear, which I read as I considered my New Year's resolutions. While the concepts in *Atomic Habits* can support personal goals like exercising more, I read the book through the lens of my work with law firm marketers and lawyers, looking for how I could help them develop a habit that supports business development goals.

Marketing professionals know that it takes time and a consistent effort to raise awareness of a lawyer's capabilities and those of the firm as a whole. A marketing team might suggest tactics such as networking, speaking engagements or article writing as excellent ways to increase a lawyer's visibility. But while the lawyer may appreciate the potential value of marketing, the idea of getting started — and then finding the time to stick with it — seems almost impossible. A key to being consistent is to make the process painless and automatic; in short, it has to become a habit. Surely, I thought, the guidance in *Atomic Habits* could help.

For the purposes of this article, and the formation of a new business development habit, I thought of a common marketing problem in law firms: publicizing litigation wins and settlements (or deals, if your practice is transactional) while the news is still current. A good tactic is to write a press release to announce a win (with client consent), and distribute it externally for media coverage and internally for cross-selling purposes. But how does the marketing team know when a case has been won or a deal has closed? Someone has to notify the marketing department and provide the details of the win. This sounds simple enough, but marketing departments are sometimes the last to find out when a matter closes successfully, and by the time the news does reach them, it's too stale to garner any media attention.

With that scenario in mind, I applied James Clear's *Atomic Habits* and his 4 Laws of Behavior Change to building a habit that could help lawyers provide the information the marketing department needs, all for the greater good of business development.

According to *Atomic Habits*, the first Law of Behavior Change is to make it obvious. "It" refers to "anything that gets your attention and signifies what to do next." The more obvious this cue is, the more likely it will be acted upon. For establishing a habit to notify the marketing team about a litigation win, I suggest that the cue be a weekly 15-minute appointment driven by technology, such as a work calendar that sends a visual and/or audible reminder (e.g., text, on-screen notification, email, sounds, alarms, etc.). At the sound or sight of the reminder, the lawyer must stop other work and think about recent



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and pending wins that could be newsworthy. By setting aside these 15 minutes, the likelihood of sharing the litigation news increases. But this action alone will not form a new habit.

According to Clear, the second Law of Behavior Change is to make it attractive. He writes, "We need to make our habits attractive because it is the expectation of a rewarding experience that motivates us to act in the first place." The idea is that "doing the thing you need to do means you get to do the thing you want to do." In the context of our scenario, we need to identify the reward. Once the cue happens, the task at hand (spending 15 minutes focused on matters that could be newsworthy) can be paired with an action that is attractive (grab a cappuccino, call a friend or watch a comedy clip on YouTube, etc.). This strategy may feel like a trick, but Clear explains that, psychologically, the anticipation of a reward will motivate you to act.

The third Law of Behavior Change, Clear says, is to make it easy. He explains, "This law is associated with the response, which is the actual behavior or habit that you perform. Behaviors are more likely to be performed when they are easy – that is, when they can be accomplished with ease." As Clear says, "the less energy a habit requires, the more likely it is to occur." In our hypothetical scenario, the goal is to notify the marketing department. The easiest way to do this is to send the marketing team an email that simply lists the cases that have closed or will close soon. The marketing team will then be prompted to contact you for more details.

The fourth Law of Behavior Change is to make it satisfying. Clear explains that when the new behavior has a satisfying result, there is reason to repeat it in the future. The result must be something you expect to happen, and the speed of the reward is a critical factor. Returning to our scenario, once the marketing team has been notified of the litigation win, and thereby prompted to gather more details, the result will be a timely press release that is distributed internally and externally, which raises the lawyer's (and firm's) visibility. Mission accomplished! The bonus is the attention that comes from the announcement, which in turn could lead to new business and cross-selling opportunities. The potential to develop more business, while simultaneously elevating the firm's reputation, provides the motivation to do this process every week, until, to your pleasant surprise, it has become a habit.

Liz Lindley is a Senior Vice President with Jaffe, where she collaborates with marketing departments, practice groups and individual lawyers on the many marketing tactics that support their business development and reputation management objectives. The author thanks James Clear and his assistant Lyndsey Nuckols for permission to share quotes from Atomic Habits. If you would like to learn more about Atomic Habits, visit www.JamesClear.com/atomic-habits.

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