



Episode 111 - Resumes and Cover Letters (with an ex-BigLaw Recruiter)

Alison Monahan: Welcome to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today, we're here with ex big law recruiter, Sadie Jones, to talk about the basics of resumes and cover letter. Your Law School Toolbox host is Alison Monahan and typically I'm here with my co-host, Lee Burgess. We're here to demystify the law school and early legal career experience so that you'll be the best law student and lawyer you can be. We're the co-creators of the [Law School Toolbox](#), the [Bar Exam Toolbox](#), and the Catapult Career Conference. I also run [The Girl's Guide to Law School](#).

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Welcome back. Today we're here with ex big law recruiter Sadie Jones to talk about the basics of resumes and cover letters, something that I'm sure you have seen a lot of. First question. How many resumes do you think you have reviewed in your entire life?

Sadie Jones: I have probably reviewed thousands of resumes, maybe 5000 resumes.

Alison Monahan: Wow.

Sadie Jones: Throughout my career.

Alison Monahan: That's a lot.

Sadie Jones: Yes. I would look at multiple a day, every single day, when I was working at law firms. Between students and laterals, partners ...

Alison Monahan: Okay, so you have a pretty good idea at this point of what a good and a bad resume look like.

Sadie Jones: I do, at least to myself.

Alison Monahan: Right. Well, other people listen to you, right?

Sadie Jones: Yes. Well, I would basically be the screening and sending things on to the partners and other attorneys. I was really the one deciding whether the resume was worth passing on.

Alison Monahan: So, you had the ability to say no if you got a resume and you were like, you know what? There are three typos in the first two lines. I don't think this is a great person to work for us.

Sadie Jones: Correct.

Alison Monahan: Did you have to justify that, or was it really just yes or no?

Sadie Jones: Maybe at first. I think once the attorneys got to know me, they trusted my opinion, so there really wasn't much double-checking what I thought. I think when I was first starting, maybe they would want to see that my judgment matched their judgment.

Alison Monahan: Right. All right, well, that's actually good to know, that the recruiting person at this firm or wherever you're sending your resume may be the one who's really making the final decision about whether you're going to make the cut.

Sadie Jones: Correct. I think that's really the person you want to be impressing.

Alison Monahan: Okay. What makes a resume good versus one that's mediocre or really bad, in general?

Sadie Jones: I think first of all, it should be easy to read. It should have a clear idea of what your experience is and what your story is, and where you went to school, and all the jobs you've had. I shouldn't be having to look for things, or put anything together, or trying to fill in holes.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I've seen some sometimes where people leave the dates off of things and stuff like that, but I feel like that just ... For me, at least, that just raises red flags.

Sadie Jones: Correct. If I saw a hole or some kind of time period that was missing and it wasn't explained, I would immediately think something had happened or there was an issue there.

Alison Monahan: Right. Where, in reality, the person may have just been dealing with a family situation or something. It's almost better to ... Well, I guess that's what we should talk about later. That can be a tricky one. All right. In general, though, we're looking for something that's clean, easy to read, obviously no typos.

Sadie Jones: Correct. I really liked everything to line up, so all the margins should be the same, where you're starting your bullets, and things like that. That's what I mean by definitely easy to read.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, that was one of my pet peeves, was when someone would left justify something and then right justify something, but then ...

Sadie Jones: Drives me crazy.

Alison Monahan: Well, I don't mind that, as long as both of the margins align and things are actually right aligned. But when someone tries to right align dates or something, and they don't line up? Oh my God, it drives me crazy.

Sadie Jones: Exactly. I think that a resume, just formatting should always be checked by multiple people, because someone's going to probably see that.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I mean, maybe it's because I have a design background, but I'm like, "Don't you see that these margins don't line up?"

Sadie Jones: I agree. That stuff would drive me crazy.

Alison Monahan: I think it's also something to keep in mind when you're working with a Word document and then you convert it to a PDF, which you should do. You want to make sure the PDF doesn't transfer over any weird formatting, because whatever you're presenting needs to be the one that lines up.

Sadie Jones: My advice is always to convert it to a PDF and then print the PDF.

