



Lee Burgess: Welcome to the Bar Exam Toolbox podcast. Today we're discussing habits – making new ones and ditching old ones, and learning best practices. Your Bar Exam Toolbox hosts are Alison Monahan and Lee Burgess, that's me. We're here to demystify the bar exam experience, so you can study effectively, stay sane, and hopefully pass and move on with your life. We're the co-creators of the [Law School Toolbox](#), the [Bar Exam Toolbox](#), and the career-related website [CareerDicta](#). Alison also runs [The Girl's Guide to Law School](#). If you enjoy the show, please leave a review on your favorite listening app, and check out our sister podcast, the [Law School Toolbox podcast](#). If you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to us. You can reach us via the [contact form](#) on [BarExamToolbox.com](#), and we'd love to hear from you. And with that, let's get started.

Alison Monahan: Welcome back to the Bar Exam Toolbox podcast. Today we're discussing habits – making new ones and ditching the old ones that you do not need anymore. The idea for this podcast actually came from some books that Lee has been reading. So, Lee, tell us about these.

Lee Burgess: Yes. There are two books that I have recently been reading or listening to, and these are [Dopamine Nation by Dr. Anna Lembke](#) and [Atomic Habits by James Clear](#). And both are super interesting books. I highly recommend *Dopamine Nation*, first of all; it's by far my favorite. It really makes you consider some of your habits, whether or not you may be addicted to things, and she talks about addiction in a way that I had not really appreciated – that you can be addicted to technology, food, she even talks about being addicted to romance novels. But it also discusses the way to help yourself reset your dopamine levels to increase overall happiness and productivity. It is a must read on my list. And Dr. Lembke is an addiction specialist, and she approaches a lot of these issues through that lens. So this book, I talk about it to everyone. I mean, literally anyone who's talked to me recently has to hear about this book. You and I were in a car and you had to listen to me talk about this book. I just love talking about this book.

Alison Monahan: I look forward to reading it. I have not gotten around to it yet.

Lee Burgess: I know. The other book is *Atomic Habits*, which is more about changing your daily habits – how to make good ones and how to break the bad ones. Now, I don't think the suggestions in this book are necessarily earth-shattering but there are really good reminders that I think can apply, especially in the bar study context. So, that's why I wanted to talk about this today.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I feel like most of the advice around habits is sort of like, "Oh yeah, okay, I know that." But actually doing it is kind of a different story.

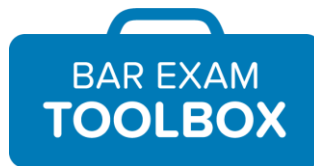


Lee Burgess: Exactly. And I do like that he's really framed the book to talk about the actions you can take to ignite change, and he doesn't just talk about sweeping changes. So today, I'll talk about a couple of his suggestions that I think could really be helpful to students in this context. But before we move on to that, I have to talk more about my new favorite book.

Alison Monahan: What's number one on your list that you've learned from this book, Lee?

Lee Burgess: I know. Okay, so here's the thing that I think was so powerful for me about this book, is this idea that distraction is not a good habit. So, in *Dopamine Nation*, Dr. Lembke talks about how the same areas of the brain process pleasure and pain, and the body is always trying to find a balance between the two. She uses the imagery of a teeter-totter, like you have at a children's playground. When the teeter-totter is at a resting baseline, it is level with the ground. And when we do something pleasurable – and that could be like eat chocolate, use our phones to check social media – the pleasure/pain balance tilts to the side of pleasure and you get dopamine, which is great, because dopamine feels really good. But when the balance goes to pleasure, the body wants to tip things back to the other side, thus creating some kind of pain. This could be a craving – perhaps you feel like you want to eat more chocolate or spend more time on your phone. Basically you're just wanting more. But if you just ride that out, the feeling will pass and then that homeostasis is restored, the teeter-totter becomes balanced again. Now, this idea that she really bases this book on seems pretty simple, but she talks more in the book about how this applies to a lot of different things in our world, and how really any habit that floods you with dopamine can cause your body to create some sort of pain. And she argues that the pleasure/pain imbalance can lead to anxiety, depression, and a lot of other mental health issues. Really, you have to read the book or listen to the audio book; it is so fascinating. I actually learned about this book from my child's teacher, because the school was talking about it, mostly around kind of like pre-teens and the use of technology. But she talks about video game addiction and all different kinds of addiction that you don't really think necessarily involve the same sort of struggles, but it seems that a lot of us at varying different levels are really struggling with this in the modern world.

