

The Red Pill for Legal

Ignorance is bliss

—Cypher.

We all know that the new Matrix movie is coming up in theaters very soon.

This fact sprouted plenty of hum and speculation:

*‘Will it be any good? Is it purely commercial, like other franchise reloadings? Was it created because the Wachowski sisters just couldn’t **let go**, in spite of their initial plan to **move on**?’*

All the bias aside (we’re fans, so we’ll be watching it even if it scores 2 on IMDB, and even if it collapses the logic and the ambience of the previous parts), it got us thinking on a large scale: how often do we return to the old habits even though we claimed to never do it?

So we decided to review how habits work, through the prism of the Matrix series (because why not).

How good are we at letting go anyways?

Some things tend to grow on us in a way that they become part of us. These could be anything, from the way we format our emails and label our files, to the way we drive, and hold a meeting (or practice kung-fu). Many of them stop being individual habits, and rather become the basis for the tribal knowledge we pass on.

With the pace our world is moving at, and all the technological momentum, we don’t even have to wait for the new generations to appear and absorb our knowledge. There is always someone apt to learn, someone caught in the marginal industry, or just looking to expand their horizons.

And that's where we have it for them, bits and pieces of the habits cemented into ourselves.

Irrespective of the fact if they are even any valuable in the present day. The familiarity and comfort of such habits prevents us from forming new ones, and makes us lean to tradition instead of innovation. To the extent that this has become characteristic of the entire industries, where these habits have become timeless after once being proven successful, and keep slowing the industry down.

Like legal, who possibly find it hardest to let go.

That's what we're writing this for, to help you deal with the habits that have had their day.

“You hear that Mr. Anderson? That is the sound of inevitability!”

We'd surprise no one by saying that the world is developing fast enough for many of our habits to become outdated VERY QUICKLY.

It seems only yesterday we were dialing our friend's phone number to share breaking news, and now we Whatsapp, concerned that a phone call may find them at a bad time, or that it might be too interruptive.

So the problem is not IF such habits you've been inadvertently nurturing will become obsolete (because they eventually will, end of story), but much rather HOW do you prepare yourself to let them go when the time comes, and how do you drive change in yourself that the entire industry will pick up.

How do you control the time lapse of your habits?

And here's where the keynote from the Matrix kicks in: it's all a matter of choice.

“I can only show you the door. You’re the one that has to walk through it.”



Source: Looper

This is the part we’re facing a dilemma:

Blue pill: we tell you that all you need to control your habits is willpower alone. We assure you that when you put your mind and dedication to it, nothing is impossible, and leave it at that.

You leave empowered, but go back to the old ways the second you close this tab.

Red pill: we tell you the truth. That working with habits is no bed of roses, that it will call for plenty of cognitive effort, analysis, determination and practice at every step and in between steps, and probably a fight or two with your inner self.

But you might as well change how you operate, and help fellow lawyers get a similar grip.

Us, we’ve always been the suckers for the hard way.

And if you’re still with us, here goes.

“You have to understand, most people are not ready to be unplugged...”

When we crave something, and surrender to this craving repeatedly, a habit forms.

It's as simple as that.

To control a habit, on the other hand, we need to understand that

(1) a habit is a neurological path that isolates your prefrontal cortex, a part of the brain responsible for decision-making, saving you mental activity by taking you straight to the targeted action, (2) a habit is not a single action, but a loop, and (3) it needs to be decomposed and addressed on several levels.

According to [Charles Duhigg](#), a habit loop consists of 3 parts:

- **Cue**, which triggers your brain to go into the automatic mode, and disables the need to make a decision.
- **Routine**, which is the action you take. Your habit per se.
- **Reward**, an outcome your brain obviously enjoys enough to revert to the same path in the future.

Here's an example you can see in your team (if not in yourself):

Sales are getting ready to close a deal, and have prepared a batch of supporting documents. Although you know they've done it thousands of times, you still spend an extra hour at the end of the day reviewing them, to make sure that they are fully compliant and devoid of errors before your company signs them.