Alison Monahan: Yes, for sure. I agree. Yeah, so I think it's got to be clean, it's got to be technically accurate. This is also really the opportunity to start telling your story. One of the things I often tell people when I look at their resumes is, what ... You've got to sell yourself here. You've got to put the pieces together for someone. If you've got weird stuff, and this is also where the cover letter can come in, but if you've got weird stuff on your resume, then ... I had a really weird resume. I had a lot of strange degrees. I had an architecture background, I had a programming background, I had a legal background. All this stuff, so it was on me to put this together in a way where someone thinks, "Oh, yeah, that makes sense." Versus, "What in the world did this person do?"

Sadie Jones: Yeah, so I think in that case, I would want to categorize it right and make sure that it ... Things that go together should go together, and you're telling the story of different skills you've learned, and the path you took, and maybe ... It can become obvious just from looking at someone's resume why they went from one thing to the next thing.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly.

Sadie Jones: And what their interests are. I also think you put the resume together as you want to. You don't have to put everything you've ever done on your resume. I think it's good to edit.

Alison Monahan: Yes, I think that's a key area that sometimes people get so obsessed with, oh, I have to put every job I've ever had. It's like, really? Do they care that I was a lifeguard when I was 16? Probably not.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely. I see so much of that and I think, all that says to me is that person doesn't feel like they have enough for their resume and they're trying to fill things in. Rather than do that, I would say maybe add some more substance to certain jobs you have had.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think people want to take away what did you really do here, how does that apply here? Sometimes people wonder, oh, should I put jobs that maybe aren't super prestigious on there? I think there's an argument in certain cases, yes. If you worked your way through college working as a waitress or barista or whatever it was, presumably you learned some useful skills there. I used to have a boss who would only hire people who had been a wait staff, because he thought it was a great training ground for dealing with people, dealing with stress, multi-tasking, all these things. I don't think you have to leave off stuff that isn't super prestigious, but it needs to be explained in a way that makes it sound like you were doing something that's useful here.

Sadie Jones: I agree. In that case, I would say I've seen a lot of resumes where you write, I worked 30 hours a week throughout college or law school or whatnot. I think that says a lot. I would put details where you think that they can help you.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. You don't actually put, "worked at McDonald's." It's like, "I was a shift leader at McDonald's and I worked 30 hours a week, working my way through school, and I was promoted three times." Whatever it is. Because then, that shows, hey, this is a person who's a hustler. They went out there and they got this job, and they supported themselves. Yeah, it's not a glamorous job, but they're going to do the work when you need them to do the work. It's not that you have to leave this stuff off, it's just it needs to be sort of framed in a way that makes it clear how it's relevant.

Sadie Jones: I think your resume is your way to tell your story and put your best foot forward, and show where you excel. I would also say, when I say edit, make sure you're not leaving anything off that's important. Because we would see sometimes a transcript from another school, but that school is not listed on the resume.

Alison Monahan: Yeah.

Sadie Jones: That is a huge red flag. So, you should make sure you're not leaving anything off that's relevant.

Alison Monahan: Right. I transferred schools after my first year of college, and I always put my first school on my resume, but I didn't go into a lot of detail. It was really just there to be like, hey, I went to this school for a year. Whatever.

Sadie Jones: Exactly. Just so no one thinks you're being deceptive.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. So, when they get the transcript, they're like, "Wait, you were at Rice? What? That's not anywhere."

Sadie Jones: Exactly. But you wouldn't believe how many of those resumes I've seen.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it's interesting. Do you ever see ones of people who try to hide that they transferred law schools?

Sadie Jones: You know, I don't know that they were consciously trying to hide it. Usually, someone's transferred because they did really good at, let's say, a lower ranked law school and transferred to a better law school. I think in their mind, they should just highlight the better law school. I don't think they're necessarily doing it on purpose, but I've seen that quite a bit, and I would say to the student, "You really need to make sure all the schools you've attended are on here." They would say they just didn't realize.

Alison Monahan: Right.

Sadie Jones: My advice to everyone right now is, make sure any school you attended is on there.

Alison Monahan: Right. What do you think about undergraduate study abroad? I feel like that should at least be mentioned as well.

Sadie Jones: I would mention it, but very briefly. I wouldn't want it to take up too much space on your resume. But I think it's relevant, and I think you could mention what type of course you did if it's relevant, or if you became fluent in a language, or it's relevant to you want to work in international law or something like that.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think for me, I just listed it in case. I think I've had to send that transcript in places.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, I agree. Especially if it's an accredited school, and you did get credit for the work you did.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean, it's unlikely anyone's going to ding you for studying abroad. So, you might as well just go ahead and put it on there.