Alison Monahan: I can definitely see that. I was just thinking about the habit that I've created when I'm up at the mountains and I have my coffee, and I'm always like, "Oh, I'm going to have one little chocolate", but I always have two because one is never enough. But I think because I don't have a particularly addictive type of personality, I do stop with two and I just never think about it for the rest of the



day. But I always have that second one, even if I'm like, "Oh, I'm not going to have that second one today," but I always want the second one.

Lee Burgess: Right. So, her argument would be, you have to stop having the second one for a while to see if you're addicted to the second one.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, but maybe I just get pleasure out of it.

Lee Burgess: That's true. And maybe that's not such a dopamine hit that you can't overcome it.

Alison Monahan: I mean, it's two little... They're all individually wrapped. I'm like, "Okay, I can live with that." But it's weird because I never do that in San Francisco, it's just not something I ever would do. But somehow it has become a habit specifically when I'm in the mountains.

Lee Burgess: When I started reading this book, I had already watched a talk that she did, which was mostly about children and technology. And it really made me think about my own technology use. I did an Instagram break for a few weeks, I tried to really limit my screen time on my phone. And it was very interesting about how we often just reach for these things in these moments of quiet to fill the space. And arguably we're getting dopamine from checking our email, and being like, "Somebody wants to speak to me, even if it's just some politician raising money." I get so many of those emails, I don't even know why.

Alison Monahan: Like, "Oh, I'm so important." It's probably because you paid... You literally donated to one and now you're on a mailing list for all of them.

Lee Burgess: It's so true.

Alison Monahan: Unless you remove yourself individually from every single mailing list.

Lee Burgess: I know, I just delete them.

Alison Monahan: I have actually done that.

Lee Burgess: I'm very impressed.

Alison Monahan: Because I'm like, "I don't know who you are. I'm sure you're a very nice person, but I'm not giving you money. I don't even know you or where you live. Sorry."



Lee Burgess: Yeah, I know. So, I really think that it's worth examining your life and just asking, "Are there things that I'm flooding myself with dopamine that I should take a break from to see what the effects are?" And if you have withdrawals when you stop something, that's really not a good sign. And I think it can be interesting what we kind of have withdrawals from. Really try and not touch your phone all day – I think most people would have a really hard time with that.

Alison Monahan: Oh my gosh, you would be reaching for the ghost. I remember even when I quit my law firm job and they took my Blackberry away, for another couple of days I was having phantom Blackberry syndrome, where I would just be reaching for it, and then it was like, "Oh, I don't have that anymore."

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Great.

Lee Burgess: I know. When I took my Instagram break, I didn't delete the app from my phone, because I kind of wanted to see if I could just stop myself from doing it. And for days, I would still automatically go open it, literally without thinking. And then had to shut it down and say to myself, "You can't have the Instagram. Walk away from the phone." I mean, it is really bizarre, but I think there is an interesting idea of playing with this... Of course, she has so many more details in the book, but playing with this idea that we can kind of become addicted to these distractors, and a lot of them I think are distractors. I know addiction is a lot more complicated than that, but for those of us who necessarily don't have addictive personalities, I think distraction is one of the major addictions in our life these days. And then, what happens if you take it away? Really, that moment of what happens when you take it away is very thought-provoking. So, I think it's really important to think about.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think particularly when you're doing something that's mentally and academically stressful, like taking the bar exam, for example. I mean, people are probably, understandably turning to these little quick hits of dopamine to help them feel better, like, "I'll just have a little treat" or, "Oh, I'll just scroll through some social media for a little while." But it sounds like you think that might be a disservice.

Lee Burgess: Yes, she argues that these quick hits are really flooding ourselves with dopamine, and then the body is making us more anxious, it's creating this pain. And the last thing anyone needs while studying for the bar exam is more anxiety. And I think it is a very interesting idea, if, to say, "Well, if I'm feeling very anxious and I'm not feeling particularly good and my mental health is not



as stable as it could be, I should take away some of my pleasure." I think that was what was so mind-blowing to me, was this idea of the escapism isn't necessarily serving you, which is kind of a mindfulness idea. It makes me think of this idea that you're supposed to sit with your discomforts.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I was thinking that maybe you need to do a cold plunge pool or something.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, she talks about those too. Apparently, you can be addicted to that too.

