



# Read2Lead

## *Atomic Habits* by James Clear

### Book Summary:

Have big dreams? Recovering from big setbacks? Start small, at least with your habits, recommends James Clear in *Atomic Habits*, his guide to building better routines for the rest of your life. For Clear, it's all about finding 1% improvements and avoiding parallel, 1% declines in our choices to drive our long-term development, for good or ill. Paradoxically, claims Clear, it is not so much desired outcomes or processes that drive our habit formation, but the identity we choose through our actions. This interplay between habit and identity is a feedback loop, an endless cycle of cue, craving, response, and reward we must deliberately harness, argues Clear. What follows from these assumptions, then, is Clear's recommendation to make habits obvious, attractive, easy and satisfying, or his Four Laws of Behavior Change. What does this look like in practice, especially with regards to not just making a good habit, but breaking a bad one?

The remainder of the book is dedicated to tactics and techniques that address just this question as they relate to his four laws. As a rule of thumb, if you want to make a good habit, Clear recommends you redesign your environment and minimize friction to make its adoption easy. Additionally, Clear suggests you find commitment devices that force you to do the good habit and only attempt it for two minutes when just beginning. For breaking a bad habit, Clear encourages readers to do pretty much the exact opposite. Make the cues for your bad habits invisible or get rid of them entirely. Reimagine not doing your bad habit as something distinctly pleasing. He even recommends readers write contracts that punish themselves when they commit the bad habit. Clear concludes his book with various recommendations—focusing on your strengths, keeping your identity flexible, and pushing yourself appropriately—to maintain his suggestions for life.

### Suggested Questions for Moderators:

1. The author's (morbid) inspiration for this book was his challenging recovery from a baseball injury. Are there any participants here who have had to start from "square one" to get back to a preexisting level of performance?
  - a. *Encourage participants to consider their recovery process from Ranger School or Special Forces Assessment and Selection. These challenging experiences often seriously degrade participants' physical ability by their conclusion. How did participants who attended these schools and other challenges get back in shape?*
2. A foundational concept for Clear is committing to becoming 1% better at some pertinent skill. What do you think is a relevant "1% improvement" for junior officers that they could leverage over the course of their company-grade time, and beyond?

- a. *Possible responses could run the gamut from PT to PowerPoint “slideology” to even doctrine. What small, daily activity can junior officers do to totally transform their performance over the course of their company-grade time?*
3. In Chapter 1, Clear declares, “You do not rise to the level of your goals. You fall to the level of your systems.” Do you agree or disagree with that statement, and how has that applied to your own career as a junior officer.
  - a. *Junior officers often have goals like “[passing Ranger School](#)” or “[passing Special Forces Assessment and Selection](#).” Their performance there, nevertheless, depends on [the preparatory work they do before arriving](#). The purpose of this question, then, is to encourage participants to consider the interplay between goals and processes, and how to productively connect the two.*
4. In Chapter 1, Clear introduces his [Plateau of Latent Potential](#), in which our results lag our efforts, and, initially, we are caught in a “Valley of Disappointment” until we see the improvements we desire. Do you believe there is a common “Valley of Disappointment” for junior officers?
  - a. *Encourage participants to think about their experience arriving at their first unit after BOLC. Was it what they expected? Did they struggle initially to meet their new unit’s expectations? When and how did things change for the better?*
5. In Chapter 2, Clear argues that if we want to change our habits, we should first change our identity. How do you think identities influence junior officer performance, for good or for ill?
  - a. *Are there [positive identities that junior officers can form to serve and lead better](#)? Does the “[lost lieutenant](#)” stereotype cause other ranks to unfairly dismiss lieutenants and their potential?*
6. Clear strongly encourages readers seeking to break bad habits to hide or eliminate the cues for these same habits. Conversely, to stick with good habits, he encourages readers make them more visible and minimize the friction around them. What habits do you think your platoon, company or even battalion could make more or less visible?
  - a. *Encourage readers to consider [the amount of junk food that’s available on post, at the DFAC, and for sale at shoppettes](#). Is this a cue for a habit of bad nutrition?*
7. Clear cites the example of the [Los Angeles Lakers’ Career Best Effort](#) as an example of an organization both quantifying and encouraging altruistic performance. Can you think of an Army-equivalent CBE for lieutenants and captains to evaluate and encourage pro-social behavior?
  - a. *Encourage readers to consider an Army Best Effort that measures and weighs ACFT scores, ranges run, SFRG events planned, platoon readiness, or any other measure. How could this be incorporated into evaluations and promotions?*

### **Follow-on Reading and Resources:**

- [The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business](#) by Charles Duhigg
- [“Policymakers around the World Are Embracing Behavioral Science”](#)
- [“Lessons Learned – and Lost – from a Vietnam-era Study of Addiction,”](#) by Lauren Aguirre

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