Sadie Jones: Correct. I think it's just something you make a little note of.

Alison Monahan: Exactly. It also gives people something to talk about in the interview when you're running out of material, like, "Oh, how did you like studying abroad in Madrid?" You know? "What did you do? Do you speak Spanish?"

Sadie Jones: I do think that's one of the biggest advantages to a resume, too, is just giving some information to discuss in an interview.

Alison Monahan: Right, I think that's absolutely key. Sometimes people think it's an objective list of everything they've ever done, but really, you're planting seeds of things that you would like to talk about or that you don't mind talking about, or that you're comfortable talking about so that hopefully you get those questions instead of, "What happened in Civ Pro 1L year?" You want to have someone who's more like, "Oh, I was in the same organization in law school. Tell me what it's like these days." Then you have a connection.

Alright, let's dive into some specific questions that we often get about resumes. This is probably number one, honestly. I'm not really sure why, but ... How long should the resume be? Is one page a requirement, or are there situations where longer is okay?

Sadie Jones: My advice is, you should aim to have it be one page.

Alison Monahan: Right.

Sadie Jones: Most people who are in this position, and I think we're talking about entry-level lawyers or law students, don't have that much experience. I think if you inflate it, it maybe doesn't say something good about you that you are trying to make a much longer resume out of a short period of time. My exceptions would be if you do have, let's say, a lot of technical experience and you're trying to be a patent prosecutor and you have engineering background, and you've published a lot of papers, and things like that. I think some of that could make it a little bit longer. I think if you have something very specialized, maybe that's okay to go a little bit over. But overall, people in this position should keep it to one page.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I feel like almost every law student resume I see, I'm like, "This could be one page. Really?" You know?

Sadie Jones: It just doesn't look good.

Alison Monahan: No, because you end up using fillers. The problem is if you go over one page, you can't really do a page and a half. It needs to be ... It's I guess a little different if you're doing a list of publications or something like that, but typically, I would say if you go into two pages, it needs to be two pages.

Sadie Jones: I think if it's a little bit over one and there's nothing you want to take out, I'm okay with a little bit of formatting magic.

Alison Monahan: Oh yeah.

Sadie Jones: To make certain things a little bit smaller. I've done that on my own resume. I'm okay as long as it's readable, but I think the rule of thumb is one page.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. Reality is if you go from a one-inch margin all around to .75 inch margin. I think in the end, I went down to a half inch margin on the left and side, and it looks a little weird, but you can fit a lot more stuff on it.

Sadie Jones: I agree. I would go in that direction rather than make it longer.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and you can almost always edit. A lot of it could be formatting. If you've got bullet points, condense those into a paragraph. Okay, you just saved yourself two lines. Great, you can put a whole other job in two lines.

Sadie Jones: Well, there's a way to cut down on the tasks that you've done at certain jobs. Use a lot of filler words, things like that, you can make those shorter.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. A lot of it is just formatting. Obviously, you want to have enough white space on your resume that it's not totally cluttered, but at the same time, you can squeeze a lot of stuff in if your formatting is well done.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely. I agree.

Alison Monahan: All right. Here's another common one. Should your education go first, or your work experience go first? If you're not sure, how do you decide that?

Sadie Jones: I think this changes over time and over your career. Pretty much everyone in this situation should have their education first. We're talking about entry-level legal job, and so what you want to highlight is the work you're doing in law school first.

Alison Monahan: Right.

Sadie Jones: I think as you get more experienced, and when I would see lateral resumes, their work experience would move up. That would be my rule for an entry-level or summer associate position.

Alison Monahan: I think that's totally right. Throughout your career, it probably starts to depend, too, on how prestigious your law school was, how well you did there ... Always, you want to be thinking about what do you want to highlight here? What's the first thing you want them to see when they see this resume? You're like, oh, you're top of your class at Harvard. Okay. You know?

Sadie Jones: Absolutely. Then I think if you get a job at a really prestigious firm, or you have a really prestigious clerkship, maybe that will become more important. So, I think your resume is a living thing that changes over time.

Alison Monahan: Oh, for sure. How can people handle unrelated, non-legal work experience? Especially these people I'm thinking of who might be a little bit older, maybe they've had a whole prior career. If you had been, say, doing marketing or you

were working in a lab. Your resume for getting that next job in that field is going to look really different than your legal resume, right?