Alison Monahan: Oh, I'm sure. I was thinking, the example I always use when I was studying for the California bar, and I got an unlimited yoga pass and I was going twice a day and they were finally like, "Why are you coming so frequently?" But yeah, I always thought that was probably my addiction, but as addictions go, that was probably a pretty okay one.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And you were able to stop at some point, I assume. Because I've known you for a long time and you don't go to yoga twice a day.

Alison Monahan: No. In fact, I don't go to yoga at all anymore thanks to the pandemic, but I probably would be a better, happier person if I went at least sometimes.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. So, I think the idea that I really wanted to share is that these indulgences that oftentimes we give ourselves when times are hard, may not be making us happier. They may be making the hard times harder, and that kind of blew my mind. So, if this sounds like something that you are interested in, I really recommend that you check out the book. I've also linked to an [NPR interview with Dr. Lembke](#) in the show notes, if you want to learn more about her work before you invest in the book, but I think it's a worthwhile read. And if you're a parent and you're listening to this podcast, as I am, thinking about this and our children is also mind-blowing. I'll just leave it at that.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, definitely. I look at my nephew and you give him a phone for five minutes and then try to take it away, and it's just like, "Oh my gosh, you should just never have given him that to begin with."

Lee Burgess: I know. So, totally worth it. But just warning – the phone, the chocolate, these indulgences may actually be making it harder for you to discipline yourself to study for the bar.

Alison Monahan: Well, that's not great, but hey, at least you can fix it beforehand or maybe just not settle into those patterns to start with.



- Lee Burgess: True, exactly.
- Alison Monahan: And also, your other book sounds like they have some ideas around reshaping your habits, shall we say.
- Lee Burgess: Yes. So, now that I have freaked everyone out that were addicted to this stuff, now let's talk about how we have the power to kind of create new and positive habits, which is really what the book *Atomic Habits* is about. So, when we think about good habits, we often focus on big changes: "I'm going to study 10 hours a day, starting tomorrow", "I'm going to start working out hard, 60 minutes a day." And then we burn out and stop. This is why New Year's resolutions are garbage and never work, right? That's not a way to really create a new habit. But what he's arguing in *Atomic Habits* is that great change can come with compounding small changes, and that creating new habits can have a big effect even if the day-to-day change doesn't seem so major.
- Alison Monahan: Well, that sounds more promising.
- Lee Burgess: It does really, because I think I'm much more likely to do that than take on some of these crazy goals.
- Alison Monahan: I'm like, "You're going to take away all my chocolate and my Instagram. I'm not signing up for that, sorry."
- Lee Burgess: I know. This is not the happiest podcast, it's turning out.
- Alison Monahan: But if you tell me, "Oh, maybe you could just alternate days when you have your chocolate", I'm like, "I could probably get behind that."
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly. So, one of the things he talks about when he starts discussing habits is this idea that you can create identity habits. I think you can apply this idea to the bar exam like this: You might say, "I want to study 50 hours a week." Perfect, great, great goal. You work with us, typically we have a study schedule that has those numbers in it. The problem is when argues that instead of just having a study schedule and saying, "I'm going to study 50 hours a week", it is much more powerful if you ask yourself, "Who is the type of person that can study 50 hours a week, or who will study 50 hours a week?" And you start to focus on who that person seems like, and what choices are they going to make to study 50 hours a week. And if you want to be that person, think about how you can assume the identity and not just try and reach that goal. He had an [interview with Brené Brown](#) that I was reading, where he said, "Every action we



take is like a vote for the type of person we wish to become. Your habits are how you embody a particular identity. So, every day that you make your bed, you embody the identity of someone who is clean and organized. In this way, our behaviors are like they're casting votes for the story that we are telling ourselves." What is interesting to me about this is this idea that you're trying to almost talk to your future self, which is something that I've also read and had people share about motivation – that if you are making a decision, you can ask yourself what is your future self going to think of that choice. I think it's a similar idea – you're just saying, "What do I want as a person as my identity?", instead of just saying, "This is on my to-do list and I'm going to do it." And then, perhaps you can have a little bit more of that intrinsic motivation. I don't know, what do you think about this idea?

