



SPI 340

How to Build Atomic Habits – with James Clear

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Pat Flynn:

Who you are and what happens in your life, the results of the work that you do, is often a reflection of the habits that you form and the systems that you create to achieve those goals that you have. There is a very famous quote out there that is actually often—I've done some research here. A lot of people think Aristotle said this, "We are what we repeatedly do, excellence then is not an act, but a habit." I love that quote but it's often misattributed. But I want to give credit to where credit is due: It was first written in a small book called *The Story of Philosophy* by a man, a philosopher named Will Durant, back in 1926.

So anyway, now that we got that out of the way, I do want to talk about another book that just came out, written by a good friend of mine, James Clear from JamesClear.com and his book, *Atomic Habits*. This literally just came out the other day and I'm really excited to bring James on the show today. You know, he's been blogging about habits for years and I feel is one of the top writers on the topic in the space, and his book is incredible. There are so many habit books out there and this is the one to get. This is about proven ways, easy ways to build good habits and break bad ones.

And in this episode today we talk about a number of things, including procrastination, and the easy and simple way to get over that; it's actually turning things into little two minute rules that can really help you, and we'll talk more about that in the show.

The easiest way to stay motivated over time, how it's okay to actually break a habitual streak—and that's something that I often struggle with. I'll get on a great run for something, whatever it is I'm trying to do and I'll do it for you know, however many days straight, but a couple days off and it then it just kind of derails itself. But we talk about how to get back and how it's okay.

The 1 percent better every day system, the creation of goals is actually not what's going to lead to you to success. This was a big eye opener for me, the fact that okay goal setting is not the key. Yes it's important because it gives you direction, but if goal setting was the key then guess what? Everybody would be successful. It's not

about that, it's about something else that we talk about.

And then finally, really this is about making or breaking habits. So making good habits that can help support the goals that you have and the systems that you create to support the goals that you have, and also creating systems to break the bad habits so that you can live a better life.

And that's what we're gonna be talking about today. So before we get into it, let's just cue the music. Let's do this.

Announcer: Welcome to the Smart Passive Income Podcast, where it's all about working hard now so you can sit back and reap the benefits later. And now your host—he still struggles to poke a straw into his Capri Suns—Pat Flynn!

Pat Flynn: Hey what's up, Pat Flynn here. I'm here to help you make more money, save more time, and help more people too. And today we have, like I said, James Clear on the show with us. If you haven't subscribed to the show yet, please make sure you do that because we have a lot of great content coming your way in the future. But today we're just gonna dive right in to this interview with James Clear to help you achieve better results in your life. Let's do it.

What's up James? Welcome to the SPI Podcast man, thanks for being here.

James Clear: Hey Pat, thanks so much for having me man, I'm really excited to talk, I appreciate it.

Pat Flynn: You know I've been reading your stuff for a while, I love it, and now you have this book called *Atomic Habits*. I want to know why it's called *Atomic Habits* before anything. What does that mean?

James Clear: Sure. So, well there are multiple meanings behind the word. So first of all, I think people get the idea atomic, like very small like an atom, and your habits should be small and easy to do, but there's more to it than that. An atom is a fundamental unit of a larger system. Atoms

make molecules, and molecules build up into compounds, and so on. And similarly, I think we can say that our habits are sort of like the atoms of our life in the sense that they're the fundamental unit that make up what we do on a daily basis and the type of results that we get, so that's another meaning.

And then the third thing is atomic can also mean the source of immense energy or power and so if we do it right, we pick the right small behaviors that accumulate into a larger system that are the fundamental unit of a greater process, then I think we can have some really incredible results from that. And that's one of the core philosophies in the book is this idea that if you can get 1 percent better each day, you can end up with some very remarkable results in the long run.

Pat Flynn: I love that. And we've heard that before on the show, we've had [Thomas Frank](#) on the show who's been a big proponent of building strong habits and the 1 percent better every day. And I think it was Aristotle, or somebody who said, you know, that "we are what we repeatedly do; excellence then is not an act but a habit." And so this is why I love that this book is coming from you, because you have become known as the person who's helped instill a number of habits in many people's lives to help make change for the better.

But I wanted to ask you just straight up, like okay, why another habit book? I mean there's so many out there, why is this one different? And then we'll kinda get into the juicy stuff.

James Clear: Sure. So there are quite a few habit books out there. I think that there were two things missing that helped propel me to write this book. So the first thing that was missing is that there are quite a few books that do a good job of explaining how habits work from a high level, [Power of Habit](#) for example, I think Duhigg wrote a really good book with that. But there aren't that many books that explain how to implement them in daily life, and in fact if you look at the reviews on Amazon, like the two or three stars for *Power of Habit*, there aren't that many but one of the common critiques is that people will say "he did a great job of explaining how they work,

I wish I just knew like what to do next, or how to implement it.” And that’s one of the goals behind *Atomic Habits* is to take the science of how habits work and then distill it into a variety of practical action steps. In the book I call it the Four Laws of Behavior Change, but they’re sort of these four levers that you can pull to make building good habits easier and make falling into bad habits harder. So that was the first piece, was let’s make it practical and actionable.