If we break this habit down into the stages mentioned above, here's what we get:

Cue: sales need to close the deal and require the documents for it.

Routine: you spend time reviewing them.

Reward: you know that there's no one else who can do the job as good as you, and by checking them yourself you get a sense of security that your company is protected and you succeeded as a lawyer.

Now, what does it all mean—and how do we break this?

“There is no spoon.”



Source: Fox News

Realistically, we can't impact a cue of the habit. It's going to inevitably happen.

The documents will be prepared one way or another, or you may need to contact the client, or you may feel hunger at 2 PM, you name it.

Neither should we argue with the brain on the reward—it wants what it wants, and most often it's a good thing.

Nor should we try to eliminate the routine completely. Your brain will fall into the established pattern whenever it craves for the reward, or when a trigger is met.

BUT, we can *change* the routine to trick our brain into getting the reward by replacing the action.

To do that, you need to:

- Understand what is the reward you get for your action. What is it that your brain enjoys best? When going for a smoke break every hour, do you

really need nicotine, or do you want to connect with everyone else on your team who smokes?

- Identify the cue for your habit. When do you get that urge? Is it every hour, or whenever someone on the team puts on a coat and heads out?
- What are the alternative ways to get the same reward, without resorting to a health-damaging habit? Could you join them for lunch? Or could you get a cup of tea instead and stop by on your way back to the desk for a quick chat?

The key is to experiment with the routines and check up on yourself each time you do a new action.

Duhigg suggests setting a timer for 15 minutes after you've tried a new routine to see if the urge is still there. If it isn't—bingo, you're on the right track.

I get it, so what's down this rabbit hole?

We may go on and on about how you need to shape new habits in place of old ones, but how does this tie with the idea of controlling their time lapse— and impact?

After all, you can't deprive yourself of all habits, or try to make them dynamic—that's an oxymoron.

But you can **keep your mind sharp** and control the amount of times your prefrontal cortex goes into sleep mode.

By doing that, you train the flexibility of your brain, making it easier for you to change the established patterns when you need to get rid of the outdated habit.

Here are 3 actionable ways to do this:

1. Start small.

Don't try to change everything at once, this will only confuse your brain. Practice one thing until you see the result instead.

Choose the thing that will create least 'ripples' when under transformation, the one it would be hardest to say no to. This way you will see less friction, and can set the ground for more fundamental changes.

2. Know the impact.

Any workplace-related habit has its impact and its price. And since we live in a data-driven world, they can easily be calculated.

It may seem insignificant if you manually redline a contract, email it to the client, and then send them a follow up or two. You only spend 15 minutes, what's the big deal?

But for each four of such contracts, it's an hour. Two and a half hours for ten.

These hours could be billable.

Or they could be spent communicating with new clients that will help your company (and your salary) grow.

3. Communicate.

It's harder to bail on changing your habits when everyone is watching.

It's also easier to inspire others when they've seen you succeed.

This is how new technology or ideas can spread like wildfire.

This is how you can be the source of change in your organization—by sharing the success story, and making it reliable and relatable. Easy as that.

Bonus: find a friend in technology.



Source: Reflections on Film and Television

Lucky for us, we don't live in a world where machines took over and harvest energy off human bodies.

The software created is meant to help us (1) see the difference between the old and new ways, (2) bridge the gap between these ways, (3) get across this bridge with minimum losses.

There're a multitude of apps that will help you set, track, and reach habitchanging goals.

There is software for every process that involves your prefrontal cortex as little as your habits do (like **AXDRAFT** for managing your contracts).

By increasing your technological awareness, you:

- Create an change-welcoming ambience by expanding the understanding of what is possible
- Know where to look for the support in building new habits
- Can identify your habits that are about to become outdated, and start building new ones before their impact gets critical. And that's how you can fully prepare yourself for change that inevitably comes with *the real world*.

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