



Episode 82: The Happy Lawyer Project with Guest Okeoma Moronu

Alison Monahan: Welcome to the Law School Toolbox Podcast. Today we're talking with Okeoma Moronu, which I'm probably mis-pronouncing which I apologize. He was a big law, mid-level associate and is creator of the Happy Lawyer Project. Your Law School Tool box host is Alison Monahan. Normally I'm here with Lee Burgess. We are here to demystify the law school and early legal career experience so you'll be the best law student and lawyer you can be. We are the co-creators of the Law School Toolbox, the Bar Exam toolbox and the Catapult Career Conference and I also run the Girls Guide to Law school. If you enjoy the show, please leave a review on iTunes and if you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to us. You can always reach us via the contact form on lawschooltoolbox.com and we would love to hear from you. With that, let's get started.

Welcome back. Today, we're talking with Okeoma Moronu, a big law mid-level associate and creator of The Happy Lawyer project. Welcome. Well, first off, let's get this out of the way. Do you really think lawyers can actually be happy? Is that allowed?

Okeoma Moronu: I actually love that question because I honestly think people believe they're not allowed to be happy. People come into the profession thinking that part of what they're signing on for is this unhappiness.

Alison Monahan: Right, why do you think that is? Is it just sort of media representations or is there something underlying this?

Okeoma Moronu: I think there's a lot to it. I think part of it has to do with the idea that we believe we're being compensated with money and so we're giving up happiness for money and the idea that you could both be happy and have a lot of money is also kind of a weird thing socially and culturally.

Alison Monahan: Right. It's funny. I think the happiest big law partners I know are the ones who care the most about money.

Okeoma Moronu: Yeah, no, it's very interesting because there are both people who care about money, and those who don't care about money. I think that people who care about money stay in it and make the money but that's not what makes them happy.

Alison Monahan: I used to think that but I worked with this partner who is one of the happiest lawyers I know and I was like, why do you keep doing this? She's like, I just really

like having nice stuff and I realized my father wasn't going to buy it my whole life. I was like, well, that's one answer.

Okeoma Moronu: Well, yes, so the stuff makes her happy, right? Money is always just a tool.

Alison Monahan: Sure.

Okeoma Moronu: I think you have to have a vision for what you want your life to look like. The money can facilitate that vision. If you're in it just for the money, no one wants to just count the dollar bills in their bank account, you know?

Alison Monahan: No, also, what I tell people is, if you really want to make a lot of money, there are probably easier ways to do it.

Okeoma Moronu: Also true. There's a lot of ways to make money but I think that that idea that we have to sacrifice our happiness to make money is one that gets people going down the wrong road.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean, that was one of the things I felt like when I was a big law associate is that, somehow it was almost like they had bought my entire life because they were paying me so much. I felt like at some point, I didn't have any ownership of my time.

Okeoma Moronu: I think that can be really true for a lot of young associates and one of the big secrets of big law is that it gets so much better.

Alison Monahan: Let's talk about that because you are a bit of a rarity, statistically speaking. What year, you're like a fifth-year, sixth-year or something like that?

Okeoma Moronu: I'm a sixth year.

Alison Monahan: Okay, so you're a sixth-year associate in big law so already you're past the 80% burn-out leave rate. I think it's the first three to five years something like 80% of associates leave. Not only are you a sixth year which means you've made it past the majority of most associates, you're also a woman, and a minority, and the mother of two kids. Tell me about this. How are you making it work?

Okeoma Moronu: It's funny because I didn't find it that hard to make it work because I never saw myself being here this long.

Alison Monahan: Okay.

Okeoma Moronu: I'm somebody who has always been beholden to my priorities, not to my schedule.

Alison Monahan: Okay, explain that.

Okeoma Moronu: I was, for some people, they feel very clear that they want to do things in their career by a certain amount of time.

Alison Monahan: Okay, like by 30, I have to be a partner.