Sadie Jones: I would say don't run away from the other experience you've had. I don't think it necessarily says, oh, I didn't have legal experience. I think it says I have good experience at something else. I think you should think about what you're highlighting at those jobs and how those tasks relate to what it would be like to be a lawyer. So, if you would be managing other people or keeping things organized ...

Alison Monahan: And sort of writing, communicating ...

Sadie Jones: Exactly. Research. Yeah, you work well with a team. All of those kinds of things. So, I think you want to take what you can out of your previous experience and relate it to what you're going to be doing now. I also think that excelling in anything, whether it was a former career or just summer positions or internships or things like that always are positive.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I saw this discussion recently regarding specifically military service, and one of the points that someone was making, which I thought was a really good point was you definitely want to own this and you want to think about how it applies, but you have to be careful to explain to, in this case, a civilian what you're talking about. If you say, oh, I had a platoon of da da da and throw in a bunch of lingo, people are going to be like, what is that? Any time that it's outside of the legal realm, I think you need to be really clear and probably have some people who are not experts in the field you used to work in really look at this and say, "I understand what you're saying here" versus "I was an MW3 blah blah blah." You're like, what are you talking about?

Sadie Jones: I agree. I like that idea of having other people read it, and I think even having non-lawyers read things that might sound legal, to make sure that they make sense to anyone. Because you might be having your resume looked at by a lawyer who's not in that area. I think you really want it to be easy to read and understand. I think military service is great, I think highlighting anything you did that's different is a positive at law firms.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. They're looking for someone a little more interesting than straight out of undergrad. Of course, you can get a job at a law firm if you go straight through, but there's always in the back of your mind, you're sort of thinking, wow, it would be nice to have someone who's a little different here.

Sadie Jones: Yeah. I think there still are lots of law students that go straight through, but more and more, they're giving credit to people who have higher work experience.

Alison Monahan: Right. What about those people who go straight through? What are they supposed to put in their work experience if they don't really have very much?

Sadie Jones: I think you really have to dig deep and think about what you've done, what accomplishments you've had. You also don't want to overplay it, because I think that sends the wrong tone. I think you want to make it clear that you don't have a ton of work experience, but here are things you've done that you've excelled at and that you're eager to excel at this.

Alison Monahan: Right. You can also include volunteer work, or public service. I'm not saying you should ...

Sadie Jones: Former jobs, any awards you've had, undergrad ... Anything like that.

Alison Monahan: Obviously you can't really make "I was in the student government" into a real job, but you can put that. You could go into some detail about what you did there, if you had a real solid position. Gotta work with what you have.

Sadie Jones: Exactly. I think there's a lot of creative ways to sell yourself.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and a lot of it is in the framing. I've helped various people with their resumes. My sister at one point followed fish around the country one summer. When she applied to grad school, that summer because "tour of the parks and national monuments of the U.S.".

Sadie Jones: Exactly. I'm sure she did see lots of national parks.

Alison Monahan: It was absolutely true. She's like, "Yup, we did camp there a lot. We tried to go any time we were in the area." I'm like, "We don't need to mention it was fish tour."

Sadie Jones: Well, that's why I think it's good to go through your story with somebody else.

Alison Monahan: Think about how you can frame it. It's all about the framing. If you're going to be a lawyer, you've got to learn how to frame things, and this is a great way to start.

Sadie Jones: Yup, absolutely.

Alison Monahan: Here's a question that actually generated a lot of debate recently on Twitter. What do you think about the "Interests" section? Pro or con?

Sadie Jones: I used to not have an interests section on my own resume and I thought that they were silly.

Alison Monahan: I think it's weird. I've never seen them until I saw legal resumes.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, I think that's what happened. Once I started working as a recruiter at law firms, I realized that they are actually really useful. Just because it gives you a

little more sense of the person, and it gives you things to talk about in an interview. I always say now that you should have an interests section.

Alison Monahan: I agree. I think they're useful. Some people have concerns about implicit bias and that kind of thing but to me, it feels like almost an ability to control the narrative a little bit more. What kind of stuff should people put on them or not put on them, do you think?

Sadie Jones: I think it's fine to have general things you're interested in. But I always like to get a bit more specific under the general. For example, if you like to cook, I would say put a specific kind of food or somewhere you've gone, like you've taken cooking lessons or you like to bake pies ...