Alison Monahan: I think it's interesting. I think sometimes people... We've talked a lot about [self-sabotage](#) when people are studying for the bar, and I can definitely see this feeding into it, when they are essentially creating that identity of a person who is not organized and not preparing properly. And a lot of this is probably subconscious; they're not consciously thinking, "I don't want to study for the bar, so I'm not going to make my bed." But all of this kind of feeds into, "I'm a person who's disorganized and my study space is disorganized and my life is falling apart" versus, "You know what? I'm not necessarily the most intrinsically organized person in the world, but I'm going to make sure that every single day I'm going to straighten up my study space at the end of the day, so when I come back to it, it will be the study space of an organized person."

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I can also see journaling playing into this well. We've talked in the past about journaling being an important activity that folks can do when they study for the bar to handle anxiety, to kind of control that monkey brain, that fast talking brain in our head. And I could see this as being an interesting journal activity, of this prompt of, "Who am I trying to emulate, who's this? Am I trying to be a bar studier who has a lot of balance? Am I trying to be a bar studier who does a ton of effective practice?" And then, what are you going to do to become that person? And I think that everyone who has successfully lived through law school can be this person, can be this studier, but you have to be focused on the tiny things that you can do to get to that kind of goal. And he's saying instead of having a goal like, "I want to study 50 hours a week", there's a more powerful goal if it has this identity that's like, "I want to be the person who will study 50 hours a week. I want to be the person who's doing what they need to do to pass the bar. I want to be the person who's going to walk into the room the day of the bar exam and not think that I left anything on the table." And I think that that can be a shift for some people, especially if you're struggling to find the motivation to do the heavy lifting.



Alison Monahan: Yeah. And I think this could even tie into what some of our tutors have suggested for students before, who are kind of struggling with motivation and that kind of thing. Maybe you put up a sign where you see it every time you brush your teeth that says, "I am a person that does bar exam practice every day." It sounds kind of silly, but your brain is going to start processing that sort of thing. Whatever it is that's your biggest goal that you know you need to focus on, put up those signs and look at them.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Our brains are always taking in information, and even if it seems silly, if you read to yourself, "I am a person who's going to practice every day", your brain starts to believe it, if you then do it.

Alison Monahan: Not even a person who's going to; you are a person who does it.

Lee Burgess: That's true, you are a person who does. That's a very good point.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, because if you're going to, it's like, "Oh, off in the future, I'll become that person." Here it's like, "No, I am that person. Right now, I am that person." Whether you want to be or not.

Lee Burgess: Right, totally. So then he goes on into the book to talk about creating good habits. He's got a lot of suggestions, and a few of them I thought could really be applicable to the studying timeframe. Again, I don't think any of these are mind-blowing; however, again, you read them and you're like, "Oh, that's a good suggestion. I should probably check that out." So, the first one that I thought was kind of the easiest one, that is one that we often don't think about, is called stacking habits, and I think this is really easy to implement. Basically you take a habit that you already do and you just tack a new one on the end. So, if you want to start meditating every morning and you're going to say, "I need five minutes to meditate", you could say, "I'm going to meditate right after I make my coffee and my coffee cools for five minutes." You're not really having to force yourself to meditate, because you're attaching it to something you're already going to do. If you're like me, you make coffee first thing every morning. I don't even feed the cats until the cat is like screaming at me, and I was like, "You've got to wait."

Alison Monahan: See, this is exactly how I ended up with a habit of eating chocolate in the mountains, because as I wait for the machine to run, which normally I probably wouldn't be doing, because I'd be buying my coffee and a barista would be making it, I wouldn't have chocolate sitting here in front of me. I have now trained myself to, while the coffee is being made for me and the espresso thingy



that takes a couple of minutes, I get the chocolate and I unwrap one, and I'll have one while I'm making it, and I'll have another one when I'm tasting it. I've totally stacked that habit.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, so you can do it with things other than chocolate, but you never know.

Alison Monahan: Right, there might be a more productive way that I could do. But hey, it totally works. I'm completely committed to that new habit now.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Also, we'll hear from students, "I don't have time to review the MBE questions" or, "I don't have time to do this." What if you stacked it onto a habit that you were really good at doing? What if you did reviewing of your MBE questions right after lunch, so you don't even think about it? You're like, "The thing I do after lunch, I eat lunch, I then do the MBE review, I'm done." It really does seem to be these tiny little barriers to entry that stop us from these new habits. And I'm definitely not saying that I am perfect. I won't even begin to talk about... Well, maybe I should talk about it. I am trying to learn French and I'm having a terrible time creating a study habit for this and squeezing it into my day-to-day life. And I think I'm going to have to stack it as a habit, because it just falls off the to-do list every day. I have to give it a place. And so, I'm also trying to go through this book to try and figure out how to better my own habits.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think you have to. It just has to be like, you do your 10 minutes of Duolingo or whatever it is, at a certain time when you do something else.