Okeoma Moronu: Correct, or making a certain amount of money or having a certain amount of clients or doing something like they feel like is going to catapult their life career wise. For me, I was always very clear that I wanted to be a mother. I wanted to travel well. I wanted to eat well. I never thought that big law was going to be the thing that allowed me to do that. It wasn't really a thought about the how. I knew that coming out of Columbia, I would always have ways to make money, you know? That wasn't something I was concerned about. I was always going to try and follow the easiest way to make that money. I know you're thinking big law could not possibly be the easiest way to make that money but for me, at the time, it was. I came out of law school right after the recession.

Alison Monahan: Mm-hmm

Okeoma Moronu: There weren't that many jobs.

Alison Monahan: Sure.

Okeoma Moronu: There weren't many jobs that were paying what big law was paying and I, at that point, like a lot of law students, didn't know what else I could do with a degree.

Alison Monahan: Of course, why would you?

Okeoma Moronu: Of course not, no, I was definitely one of those people who went to law school because I thought it would, don't kill me now, open doors. I was good at reading.

Alison Monahan: That's great. I went to law school because I was good at reading.

Okeoma Moronu: I love to read. I like to learn. All these really ridiculous reasons to take out a quarter of a million dollars of debt.

Alison Monahan: In some ways. I struggle with that because I sort of went to law school in a lot of ways just because I thought I would be good at it and I thought I could make a living. Is that a good enough reason? I'm not sure. I think that's why a lot of people are there.

Okeoma Moronu: Yes, and I think that if you are correct in that assessment of yourself, then it works out, right? If you're correct in that assessment and you're ranked high

enough in your class, then it does open doors. You are going to do all right. I think for people, not everyone can be in the top 25%. That's statistically how that works.

Alison Monahan: Right.

Okeoma Moronu: Some people are wrong in that assessment and for those people, you need to go with real clarity about what you think that degree is going to get you and so it really is about going in with a clear plan about what classes you're going to take. How are you going to leverage the resources and the connections that you can make while you're at law school? If you're not going to be in the top of your class, you're going to have to hustle a little harder to figure out what you're going to do next. There's lots of things you can do. There's lots of people who are in the bottom half of law schools who have very happy, successful careers, but the people who are able to do that are the people who went in with real clarity on what they were going to do who were a little bit misguided about how well they thought they were going to do.

Alison Monahan: Well, I think that helps. If I think back, you know, I went to Columbia and graduated in the middle of a boom where anyone who was breathing could basically get a big law job but I still think the people who have ended up being the most content with their career path are the people who went in with the clearest idea of what they were looking for. The people like me who were kind of like, oh, yeah, I'll be good at this. I can make a living but I didn't really have a great idea of what I was going to do or some great passion for an area of the law or anything like that. We're the people who kind of have meandered into different options. Not like we're unhappy but I think, for example, of a friend who was a year below me and knew from the start she wanted to be a federal public defender. That was her entire focus was getting that job, getting that experience, taking those classes. Now, she's a federal public defender. I actually saw her a few weeks ago, and she's extremely happy.

Okeoma Moronu: Absolutely and that makes sense. I couldn't agree more because anybody who knows what they want to do and is able to accomplish it is going to be happier than people who are kind of just moving forward with little clarity or little purpose.

Alison Monahan: I think the thing that I didn't realize and I think probably a lot of other people don't realize is at these top schools is, you basically are on this conveyor belt to a destination from day one. If that is not the destination that you think might be the best option for you, you're facing an uphill battle to do something else. There's nothing wrong with sort of getting on this conveyor belt and having someone pay you a lot of money but I think you should have to be ... I didn't understand how quickly those decisions were going to start having to be made.

Okeoma Moronu: Yeah. I'd be interested to know how it is now because I think your experience and my experience were probably very different because I came in when there weren't jobs. Something like, it was only 60% of us were actually gainfully employed when I graduated.

Alison Monahan: Wow, that's pretty astonishing.

Okeoma Moronu: Another 20 to 30% were employed through Columbia sponsored fellowships and all sorts of-

Alison Monahan: Kind of fake jobs.