And then the second part is that a lot of the conversation about habits, a lot of the science of habits focuses on behavior psychology and what has kind of evolved out of operant conditioning and B.F. Skinner’s work at Stanford in the 1930’s and 40’s and so on. And in fact, Skinner originally proposed this model that he called stimulus response reward, which is similar to what Duhigg laid out in his book which he called acute routine reward. And that’s great, it’s an effective model, it is true that we see a cue and then that if we get the right reward or the right punishment that we’ll fall into a habit or avoid it. But over the last few decades, cognitive scientists have seen a big change in a way that the motions and feelings and moods impact our behavior. And so there isn’t, or there wasn’t, I think until I wrote *Atomic Habits*, a good model that was offered that incorporated both of those, that incorporated both the influence of external factors, like a cue and a reward, and the influence of internal factors, like how you feel in your emotions and the predictions that you make; and this is something that I lay out in the second stage of habits. In the book I break habits into four stages, and the second stage is largely about our thoughts and feelings and emotions and how those shape our habits.

So those were two areas that I felt like I could fill with the book and my hope is that I was able to do it well.

Pat Flynn: How did you become interested in habits and become an expert on this stuff? Like what really is the driver for you?

James Clear: Well, I mean I think, Pat, this resonates with you a little bit with your work as well, but I don’t really like to call myself an expert or view myself that way. Like, I view my readers and I as peers, and so we’re

all experimenting and trying things, trying to build better habits and improve the work that we do and how we show up each day and my job is to just share the lessons that I learn along the way. And so I'm hopeful that I'm not like, you know—I do worry a little bit that the bloggers could be a new age version of an academic in the Ivory Tower, where they're just kind of sitting up there and writing about ideas, but their job is just to write about ideas all day and they're not actually putting them to use. And so I want to resist that as much as I can. I want to be like, you know, there's that famous Roosevelt quote about being the man in the arena and kind of getting like dirty and dusted up and beaten around a little bit because you're out in the real world trying to do things. And so for me I try to have a balance of like fifty-fifty there.

Some of that is work that I do with companies and like helping them implement habits, but a lot of it is just my personal life; whether it's training in gym and trying out different habit strategies there, or sticking to a writing habit, or the photography work that I do. These are just different ways for me to test the ideas that I write about, so I guess one way that I came into it was through experimenting and trying it out, and the second side is I do have a science background. So I mostly studied chemistry and physics in undergrad and I've always been interested in the sciences and then eventually once I launched my own business, I spent the last five to eight years reading and researching habits and writing about them each week.

Pat Flynn: And you've been writing very consistently, we can see on our end. So just the fact that you practice what you preach, which is great—so if you haven't checked out JamesClear.com, definitely check that out and obviously we'll have all the links in the show notes and whatnot for you at the end of the show here.

But I want to get into what these laws are and sort of the structure of your book and let's talk about some of these things that people who are listening right now can take away with them, even in some of the chapters like I know, for instance, on procrastination. Like, a lot of what you mentioned in the book was huge for me in terms, for me, like let's make it a two minute habit instead of a giant one

and I'd love to talk about that eventually when we get to that law. But you know, let's start with law number one. Make it obvious. Okay, what should we make obvious, what're some things we can do to just get started with okay like we know we need to do certain things like go to the gym, or wake up earlier, or practice our miracle morning, or begin writing, but what do you mean by make it obvious?

James Clear: Okay so first of all, let's understand where these laws are coming from or why did I come up with this framework in the first place. And one of the core ideas behind the book is that we do not rise to the level of our goals, we fall to the level of our systems. And what I mean by that is it's very easy to come up with ambition and have a dream and want to achieve more for yourself and that's great, but it's in fact the process or the system that largely determines whether you follow through with that or not. And so one of my goals in writing this book, or one of the things I wanted to achieve, was to come up with a system that people could follow for achieving or building habits that they wanted. And so these four laws are sort of, like I said earlier, you can sort of view them as levers, and so you don't always need to use all four, but for a given circumstance there might be two or three levers that you can pull that you can make that habit easier.

And so the four laws, as you said, is to make it obvious. And this is associated with a cue or something that gets your attention when you're trying to build a new habit. And so one way to make it obvious is by practicing what I call environment design. And one of the stories, or examples, that I give in the book is about this little community in Amsterdam. This was in the 1970's. There was a neighborhood and there was an energy crisis, and researchers noticed that a few of the houses in the neighborhood were spending much less energy, paying much less energy bills than their neighbors even though they were getting energy at the same rate, same electrical cost, and the houses were roughly the same size. And it turns out these houses had one thing that was different, and the key thing was the houses that had lower energy uses had the electrical meter upstairs in the main hallway, whereas most of

the homes had them downstairs in the basement.