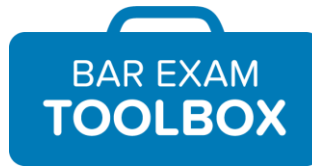
Lee Burgess: Yeah. Alright, the next thing is to look at your physical environment. And I'll be honest, I love this one because I studied organizational psychology in college, and I wrote my thesis on how office environments could ignite creativity. Anyone can email me for it, I'm sure it's just a page turner, all these years later.

Alison Monahan: It's kind of ironic that now you work virtually for yourself.

Lee Burgess: I know. I learned so much about organizational psychology. Well, I created my own organization. There we go.

Alison Monahan: Exactly, true.

Lee Burgess: I know, it's true. Alright, so the book argues that you should check out your environment and whether or not it can help with focus. So for example, in your home, even if it is small, you may want to have a clear division between your work spaces and your life spaces. So if you find yourself sitting at the kitchen table, but you're constantly being distracted by things to do around the house,



like seeing dirty dishes or whatever – this is a big thing for me, I'm terrible at this – you should try setting up a study corner where you only study. And if you are disciplined about this, the context of where you are can actually help with focus. When you go to that study corner, your body and your mind are going to say, "This is my time to focus." And it's going to be ready to do that. And I think you can do this even if your study location isn't in your home. If you love to study in coffee shops – I personally don't like to, but some people really love it – go to one coffee shop only to study. And then when you get there, your body and your mind will be like, "This is my time to study." You could do this in the library, but you're kind of creating these triggers for yourself in a positive way, so you have associations. So your mind is like, "I am in the location in which I do this thing. I should get ready to do this thing."

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think that one's key. I know for me, it's always surprising how much of a difference it makes if I have even a tiny office space set up some place, versus just like, "Oh, I'll just do it on the couch" or, "I'll just sit at this kitchen table." There's definitely something, even if it's literally a tiny little square that's probably not two feet on every side, about having a desk and then a lamp and all of these things where it's like... And also to be facing away from other things – at least for me, it definitely increases my focus.

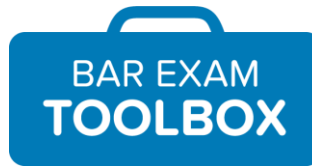
Lee Burgess: I could see this being a very powerful tool also for folks with any sort of attention deficit issues.

Alison Monahan: For sure.

Lee Burgess: I mean, you really have to protect your space. Even in libraries, it could be that you study better in a cubby with walls than at a table where you can see your friends, or you see other things going on, or you wonder what so and so is doing across the room. I mean, I think it's important to be very honest with yourself about the triggers in your environment. But I really like this idea of creating consistency, so you're pretty much triggering to your brain, without having to actually do anything, that it's time to get it together and focus.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think that's really key. I think anyone who's studying for the bar needs to have some space that they have carved out, where their materials are and where they can just go to and be ready to go.

Lee Burgess: Alright. This is my third suggestion that I pulled from the book – there're a bunch more in the book – but the book also argues that nearly any habit can be scaled down to two minutes. And he argues that this can help with procrastination, which also almost everybody does at one point or another. See



my previous example of not being able to remind myself to study French. So, the examples from the book are this idea of instead of saying, "I'm going to read before bed each night", the habit that you're trying to initiate is just, "I'm going to read one page of a book at night." Or instead of, "I'm going to study for class", it just becomes, "I'm going to sit and open my notes." The idea is that you make the habit as easy as possible to start, because once you do that first right thing, it's much easier to continue doing it, because you have to do something else to stop doing it. Therefore the new habit doesn't really feel like a challenge. Sometimes the challenging work comes after it, but showing up has already happened. I prepped for this podcast earlier, and then I went and did this Peloton workout. And this one instructor always starts with, "You did the hardest thing because you showed up. Now, don't leave."