Okeoma Moronu: Yes, correct. Most of those people have now done fine now that the economy is doing much better. None of them who thought they wanted to be in big law have been able to get back into big law because I think that's a really hard transition to make.

Alison Monahan: I think that's right. Clearly the path is, you do the summer associate position, you go to that firm. For me, I had weird summer associate positions and never actually went, the firm I ended up working for was not one I summered at but I think that's a lot harder these days.

Okeoma Moronu: Yes, definitely. I know that even some firms are bringing back 1L summers which I have mixed feelings about.

Alison Monahan: I did that. It was fun. It was a lot of money. It might not have been the best long-term career choice just because again, it put me on this path that basically there was very little way to get out of. Your 1L summer is really the chance. If you think that you're going to take a big law job but maybe you want to transition to something else later, that's really your chance to explore a different option before you're on this very pre-professional track.

Okeoma Moronu: Exactly but I also find it really challenging to interview for 1L summer positions because I feel like they know so little about-

Alison Monahan: I knew nothing.

Okeoma Moronu: Correct.

Alison Monahan: I think of assignments that they gave me. I remember one where it was some contract thing. I had never seen contracts before in my life. They just don't tell you about that at law school. The senior associate gave me some assignment to research this question and I did my research and I came back to him after a couple of hours and he says, how sure are you that this is right. I'm like, well, I've been to one year of law school and spent an hour on it. I think it's right, why? He's like, well, I'm not sure I have time to check your work and I'm getting

ready to put it in a brief. You're just like, oh, my God. Hello. Eye opening, this is crazy. What have I gotten into.

Okeoma Moronu: Correct but to be fair, part of the legal and the big law experience is getting used to that feeling.

Alison Monahan: Oh, exactly. It was very, it was really useful. It's not like you stop feeling that way.

Okeoma Moronu: I always get that question from junior associates who ask me, when does it go away? I'm like, oh, no, you just get better at having that stomach feeling.

Alison Monahan: I think that's really true and this is something that we talk to even law students about or young lawyers. This is a difficult profession and you're going to be asked hard things that are challenging. It's not like you're going to suddenly be really comfortable. You're never going to have easy questions. That's not why someone is paying you so much money for this.

Okeoma Moronu: Correct and when you start getting easy questions, it means that you're not growing in your job and probably something has gone wrong.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. When somebody is like, I'm pretty sure we already know the answer to this but can you go check it out. You're like, hmm, maybe they don't really trust my judgement.

Okeoma Moronu: Exactly. That's exactly right. If you're one of the first-year associates who's getting the easy assignments who feels that your assignment is easy, it's probably not a good sign. You want to be the one who people are giving the hard stuff to.

Alison Monahan: Yeah and particularly, I think, as a young associate, at least as a litigator. I don't know if it's true on the corporate side but you sometimes get these questions that the people above you are pretty sure there's not actually an answer to but someone has to go track down the fact that there is no answer or the answer is not what we want. You just go on these wild goose chases for days and days and you're not finding anything and you're feeling like the stupidest person on earth and then you go and report back and they're like, yeah, that's pretty much what we expected. It's like, well, why didn't you tell me that. Yeah, they never do. They never tell you.

Okeoma Moronu: That's the same. I think law is law and big law is, in some ways, big law is big law.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, what advice would you have for young associates who are trying to figure out, okay, I'm in this situation, I like some parts of it. I don't like some parts of it.

I'm not sure if it's the right fit for me. What should people be thinking about here?

Okeoma Moronu: I think that people need to have a really good idea of, even what you said is really important. To know what parts of it they like, what parts they don't like, where their strengths are. Everyone is going to be happiest in life when they're playing to their strengths. It's easier to be successful if you're really leveraging your strengths. I think, as lawyers, we can get really focused on our weaknesses and feeling like we should be working really hard to get better at that so we can be this well-rounded super lawyer. I think that the associates I find that I like to work with the best are the ones who I know what they're really good at. When you're a junior associate you don't necessarily know what you're good at yet, but once you start to become a third, fourth, fifth year, you can kind of start to see where your career could be going and to start talking to people about what it really is like to have the lifestyle. I think that's the piece that's hard for people. I always hear people say, I look at partners and that's not the life I want.