And the point here is when your behavior is obvious to you, when you're passing that cue all day long and you see how much electricity you're burning or how much you're using, it's like a reminder, "oh I should turn the light off," or "I should be more judicious with my use of energy throughout the day." And this is true for pretty much any habit. The more obvious you can make it, the more likely you are to fall into it. So for example, if you want it to be easier to practice guitar, well then keep your guitar in the middle of your living room rather than tucked away in the side of a closet.

I had this happen with two different habits that I tried to build personally. The first one was flossing. For a long time, I would brush my teeth every morning and night but I wouldn't remember to floss and so eventually I kind of broke the behavior down and said "what am I failing to do here, where am I not seeing the gaps?" And one of the issues was that the floss was always tucked away in a drawer in the bathroom, so I wouldn't see it. So I went and bought a bowl and put it right next to the toothbrush. And then I bought some of those pre made flossers and put them in the bowl and so now it was just obvious, I would see it every time I put the toothbrush down. And so now I floss, really, without having to do much more than that.

The second one was, my wife and I would go to the store and we would buy fruit; we'd buy like apples or bananas or whatever, and then we'd put them in the fridge in the bottom of the crisper, and I wouldn't see them, and then they'd just sit there for like two weeks and they would go bad and then eventually I would stumble across them and get annoyed and have to throw them out, you know, upset that I'm wasting food and wasting money. And so, again, I bought a larger display bowl and placed it in the center of the counter and then when we bought fruit we'd put it there. Well, now it's gone in like three days. And so most of that is just about making it obvious.

Pat Flynn:

How might one do that with something that's more internal, like the need to go to the gym every day? Would that actually be something

like a mirror that you walk by every day to remind you about, kinda, “well, I’m not really looking the way I want”?

James Clear: Well I mean, you could do it that way. Another thing about environment design, and this is something I talk about later in the book as well, is that you can prime environments to make a future action easier. And the great thing about that strategy is it kind of serves both purposes; it both makes the habit easy and it makes it more obvious. So for example, if you packed your workout clothes beforehand, the night before, and set them out by the door, it’s now both easier to get into the workout because you don’t have to get stuff ready and more obvious, you’re reminding yourself to do it. Both most of it comes down to creating a cue that you’re gonna run across in your daily routine. So this can also be one reason why it’s more effective to choose a gym, for example, that is on the way to work rather than one that’s like even two blocks out of the way, because once it’s two blocks out of the way, now you’re going out of your way to get the habit in whereas previously it’s frictionless. So frictionless habits are often more obvious habits as well. And that’s one of the great things about these four laws is they often interplay with each other and build upon each other.

Pat Flynn: Can you speak on how often we have to do something over and over again or daily before it actually just becomes a part of who we are, or is that even true?

James Clear: Yeah, good question. So a common way that this question is phrased is, “How long does it take to build a new habit? Does it take twenty-one days? Thirty days? Or sixty-six days? Or something like that?” And there was one study done that showed that on average it was about sixty-six days, but it varied widely based on the habit and the range was even anywhere from like three weeks to eight months for a more difficult habit. But I think actually that question, there’s kind of like an implicit assumption behind it that’s actually more important to address, which is when you ask is it going to take thirty days or sixty-six days or however long to build a habit, the assumption is “okay how long do I need to work to cross this finish line and then I won’t have to do it anymore?”

But the real answer is, the honest answer is, it takes forever. Because once you stop doing it, it's no longer a habit. So maybe we could rephrase it and say, how long does it take for a habit to be established? How long does it take for it to become easier or more automatic? And for that there are these things called automaticity curves, or learning curves in some of the literature, that researchers will map how long does it take you to do it before you can pretty much do it on autopilot. For that it actually is less about the time and more about the repetitions. This is another core piece of my philosophy is that, especially in the beginning, it's more about getting your reps in than worrying about the result or the outcome, because it's only by practicing it that you'll become more fluent in it and the behavior will become more automatic. As a general rule of thumb I will go ahead and say two or three months, but with a caveat of you understand this is actually a lifestyle to live and not a finish line to cross.

Pat Flynn: There you go. Yes, I mean that's what I was taught. It's when it just becomes a part of you and what you do. It's like no, I'm not on a paleo diet, that's just how I live. I choose not to eat grains and wheat and stuff.

James Clear: It's a really empowering place to be. It's something that I call identity based habits. I talk about this more in chapter two, but it's one thing to say "I'm the type of person who wants this." It's something very different to say "I'm the type of person who is this." Once you've internalized a thought or habit and it's part of your identity, it becomes much easier to stick with. In fact, you're not even really pursuing behavior change anymore because you're just being the type of person that you already believe you are. That type of self talk, like what you just said, where one person might say "I'm trying to stick to this paleo diet," versus another person saying "oh I just eat paleo." It's a very small change in language, but the second one signals that it's part of your identity and part of what you do normally. The other one signals that it's a sacrifice and something you're trying to force yourself to do.