- Alison Monahan: I've even heard of people sleeping in their gym clothes if they want to start a habit to go to the gym, because then when they wake up, all they have to do is put their shoes on and go run.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. And this is really interesting, when we think about procrastination and the self-sabotaging behaviors that we've talked about – we mentioned in this podcast, we've talked about them in other podcasts – it's this, "What's this first tiny step that is very easy to take that you won't want to refuse to take?"
- Alison Monahan: Right. It's so easy that you're like, "Okay, seriously, even I could do that."
- Lee Burgess: Right. I'm going to do one multiple choice question, I'm going to read one essay question, I'm going to sit at my desk and open my binder, or whatever it might be. But I think it can be really powerful, and I could see you building a day, especially if you're having a hard time with the discipline to sit down and do this work, of kind of triggering different parts of your day using these two-minute habits and saying, "I'm going to do these things at various points of my day to kind of ignite the rest of it." I think it's a really interesting idea. It also made me think about [spaced repetition](#), which is something we've talked about.
- Alison Monahan: Oh yeah. I use that for my ski exam.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, I know. I'm trying to use it because Duolingo. I know, with my poor French, I know. Anyway, I'm working on it.
- Alison Monahan: I think with the French, you just need to do something that's actually fun, like watch part of a French movie or something.
- Lee Burgess: Yes, I think you're right.



Alison Monahan: And then you'll be more motivated to try to understand it.

Lee Burgess: It's totally true.

Alison Monahan: When I was in Mexico, for example, I was also like, "I can't sit down and study." So a) I got a tutor, so I had to go to it, and b) I actually started only listening to Spanish language music in the background all day long. And I feel like that actually really helped.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that's a good point. I haven't done the music yet. I've definitely tried the TV, I have a tutor.

Alison Monahan: No, there's something about the music, it's just like, having it on all day... At first, I didn't understand it, and then I gradually started to understand it because I was memorizing it.

Lee Burgess: That's true, I know. Maybe that's my two-minute goal: Turn on French music.

Alison Monahan: Exactly, and then you'll probably have it on for hours.

Lee Burgess: Right, exactly. But with spaced repetition, there's a tool we talk about on a different podcast that we'll link to in the show notes, about using this idea of doing 10 minutes a day to study material and move it into your memory. And I thought that was the kind of activity where it would be great to say, "I'm going to log in to spaced repetition". And then once you're there, you're like, "Well, then I'll do my 10 minutes."

Alison Monahan: Right. "I might as well do it, I'm here."

Lee Burgess: But it's like the logging in... And it seems silly, but I think that it could be very effective, especially when you're feeling stuck. And we all get stuck about various things, especially things that we don't want to do. I don't like to go to the doctor. I do, because I'm trying to be responsible, but I don't like it. So I always book doctor's appointments very far away. They think I'm a little cookie. Like three months before whatever appointment is supposed to come up, I call to make the appointment, and you can tell they're like, "Why are you calling to make this appointment three months in advance?" But that's because I can do the two-minute thing.

Alison Monahan: Right, and then forget about it.



- Lee Burgess: And then forget about it. And then once it's on my calendar, I won't not go.
- Alison Monahan: I think that's why the dentist schedules me six months out when I'm leaving, so, "Oh, you want to just pop that on the calendar right now?" And I was like, "Great."
- Lee Burgess: I know, and then it's just there, so you kind of have to do it. So I don't know, I think that this idea of these tiny two-minute things that you can do, if you do them over and over again, it's going to make the harder stuff that comes after it much easier. And I think that that is a very powerful tool. So, I don't know, do you think these three habit suggestions might make a difference to someone who might be struggling with studying for the bar?
- Alison Monahan: Hey, I think every little bit helps.
- Lee Burgess: I know, right? No kidding.
- Alison Monahan: If you're just saying they're spiraling, it's like, alright, rather than that, why don't you do some spaced repetition flash cards or something? At least then you're moving forward towards your goal and you'll probably feel better about it.
- Lee Burgess: And I think that the message in that book overall, as I mentioned earlier, is this idea of compounding change. We talk to a lot of folks who are studying for the bar for a longer period of time – either they have specific concerns and they're studying in the second part of their 3L year, or they are studying and working, so they're studying for four months instead of two months. And I think the longer you study, this idea of compounding change is so powerful. What does it really look like to add 10 minutes of some habit or 30 minutes of some habit, five days a week for an additional eight weeks? It starts to be mind-blowing how it really can invoke change. And so I think, especially for folks who are thinking about habits in a longer term sense, these small changes can be very powerful.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. I was thinking about that with the [memorization](#) – sometimes people often wait until the very last minute and then it's like, "Oh, in a week or two weeks, I have to cram all this stuff in my head and memorize it all." It's like, why don't you spread that out and do 10 minutes twice a day for three or four months? It's going to end up probably being around the same amount of time, and way more effective and much easier and less stressful.
- Lee Burgess: Right. And also, we all know that we can only learn so much in a day. You just can only do so much in a day.