Alison Monahan: Right, that was pretty much my decision point.

Okeoma Moronu: Yeah, and that's completely fair but as you think about how much the law has changed and how much our lifestyles and lifestyle expectations have changed, you have to start to project forward and think, what does the junior partnership look like? What are the senior associates? How are they living their life? They're going to set the lifestyle benchmark.

Alison Monahan: Mm-hmm

Okeoma Moronu: Perhaps there is a change that could be coming that you're not seeing yet and perhaps that people are talking about it not necessarily to you. You want to start building alliances and relationships with people who seem to be happy and seem to be enjoying their lives, and see if that's true. If it is true, figure out how they did it. There's always people who have, through hard work, through leveraging technology, though the relationships they have, kind of created little silos and situations that you may not know about that are a life that you could conceive of living.

Alison Monahan: I think a lot of it has to do with being really good at what you do. That goes back to what you were saying about playing to your strengths and you really need to be a specialist, basically. What you specialize in, ideally, needs to be valuable to at least a few people in your firm. That's really, at least I found, that's really where you can start leveraging, how do you want to live? Do you want to work from home? Do you want to do whatever? You need to have something to back that up.

Okeoma Moronu: Absolutely. While the reward for good work is more work, eventually the reward for good work becomes a little bit more freedom and autonomy.

Alison Monahan: Right and I think that's the key point. Everything I've read on workplace satisfaction says that one of the key predictors of who's going to be satisfied in their job is having autonomy or at least a feeling of autonomy.

Okeoma Moronu: Yes. Along with that, I think a lot of it has to do with the relationships you have. Workplace satisfaction also comes with feeling like you're appreciated, acknowledged and ...

Alison Monahan: All those things that big law firms are so great at doing.

Okeoma Moronu: This is the ... I think that in a lot of ways, big law created the perfect environment for people to be unhappy, not intentionally, but what they thought were good ideas for motivating people are absolutely not.

Alison Monahan: Right well, for example, oh, we'll just pay you a bonus at the end of the year and then you'll be happy. It's like no, you're already making enough money that another \$10,000 or \$15,000, all that is is a way to keep score about whether someone else is getting more than you. It's not going to make you happy.

Okeoma Moronu: The studies have actually shown that when you tie compensation to work, people are less likely to find the work to be satisfying because they are in it just to make the money.

Alison Monahan: I could literally, by the end of each year, I could tell you to the quarter-hour, how many hours I needed to bill to hit a certain bonus level and was I going to come in extra? No.

Okeoma Moronu: Exactly, exactly and nobody in that situation is fulfilled. Nobody.

Alison Monahan: It's just this game. I remember one year I think I billed half an hour extra on the last day to hit some level and I was just like, yes, they did not get it... I was actually mad about the half-hour but I was like, well, at least they got less than an hour extra of my time. That's a horrible attitude.

Okeoma Moronu: It is and to be fair, if you read the research about how the billing started and why the compensation, why they started lockstep comp, it all started, I think, at least in my reading, with good intentions.

Alison Monahan: oh, yeah, it just sort of spiraled out of control.

Okeoma Moronu: Yes, and more and more, you see associates saying that they would take a pay cut for more autonomy. They would take a pay cut for more freedom, for more flexibility.

Alison Monahan: Oh, my gosh. For me it was just insane. It was like, I have to go to my office and sit there even though all my calls are on the phone and I'm not seeing anyone in

person for weeks on end, except my secretary and I still am expected to go sit in my office instead of working from wherever I want to. I'm like, this is complete madness.

Okeoma Moronu: Yeah and I think that that's changing.

Alison Monahan: Oh, I agree.