Pat Flynn: That's awesome. What's a habit that you are trying to do right now

that is sort of new for you, if anything?

James Clear: I don't have that many new ones that I'm working on, but one that I have perpetually not been able to get nailed is . . . It's really, I was gonna say it's waking up early, but that actually isn't the issue. Waking up early is fine. I have this cardinal rule where I don't cheat myself on sleep. The real issue is on the back end. It's the power down ritual and making sure that I go to bed at say 10:00 PM, instead of midnight. I don't know, especially right now with all the work around the book and everything, it's really exciting, it's great, and I like what I'm working on, but I have trouble shutting off at the end of the night. I always feel like there's something more to do. Then I go to bed at midnight and my cardinal rule is I don't cheat myself on sleep and I'm not getting up until 8:00, so that's just how it goes.

Pat Flynn: How may you use the second law, which is, make it attractive, to combat that?

James Clear: Make it attractive is an interesting one because it's mostly about—this is early in the conversation, I talked about how most models of human behavior or many of the previous ones have not accounted for how our thoughts and emotions influence our actions. Let me give you an example of how the first law and the second law tie together and then I'll answer your question. Let's say that you walk into a kitchen and you see a plate of cookies on the counter. Now, under the standard model, you would say all right, cue. You see the cookies and then the routine would be you pick a cookie up and eat it, but in fact you can imagine a wide range of responses to that situation. You could walk in and see the cookie and then in my model there's this second stage called craving, and the craving is really the prediction or the expectation that your mind makes. You are doing this all day long. Life feels reactive, but it's actually quite predictive.

Take something even super minor like taking another step on the sidewalk. As you put your foot out you have an expectation in your mind that your foot is gonna touch the pavement. If that doesn't

happen, for example you step into a pothole then all of a sudden you're very surprised by it, and you weren't thinking about the fact that you're predicting what it's gonna feel like for your foot to hit the pavement. Every little action throughout life is preceded by this prediction of what is gonna come next. So, you walk into the kitchen and you see the plate of cookies and you could predict, "these are gonna be really tasty, I should take a bite of one," and then you go and eat the cookie. Then the reward is it does taste good, it fulfills your craving and so on.

You could just as easily imagine that you just got finished eating dinner in the other room and you just ate five cookies. You walk into the kitchen and see another plate and now you think, "oh man I'm full, I don't wanna eat another cookie now." Your prediction, the expectation of what's gonna come next has changed and because your expectation changes, your response changes. The second stage, make it attractive, is mostly about figuring out ways for you to predict that something good is gonna happen, that this is something beneficial for you to do. To answer your question about my power down routine, what could I do to make that more attractive? One of the things I could do, it comes down to reframing your mindset. Rather than thinking about what I want to get done right now, like, it seems more attractive to do the work because I'm like, I have all these tasks on my list I need to cross off. Instead I can invert that a little bit and focus on what I can do with better energy in the morning, or reminding myself that I usually do my best writing in the morning, which is true. By focusing on what would make it more attractive to go to bed right now, that's one way of reframing that.

There are other things that influence attractiveness too. For example, timing is a big one. When you are asking yourself to do a habit, timing can make a big difference on whether it seems attractive or not.

Pat Flynn:

Cool. Well, that's super helpful. I asked that a little bit selfishly because that's one of my problems too. I'm very good at waking up at a certain time and doing the things that Hal Elrod taught me to do in the morning through *[The Miracle Morning](#)* and what not, which

has been super helpful. The power-down technique at night, it's really hard and *Friends* is on at night and I'm just like, "this is such a good episode, I have to stay up and watch this."

James Clear: Let me add something else to this. For each of the four laws you can invert them, so I have an inversion of each law. The law itself, make it obvious make it attractive, these are good ways to stick with a good habit. The inversion is a way to avoid a bad habit and you can, of course, employ the same thing for this situation. You could say, "all right, well the good habit I want is to go to sleep at 10:00 PM." You can also focus on the other side of the equation, which is, well the bad habit is I keep watching episodes of *Friends*. So, how can you make that unattractive?

Pat Flynn: Is that a bad habit though? Like, really? It's such a great show. No I'm just kidding, I'm just kidding.

James Clear: You could focus on the inversion of those laws. For example, Nir Eyal who wrote the book *Hooked*, another habits expert, he did this really cool thing where he bought an outlet timer. An outlet timer is a ten dollar device on Amazon. You plug it in, it's kinda like an adapter, it goes into the wall and it goes between the outlet on the wall and the device that you're using. You can set the timer to kill the power from that outlet at a particular time. Nir set it up with his internet router, and the wireless internet goes off at 10:00 PM every night. When the internet is killed and goes off everybody knows Netflix stops working, the internet's off, it's time to go to bed. That's one way to increase the friction or to make it difficult, so to speak.