Alison Monahan: Totally, I agree, 100%.

Lee Burgess: Alright, so for some thoughtful takeaways, to summarize, if you're struggling to make some good study habits, all is not lost because you can use some of these different techniques to jump start new habits, even something as small as doing something for two minutes. I think that's a very powerful thing. And if you're feeling really down or finding yourself being constantly distracted, I really encourage you to think about your dopamine levels and what you're doing to create this escapism for yourself. What would it feel like if you walked away from some habits, or even some maybe minor rejections, that aren't serving you? And would that allow your body to rebalance and make it easier to work towards your goals? It might. I actually really loved my Instagram break. I went back to it, and now I think I need to take another one.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, maybe permanently.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I know.

Alison Monahan: I went cold turkey years ago on my Facebook and Twitter one day, because I was just woke up and was like, "Huh, I don't really feel like looking at these. I wonder what would happen if I never look at them again." And honestly, from that day forward, have barely ever looked at Twitter again.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, it probably made you more sane during the pandemic. That's when I got it all the way into Twitter.

Alison Monahan: No, it really did. It was massively stressing me out, and this was even before the pandemic. It's been that long since I've looked at Twitter, and I don't really feel like I've missed out.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I don't think so. I don't think you've missed anything, really.

Alison Monahan: Particularly now.

Lee Burgess: Exactly, exactly. Alright, well, I hope that this has been helpful to some of our listeners as you think about how you're going to make the most of your study time. But I think that it's always important to remember that you can make change in your own life, and I think that that is a life lesson that I'm always trying to constantly remind myself, that you don't have to be stuck. You can take these tiny little incremental steps to change...



Alison Monahan: Every day. Every day you have the option just to say, "Maybe I'll do something a little bit different for a few minutes and just kind of see how that goes, how it feels."

Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly, I know. Alright, well, any final thoughts?

Alison Monahan: No, other than it sounds like these are great books, and probably I should pick them up.

Lee Burgess: I know, right? They're good audio books. I haven't listened to the *Atomic Habits* one, but *Dopamine Nation* is a good audio book. You can do it on a drive, that's what I did. I think I actually listened to it on a drive from seeing you, so there you go.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, you talked to me about it.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Alright, well, with that, we are out of time. I want to take a second to remind you to check out our [blog](#) BarExamToolbox.com, which is full of helpful tips to help you prepare and stay sane as you study for the bar exam. You can also find information on our website about our courses, tools, and one-on-one tutoring programs to support you as you study for the UBE or California bar exam. If you enjoyed this episode of the Bar Exam Toolbox podcast, please take a second to leave a review or rating on your favorite listening app. We'd really appreciate it. And be sure to subscribe so you don't miss anything. If you're still in law school, you might also like to check out our popular Law School Toolbox podcast as well. If you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to reach out to myself or Alison at lee@barexamtoolbox.com or alison@barexamtoolbox.com. Or you can always contact us via the website [contact form](#) at BarExamToolbox.com. Thanks for listening, and we'll talk soon!

RESOURCES:

[*Dopamine Nation: Finding Balance in the Age of Indulgence*, by Anna Lembke](#)

[*Atomic Habits: An Easy & Proven Way to Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones*, by James Clear](#)

[In 'Dopamine Nation,' Overabundance Keeps Us Craving More](#)

[Brené Brown Dare to Lead podcast – Atomic Habits, Part 1 of 2](#)

[Podcast Episode 11: Self-Sabotaging Behavior During Bar Prep \(w/Ariel Salzer\)](#)

[Podcast Episode 30: Changing Bad Bar Exam Study Habits and Setting Useful Goals](#)



[Podcast Episode 42: Memorization Techniques for the Bar Exam](#)

[Podcast Episode 199: Using Spaced Repetition for Your Law School and Bar Exam Studies \(w/Gabriel Teninbaum\)](#)

[Healthy Habits for Bar Preparation](#)

[How to Proactively Develop Good Mental Health Habits During Bar Prep](#)