Alison Monahan: If you say that, please be prepared to talk about it. I had some guy once, this poor guy. This interview was going ... I was the interviewer, and it was just going nowhere. I'm trying to kill some time and I'm like, "Oh, I see on your resume that you're really interested in baking. That's great. What do you like to bake?" And he looks at me and he says, "Well, I guess that's really more aspirational. I like to watch cooking shows." And I'm like, "Come on, dude." Is there more of a softball? What do you like to bake? Just make something up.

Sadie Jones: I also think in that case, he could have put something like that he's really interested in cooking competitions.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. I don't care what it is.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely.

Alison Monahan: I had a friend in law school who put cheese on her resume, but she was legitimately really into cheese. She had done classes, she had done all this stuff, and she said literally every person talked to her about cheese, but she would rather talk about that than con law, so she was happy.

Sadie Jones: I think that's great. I think the quirky things, that's what us behind the scenes like to talk about. I'll point it out to an attorney. Do you see that this person says they recorded a pop song in Korea once?

Alison Monahan: Yeah, that's interesting.

Sadie Jones: Which had come up with somebody. Yeah, and it was true. I think stuff like that ... I also think a lot of people maybe think that their interests aren't that great, so they think it's going to be boring. But I think anything that gives a bit of flavor to who you are. And sit down and think about what your interests actually are.

Alison Monahan: Right. If somebody likes to read, it's like okay, reading might be a boring interest, but say that you're really into reading historical biographies. That's automatically more interesting. Put that on there.

Sadie Jones: I think take the larger topic or subject matter, and then try to break it down and say to yourself, what about this do I really like to do? And put that specific thing. You know, I would say maybe have two to five interests.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it doesn't need to be everything you've ever thought about doing.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, exactly.

Alison Monahan: I think travel, instead of just travel, you're like, well, where have you traveled? You could list out the countries or the cities or whatever. This is all just to give flavor to you as a person. Okay.

Sadie Jones: You're making the job easier for the person who has to sit across from you and think of something to say.

Alison Monahan: Exactly. Most of those people are not really trained to do interviews.

Sadie Jones: Exactly. I wasn't going to say that, but yeah.

Alison Monahan: How about GPA, class rank, things like this. Are you expected to put this? I know the school I was at actually wouldn't allow us to put it. How about grades for very specific classes if you did well in them?

Sadie Jones: You're not expected to. I do think if you excelled at something, you should put it on. Except in the case you said, you shouldn't do any of this against the rules of the school or the honor code or anything like that. I do think that if you have an excellent GPA or if your school does class rank or if you got the highest grade in the class on something, or you won any kind of award or anything like that, I think all of that is great. If you don't have anything to highlight, you don't have anything to highlight. That's okay.

Alison Monahan: Certainly.

Sadie Jones: Yeah. You're not going to put that you got a B and a C in this class.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, you probably want to do well. You're not required to put your class rank on there, so if you're in the bottom quarter of your class, maybe you leave that off and they can look at your transcript and figure it out.

Sadie Jones: Yeah. It's going to come out eventually, but your resume is your chance to highlight your best stuff, so that's where I would put it if you can. I don't think it's showing off or anything like that.

Alison Monahan: No, you should show off, it's a resume.

Sadie Jones: Yeah. But I've had law students say to me that they don't want to brag.

Alison Monahan: No. If there's ever a time in your life to brag, and you have things to brag about, this is the time.

Sadie Jones: I couldn't agree more.

Alison Monahan: Get over your false modesty about getting an A+ in whatever class it was, and just put the A+ on there. All right. Let's move on and talk a little bit about cover letters. A, do people really need a cover letter?

Sadie Jones: I'll tell you, personally, I hate writing cover letters.

Alison Monahan: Who doesn't?

Sadie Jones: I don't think anyone likes writing cover letters, and I think we all think of a million reasons why we don't have to write one. But I think you should write one. I think everyone just needs to get rid of the fact that they don't want to do it and just do it. I think it's fine to have a general one where you change some things, but I think you want to make sure it's not the exact same cover letter, because then you're likely to make mistakes like not change the name of the firm, which I saw very often.

Alison Monahan: Right, so we're talking a mail merge situation where you put the wrong envelope ...