The third law is make it easy, and you could invert that and make it difficult to watch *Friends*, for example, or to continue answering email and so on. By doing that now, it automatically makes sleep a more attractive offer because there's less friction associated with going to bed and there's more friction with doing the thing that you don't wanna do.

Pat Flynn: That's really good. I don't know if I could pitch that to my wife, but I might try. A person knows to—let's just use Nir as an example. Nir

Eyal is a great author. I read his book and featured it in my book club too, just like yours. I can imagine having these battles with myself as far as okay, I know this is the right thing to do, but this is cutting off a huge pleasure point in my life. Is it really just the story we tell ourselves and really making it more attractive to do that thing that's gonna help us later. Now I'm thinking of the immediate reward versus the delay reward and how we weigh those against each other.

James Clear: Yes. This is a huge thing, so this is a really good question. In the book I lay out what I call the Cardinal Rule of Behavior Change. The Cardinal Rule of Behavior Change is behaviors that are immediately rewarded get repeated; behaviors that are immediately punished get avoided. It's really about the immediacy there. You can think about pretty much any habit or any behavior produces multiple outcomes across time. For example if you eat a donut right now, the immediate outcome is favorable. It tastes great, it's sugary, it's enjoyable. The ultimate outcome that you gain weight in two weeks or two months or whatever is unfavorable. That's often the case with many bad habits. The immediate outcome is enjoyable or satisfying in some way; the ultimate outcome doesn't serve us as well. With good habits it's the reverse. If you wanna go to bed now then maybe there's a little bit of a sacrifice there because you don't get to watch an episode that you want, you don't get another task done on your list, or for example going to the gym.

Going to the gym in a lot of ways is not really that fun in the moment. It requires sacrifice, effort, and you'd have to sweat. The immediate outcome is unenjoyable and the ultimate outcome that you're fit in two weeks, two months, or two years is favorable. So much of the battle of building good habits and breaking bad ones is about finding a way to pull the future consequences of your bad habits in the immediate moment, to feel that pain a little bit right then and to pull the benefits of your good habits into the immediate moment.

I think, and this is just a little theory of mine, that people who appear to be very good at delaying gratification on the surface—

for example people who go to the gym and work out. Everybody's like "they're so good. They'll work for months on end to be in good shape and have the body they want." Part of me wonders if actually they're just really good at finding alternative ways of being satisfied in the moment. For example, you go to the gym because it means you get to see some friends there and you enjoy that or you're casting a vote for desired identity. It feels good to be the type of person who doesn't miss workouts, or you enjoy recording your workout.

Pat Flynn: I would imagine a lot of people enjoy going to the gym now because they can then take a selfie of themselves and share it with their followers. I'm not even kidding, that gives people satisfaction.

James Clear: Right and you can criticize that behavior if you're not the selfie type of person or social media type of person, but it is true that they get some immediate gratification from that. They get likes. They get praise. They get a little bit of approval from their social network and we're constantly craving that. Not necessarily approval from social networks, but immediate satisfaction. We are craving some level of pleasure. In that sense your emotions provide a signal of what behaviors you should repeat in the future cause, "hey this felt good," and what things you should avoid in the future cause, "oh that doesn't feel that great." You need to find ways to feel successful or to feel satisfied in the moment as you're doing a habit and that's the type of thing that's gonna get you to return and come back.

Pat Flynn: Love it. Man I love this discussion. Thank you. Let's move on to the third law which is make it easy. This is the section where you talk about procrastination a bit, so I'd love to hover this conversation around that because I'm a seasoned and professional procrastinator. Many of the listeners are as well, probably admittedly, and we all know that that's not good. We have things to do yet we choose to delay doing them, so how would one stop doing that?

James Clear: Let me tell a little story to set this one up. The section where I talk about procrastination, I kick this off with a story of Twyla Tharp, who is a great dance choreographer. She won a MacArthur Genius Grant, a very famous choreographer and dancer. She's also a big proponent of habits. She writes in her book—she has a book called *The Creative Habit*. She tells this story about her morning routine, and basically the punchline is she goes to the gym for two hours every morning, but the routine or the habit for her is not going to the gym. The habit is she puts on her leg warmers, her jacket, walks out to the sidewalk, and hails a cab. It's the hailing of the cab and telling them to go to the gym that backs the ritual she focuses on. If you look at the research, depending what study you look at, it'll say that habits account for 40 to 50 percent of our behaviors on any given day.

These are automatic actions. Tying your shoes, stuff like that, brushing our teeth, but in fact the influence of our habits is even greater. 50 percent is already a good chunk, but so often the things that you do on autopilot determine the behaviors that you take afterward. For example, if you stand in line, we can't stay in a line for more than ten seconds without pulling our phone out. That action is automatic and habitual, but what you do for the next ten minutes whether it's playing a video game, answering emails, browsing website, all of that might be a conscious choice. You might think carefully about what to respond to this particular email, but you're already within the boundary of the phone. The automatic habit of pulling your phone out sets the context, like sets the trajectory of what's gonna happen for the next ten minutes. In that way I think our habits are even more powerful than just that 50 percent. They're kind of like the entrance ramp to a highway. You start down this road without thinking and then all of a sudden you're speeding 60 miles an hour in a different direction.

The point here when dealing with procrastination is that this doesn't just have to work against us. It can also work for us. Similar to Twyla Tharp's strategy of let me just go outside and hail the cab—I mean that's an action that only takes a few minutes, but then it sets her on this path of going to the gym and then the next two hours are kind

of figured out. I have a similar strategy. My wife gets home about 5:15 each night and what happens in the next five minutes kind of determines the scope of the evening. Either we'll change into our workout clothes and if we do that then everything else is decided; we're going to get in the car, go to the gym, workout and so on. The next hour is already set. But if we don't change into our workout clothes then we'll sit on the couch, watch reruns of *The Office*, order Indian food, and that's a great night too, but it was mostly shaped by those first five minutes.

When dealing with procrastination or really honestly when dealing with building any habit, my suggestion is to follow what I call the two minute rule. The two minute rule basically takes this core idea and puts it to use for you. Many habits that we wanna build are gonna be bigger than just two minutes, but any habit can be started in two minutes and so you wanna downscale the behavior to just the first two minutes of it, focus on mastering that, and then just let momentum automatically carry you through. For example, if you wanna read one book every week let's downscale it so that the habit you're trying to build is read one page. If you wanna do thirty minutes of yoga the habit is take out your yoga mat. You're focused only on initiating the behavior. You're optimizing for the starting line rather than the finish line.

Pat Flynn: I love that. Can I offer some other examples that you can then comment on, okay here's the way that two minute ties that one?

James Clear: Yes, I'd love to. Go ahead.

Pat Flynn: Two minut-ed ties . . . sorry I don't know how to phrase that. If I wanted to write every day, what's my two minute habit?

James Clear: The first two minutes could be write one sentence. I actually have a friend who's a poet and his goal, his habit is every day he tries to write one sentence. Now sometimes, he'll write a whole chapter or write an entire new poem, but just one sentence each day.

Pat Flynn: Play the guitar.

- James Clear: Play one chord progression. Could be even less than that. You could just say, “Take the guitar out and sit down on the chair.”
- Pat Flynn: Learn a new language.
- James Clear: Practice ten words of vocabulary. Open up my book and sit down and take out your notes. That could be true for pretty much any subject. The habit could be “sit down and take out my notes.”
- Pat Flynn: Love that. And one final one, what about being more present? I think a lot of us need to break that habit of thinking about the future too much so that we almost forget where we’re at. I say this in context of, we’re with our kids but we’re really thinking about that next email or that next project. How do we stay focused in the moment?
- James Clear: Well that one you can approach from different angles because you could either eliminate the thing that distracts you or you could try to get better at your ability to resist. For example, building a meditation habit.
- But I’ll tell you one way that I do it, which is I try to leave my phone in another room until lunch each day. And I love choices like this. This is actually something else that I write about in the book a little bit, which are one time actions that can deliver repeated results or recurring results over time. So the one time action of leaving my phone in a different room and then walking to the office, that is just a choice that I have to make once. It’s less than two minutes. It’s very simple and quick. But I end up benefiting for hours afterward because of doing that one thing. So it’s almost like I locked in my future behavior with that one choice. So that’s an example for being more present.
- Pat Flynn: That’s really cool. The theme here is kind of just like okay, knowing what you want, number one. But then taking a few small actions to set everything up. Set up your environment, frame yourself the right way so that everything kind of automatically takes care of itself. Is that right?

James Clear: As best as you can, whatever you can automate, you should. And those one time actions . . . Automation, a lot of the time automation is viewed at as technology solutions, which is great. They're many software solutions that can help. But it doesn't have to be software.

So for example, say you want to build a better sleep habit. You could research what kind of mattress works best for you, go to the store and try a bunch out and then buy a better mattress. That's a one time choice. You could buy blackout curtains so that your room is dark every night. That's a one time choice. If you live in a noisy environment, buy ear plugs or headphones of some sort to wear. If you feel too hot, you could buy . . . it's called a chilly pad. And there are some other alternatives too, but it's like a pad that has water inside it and you put it under your mattress pad or under your sheets and it'll circulate water that cools you a little bit, it reduces the temperature of the bed. You could buy an eye mask so that it's easier for you to sleep on planes or in hotels or whatever. And my point here is each of those purchases are just one time choices, but you end up benefiting from them over and over again. So they sort of, in a way, automate the habit of getting better sleep. There are many choices you can make like that. Sort of an investment in your future habits.

Pat Flynn: I love that. And with the eye mask, one so that you can sleep better in an airplane, hopefully not the airport so you miss your flight. But having it actually in your backpack already so that it's already there and you don't have to think about it anymore, just, we're combining all the things here right?