Sadie Jones: Don't ever do that. I would see that probably on average, a couple times a week. Either someone's name is spelled wrong, it's the wrong name, it's the wrong firm, it's the firm that was before the merger, all sorts of things like that. You want to read it over carefully, you want to make some changes, you want to make some reference to something specific at that firm or the practice group you're interested in or whatnot. I think a cover letter is necessary, whether or not the person is going to read it. You're expected to have one.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and some people will read it. It needs to basically tell your story as well. Hey, this is who I am, this is what I'm applying for, this is how I think I can help. You probably don't want to pretend that you're personally going to change the entire focus or success of the firm, you've got to pay attention to tone, be a little bit humble, that kind of thing. Here's a practical question. If I'm e-mailing my application, where does the cover letter go?

Sadie Jones: I actually think it could be an attachment, or it could be in the e-mail. Usually, if you're sending in an application, you're sending it in to the online system of the firm. There's usually a place where you upload all your documents. I know that, as a recruiter, I prefer that everybody do it that way. I think some people think that writing the person directly is going to get to them more. It's actually more work for the person.

Alison Monahan: I know, it's a nightmare.

Sadie Jones: Because then your documents don't get uploaded, so usually I just would direct people to our firm website. Also, a lot of states have laws where every applicant has to be counted. What I would say is, usually you're not in a situation where it's going to even be in an e-mail. Use the online system or you can send in a paper copy, but the best thing to do is just apply through the website.

Alison Monahan: I definitely agree. Any time someone wants to apply for our job outside of that, I just send them a link and I'm like, "Could you please use this link to apply?" There's a whole set of stuff that happens on the back end that doesn't happen if I just get an e-mail.

Sadie Jones: And it's like someone doesn't have to manually put anything in.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, you don't ... If somebody makes it a hassle for me to look at their stuff, I'm like, I'm sorry, I'm just not going to look at it.

Sadie Jones: Yup, I agree. That's my advice on that.

Alison Monahan: How are you supposed to find out who to address this to, and what do you do if you can't find a person?

Sadie Jones: I would say in most cases, a hiring partner or recruiting manager or even the head of the office is listed on the website. I almost can't think of a situation where it wouldn't be. If it really wasn't, you didn't see anywhere where anyone was listed, I think it's okay to say, "Dear hiring manager" or "Dear hiring partner".

Alison Monahan: Or you could probably even call, if this organization has a main phone number. Just call the receptionist and be like, "Hi, I'd like to apply for a job, who should I direct that towards?"

Sadie Jones: I would say that what it showed me was you were willing to put in the work to figure out who you even had to address it to, and that you spelled their name correctly. That says everything.

Alison Monahan: Yes.

Sadie Jones: The hiring partner isn't reading your application, most likely, it's somebody else. But the fact that I would make sure, oh, they got the person right and they looked it up and this wasn't someone who was hiring partner five years ago.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, just-

Sadie Jones: And all this stuff is also listed on NALP. It has to be in there. So that's a great resource.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, the NALP directory is a great place to find a lot of this stuff. All right, final question on cover letters. What if I have a contact at the organization? Can I name-drop that in the cover letter, and is that going to help at all?

Sadie Jones: I feel like if you have a contact that you know well enough, then you should be applying to them.

Alison Monahan: So, you actually send them your materials and they pass it on.

Sadie Jones: Yeah. I don't like the idea that you ... If you didn't know the person well enough that you didn't feel comfortable doing that, or you talked to them first and they put in a good word for you but then you sent your materials, that's fine too. I feel like there shouldn't be a situation where you're mentioning it to the hiring manager, and that person hasn't heard of you outside of that. That kind of says it's not really a good contact.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I guess the one exception I'm thinking of personally is when I was applying for clerkships. One of the people I'd worked with as a summer, one of the partners, encouraged me to apply to certain friends of his. In that letter, I mean, clerkships are a little different because it's more personal, but I did say, "Hey, so-and-so that I worked with this summer suggested that I apply to you because he had great things to say." But that's a little different than, "Hey, I play golf with Bob Jones, give me a job."

Sadie Jones: Yeah, I think that tone sounds fine, that's more what I was thinking, I know this big-time partner, I'm sure you'll be impressed with that. No one wants to hear that.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. If you really have a connection, I think you're right, you should use them a little bit more directly and have them actually make the call for you or pass along your materials.