James Clear: Yeah. It's crazy how this all works together. But if I went upstairs to my room right now and looked at the bag that I have packed—I'm not going anywhere right now and I don't have a trip coming up this week. But everything except for the clothes is already packed in the bag. Eye mask for example, ear plugs, all that stuff I just mentioned. The environment is primed—to use the phrase from earlier in this conversation—for what I need to do whenever I leave. So yeah, I mean, all those strategies work together. And again, this is one of the core ideas of the book, is that we need a system for

improvement: A collection of habits all oriented towards one goal.

So often people . . . we want to change or we want to have some kind of improvement. And so then we make one change and it's like it gets washed away. We do it for a few weeks and then it's like, "Well nothing really changed. Nothing really improved." The way that I would equate it, it's kind of like adding one grain of sand to one side of the scale. You're not going to say, "Okay just a single 1 percent change is going to change my life." But it's a thousand of them that are all oriented toward the same ultimate outcome, that's how you get a really amazing result and how habits compound over time, is by building on each other like that.

Pat Flynn:

Love it. Now if you were listening to this episode right now and you want to check out James' book, we're still going to talk about the fourth and final law so don't worry. But I just want to plug again his book, *Atomic Habits*. You can find it [on Amazon](#), the show notes links will be available. You can find the show notes actually at SmartPassiveIncome.com/session340. His book just came out; literally, if you listened to this on the day this episode comes out, it came out yesterday. So I'm excited to see it at the top of the charts. James just congrats on all the success that you've had and all the success that's coming your way. And because of this, I think this is going to be a game-changer. So again SmartPassiveIncome.com/session340.

At the end of the conversation here, I'm going to have James ask you all a question to leave an answer on the blogpost podcast episode so that . . . we'll give away three copies of the book to random commenters within a week after the episode goes live. We'll make that happen at the end, so stick around for that.

But to finish off James, let's chat about the fourth and final law here. You do go a little bit deeper into some other things in the book as well but the fourth law, what is it and how is it going to help us?

James Clear:

Sure. So the fourth law is make it satisfying. And this comes back to the Cardinal Rule of Behavior Change we mentioned earlier.

This idea that the . . . it's really about the ending of the habit. What follows immediately after you do a habit? It should be satisfying. You should feel successful. It should be enjoyable in some way. And if it is enjoyable, then it's like a signal to your brain to repeat it again in the future.

So there are a variety of ways you can do this. One of the ways that I lay out in the book is called habit tracking which is effectively just . . . The most simple way is to get a calendar and each time that you do a habit, you put an X on that day, for example. And doing this does three things. So the first thing that it does is it makes the habit more obvious, because if you have the calendar sitting out it's a visual cue of, "Oh, I've done this three days in a row now; I should sit down and do it again."

The second thing is there's sort of like an additive effect to motivation. So by seeing that streak build up you get motivated to do it again. You don't want to lose your progress that you've made so far. So in that way it makes the habit more attractive.

And then the third and final thing, and perhaps the most important one, is it adds a little bit of immediate satisfaction to any habit. For me, I track all of my workouts. So when I get done at the gym, it feels good to be able to check another day off, to look at the sets that I did and feel like I accomplished something. Even if I have a bad day at work and don't really feel like I got anything done from an intellectual standpoint, I can still at least have had a good physical day and got a good workout done.

So there's something immediately satisfying about tracking your habits. And for that reason, it can be one of the ways to add a little bit of enjoyment to any behavior.

Pat Flynn:

After all this, we do the work, we change our environment to help us out and we implement. A number of days go by. We're going, we're feeling good. And then for me, I know that sometimes it just takes a little small vacation or some sort of thing that happens in our lives to kind of just throw everything off. And it just seems so hard to

get back to where we were. I mean it's almost deflating to have just a few days when you've been so good with something like going to a gym every single day, then all of a sudden vacation happens and maybe you splurge or maybe there was some reason . . . maybe you hurt your Achilles or something and you needed a week off and then it's just so hard to get back into it. Do you have any tips or tricks for us to . . . once we establish this habit and it does become somewhat automated to when we get derailed, to come back to it?

James Clear: Yeah. You know what's interesting is it's so easy to do this to ourselves. Like as soon as stuff starts going well, you're like, "Yeah. I've written four blog posts in a row. I have one in the hopper. I'm ahead of schedule. I feel good. Yeah, I'll take a day off." It becomes very easy to rationalize that. Anyway, the point here is that as I investigate how habits work, it's not even just that like, "Oh. Some people slip up." Everybody does. Even top performers, elite, pick whoever you want. Every habit's streak is going to come to an end at some point.

And at that point, the little mantra I like to keep in mind is never miss twice. So I can't predict how well I'm going to do every single time. And I know that sometimes life is going to get in the way and emergencies are going to pop up. And maybe I'm trying to stick to a diet but then my friends want to go out to happy hour and I find that I binge ate with them or had a pizza or something.

That's fine. I don't need to get wrapped up in the mistake that just happened or in the fact that I had just done something that wasn't exactly what I wanted to do to follow this program. Let me just pour all my energy into making sure that the next meal is the healthy one. Or, for the first three years that I wrote at JamesClear.com, I wrote a new article every Monday and Thursday. And if I miss on a Thursday, well then all of my energy should be poured into getting back on track on Monday. It's less about worrying about the fact that you just lost a streak or broke a streak and more about trying to build the next one as soon as possible.

It's pretty much never the first mistake that ruins you. It's almost

always the spiral of repeated mistakes that follows. And if you can avoid that spiral and get back on track quickly, then you find that over the long run as you stretch the timescale out, it ends up looking really good. I have weeks when I have to go speak or work with a company or go on vacation or whatever and it's hard to get my training, my workouts in those weeks. But I'm more focused on, "Can I get 40 or 42 weeks of workouts over the course of the year?" And all of that comes back to getting back on track as quickly as possible and never missing twice once I get back home.

Pat Flynn: Love it man. Dude, this is huge. Thank you so much for this advice and sharing with us the wealth and knowledge you have about building successful habits, atomic habits, and little changes that can add up over time so that we can get remarkable results, like you say. First of all, where can people go to check out the book and get it right now if they wanted to?

James Clear: Sure, just go to AtomicHabits.com. You'll see everything there. We've got some additional resources and bonuses and a couple of chapters that were cut from the final version of the book that you can also download. So yeah, AtomicHabits.com is the best place to go.

Pat Flynn: Super cool. And what I want to do is give away five copies. I don't know if you'd actually be—I can edit this out if you don't want to, but would you be able to sign five copies and send them to me so I can send them to five random commenters?

James Clear: A hundred percent. I'm all in.

Pat Flynn: Sweet, dude. Thank you for that. So I'm going to get five signed copies of *Atomic Habits*. I'll pay for them, because I want to, and we will give them to five random commenters who answer this question that James is going to come up with right now that you can simply answer by going to SmartPassiveIncome.com/session340. So again, SmartPassiveIncome.com/session340. You'll have a week to comment. Again, totally random; I just use a random number generator and then I select five winners. You'll get an email from me

within a week or so, or after a week, and then I'll send them your way. I'll get your address and we'll make that happen.

So James, what is the one question that a person could simply answer in the comments section at SmartPassiveIncome.com/session340?

James Clear: Alright. So the question is, what is the first two minutes of the habit that you want to build?

Pat Flynn: Love it. So tell us what the habit is that you want to build and what those first two minutes might be. It's totally okay if it matches somebody else's. You can even get ideas from other people who have commented as well. And again, you have a week after this to comment.

Now if you're listening to this far in the future, which is totally cool too, feel free to participate, I just won't be able to reward you with the book but you can see everybody else's comments there. So one more time, SmartPassiveIncome.com/session340.

James thank you for that. I appreciate you man. Good luck with everything and I'm looking forward to seeing the results of the book and just how many lives it's going to change. I appreciate you man.

James Clear: Yeah. Thank you so much Pat. I really appreciate the support and I'm grateful for the opportunity to chat today.

Pat Flynn: Alright. I hope you enjoyed this episode with James Clear. Again, you can find him at JamesClear.com or you can check out AtomicHabits.com and get access to the book however you'd like to read the book, which is really cool.

So James, congratulations to you man. Thank you for sending me an early copy. And remember, answer the question that James asked you at the end to potentially win a signed copy of *Atomic Habits*. All you have to do is go to SmartPassiveIncome.com/session340 and answer the question, "What is one habit that you

want to create and how are you going to do that with a two minute breakdown?” Like we were talking about in the show, so how are you going to break that down into a two minute thing that you can just get going with?

And I’ve already started to implement this since interviewing James and it does absolutely work. Especially with the guitar playing stuff that was . . . been wanting to do that for a while. Now that both kids are in school, I’ve been wanting to create a habit of picking that thing up every day and I’m thankful that I’m doing that now. And I’m getting better. I’m getting better. My goal is to play “Johnny B. Goode” from *Back to the Future* on my guitar, my Gibson. So we’ll see what happens. But I’m on the way, and thank you James for helping make that happen.

So let us know what you thought about the show and obviously answer that question that James proposed to you at the end there. Again, one more time for the show notes and to enter into that random giveaway, SmartPassiveIncome.com/session340.

And if you haven’t done so yet, make sure you check out the Live page on my website, meaning this is where you can see all the upcoming live trainings that I have available to you. If you go to SmartPassiveIncome.com/live, you can see what’s coming up next, both trainings that I run myself and trainings that I do with other people that can help you too. And those are completely free. You’ll have the chance to ask some questions and get those answered, and also get some good bonus offers for things that might be offered on top of that too. So again one more time. SmartPassiveIncome.com/live.

Make sure you subscribe to the show if you haven’t already. Thank you so much and I’ll see you in the next episode. Cheers.

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