Sadie Jones: I also think of as a junior person, you knew someone who summered there last summer. That's a great thing to say. You know, they had a great experience, they just finished. I think that makes sense. I go to the same law school ...

Alison Monahan: That you talked to them, they really highly recommended the firm. But then you're really complimenting the firm, you're not just complimenting yourself.

Sadie Jones: Exactly.

Alison Monahan: Again, drop something specific. I know they had a great experience working with partner X, they really enjoyed their work on case Y ... It looks like-

Sadie Jones: Yeah, you really knew.

Alison Monahan: You're going to look at that. All right, let's wrap up with a few quick miscellaneous things. When do people need to send a transcript, and does that have to be an official transcript, or is some copy okay?

Sadie Jones: I would send a transcript when you send in your application. If you don't do that, all it creates is another step for that person to have to ask you for it, because there's no way they don't want to see your transcript.

Alison Monahan: Right. It's probably going to be in their system, right, when you upload stuff.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, exactly. I think you should never submit an application without a transcript. That goes straight through being a lateral. We always ask for transcripts. It makes it easier to just do it right off the bat. It doesn't need to be an official transcript. It can be an unofficial transcript.

Alison Monahan: As long as you don't change the grades.

Sadie Jones: I was going to say, I actually had an experience where that happened, and we obviously in the end, when we make the offer or they're coming, we order an official transcript and we compare it.

Alison Monahan: Duh.

Sadie Jones: That is worst-case scenario, really serious ethical issue. Obviously don't change the grades. I think there's always a way to print out an unofficial one. That looks better than just writing a list of your classes and grades. I don't really like how that looks, either.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, that doesn't look official at all. If it's unofficial, it should still look pretty official.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, so I think that's fine. You don't need to be ordering a bunch of official copies.

Alison Monahan: What about writing samples? Is that something people should typically expect to submit initially or later in the process, or maybe even not at all?

Sadie Jones: I wouldn't submit it initially. I would probably ask them if they want a writing sample, or offer it later. I feel like it's a lot of paper and most likely we're not reading it unless you get further in the process anyway. People might ask you for one, but I think initially, cover letter, resume, and transcript is all you need.

Alison Monahan: Perfect. Keep it simple.

Sadie Jones: Yup.

Alison Monahan: All right. My final question, is it ever okay to follow up if you just didn't get a response? Or do you just have to let it go if they're completely ignoring you?

Sadie Jones: I think it's okay to follow up once a reasonable amount of time has gone by.

Alison Monahan: Not two days.

Sadie Jones: Yeah. You don't want to be bugging people. Things take time. Most likely, if you're going through the process and if you've gotten through the initial especially, they'll give you information on a timeline. I also think if you talk to the person, it's fine to say, "What's your timeline?" If it's been two or three weeks and you haven't heard anything, I think that's fine to check in casually. You should never not hear back from someone. That says something bad on their end.

Alison Monahan: Right.

Sadie Jones: I would say it's fine. I just think be careful that you're not being any kind of a pest in a situation where they are dealing with hundreds of candidates.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. You're not necessarily ... You personally are not probably their very highest priority that day.

Sadie Jones: Exactly. So, I think just keep them in mind.

Alison Monahan: And there's a system. I mean, there's a process.

Sadie Jones: Exactly. Sometimes the process gets broken or dropped, or it's always good to reiterate how interested you are. If you really are and this is your top choice, that's great. But do it once.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, for sure. All right. With that, unfortunately we are out of time. Thank you so much for joining us.

Sadie Jones: Thank you for having me.

Alison Monahan: If you'd like personal help on your resume or cover letter, or on interviewing or job search strategy, visit [CareerDicta.com](https://www.careerdicta.com) and we'd be happy to help. If you enjoyed this episode of the Law School Toolbox podcast, please take a second to leave a review and rating [on iTunes](https://www.apple.com/itunes/ratings). If you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to reach out to Lee or Alison at Lee@LawSchoolToolbox.com or Alison@LawSchoolToolbox.com or you can always contact us via our website [contact form at LawSchoolToolbox.com](https://www.lawschooltoolbox.com/contact). Thanks for listening. We'll talk soon, and good luck with your job hunt.

Resources:

- [CareerDicta.com](https://www.careerdicta.com)
- [Podcast Episode 105: OCI Basics with an Ex-BigLaw Recruiter](#)
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