Okeoma Moronu: One of the downsides, obviously, of being attached 24/7 to your phone is that you're on call 24/7 but it does mean that once you get better at anticipating your deal flow, at least on the corporate side, it is easier to take vacations, extended vacations even, if you're willing to do a little bit of work while you're away.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think a lot of this is about learning how to manage expectation and if you can get good at, also using technology, both to manage those expectations and to sometimes make it appear that maybe you're doing things that you're not necessarily doing at that exact moment, I think it can be a really valuable skill set for an associate or really anyone working in the law.

Okeoma Moronu: Yes, I like that you said doing things not where you're ...

Alison Monahan: Well, I'm thinking, nothing nefarious, but I'm thinking something like Boomerang. Boomerang, if you're not familiar with it, it's a service you can use to send an email at a different time. For example, my sister, who manages people at her job, she doesn't want to make, in opposition to the law firm life, she doesn't want to make her people feel like they should be working all the time even though she's working all the time. She, for example, might be working at midnight but she'll Boomerang at eight in the morning so the person working for her doesn't have this sense that they should be responding. You can use that in a variety of ways.

Okeoma Moronu: I used to do the same thing. I worked from, I was a flex-time schedule at my prior firm so I worked at home a couple days a week. For me, the early hours, when my kids were asleep was when I could kind of start looking at email but I didn't want people to get used to me responding to email at six and seven in the morning so I would schedule stuff to start going out at the beginning of the work day but that meant that I could kind of sit with my kids and take them to school during that hour and a half time when I knew emails were being sent out.

Alison Monahan: Right and I think that is, that sort of thing is developing more and more. If you're smart about managing your time and managing other people's expectations, I think you can create these pockets and windows for yourself, if you're smart about it.

Okeoma Moronu: Setting boundaries is really important and really, really hard for lawyers.

Alison Monahan: Oh, gosh, yeah. Trying to say no to someone who wants to give you more work. That was a skill I counselled numerous co-workers on. You can't take on this project, you're already maxed out. They're like, well I have to. It's like, you can't. You can't do this. Also, this is not really your problem. Someone else is being a bad manager and here's how you need to deal with that situation and put it back on them to figure out this problem because you can't work 48 hours a day.

Okeoma Moronu: Let's talk about management in law firms and the lack of training in people management and project management and how that is so much of our job. It's one of my favorite parts of the job. I love project management. I loved wedding planning because I loved orchestrating kind of this large, all moving pieces, all the parts, all the contracts.

Alison Monahan: Have you done any sort of outside education or training on this or is it just something that you're naturally drawn to?

Okeoma Moronu: It was something I was naturally drawn to and then I started doing a lot of reading on and actually started doing training in my free time and recently taken to the head, the partner in my firm, the managing partner of my group and asked if they'd be willing to kind of pay for some it and they obviously said yes.

Alison Monahan: Another totally awesome strategy that too few people employ when they're working in a law firm or other large organization that has money for your education and is very happy to give it to you.

Okeoma Moronu: You have no idea how little that happens and how excited partners are to see people being engaged in their own development.

Alison Monahan: Oh, yeah.

Okeoma Moronu: They do put on all these CLE's, all these professional development workshops.

Alison Monahan: Some of them have people in house, I've had friends who did this and they're like, no one ever comes to talk to me. I don't understand, why are these people not interested in their own careers?

Okeoma Moronu: Yep and then people pick the things they think they're supposed to go to or should go to. They think very within the box. Literally, I just look for things I would be interested in doing and I see if the firm would pay for it. It does benefit them for me to be better at leadership. Then, I can bring it in house and do little trainings and lunch and they reap the benefits and I reap the benefits whether I stay with them or if I go somewhere else.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. You have to be, you have to basically be managing your own career. I think it's Reed Hoffman, the founder of Linked In who wrote the

startup of you which is basically about treating your career as an entrepreneur would treat their business and it's the same thing.

Okeoma Moronu: I think one of the issues that we have is that with lawyers, we start our lawyers out, and I think so many law schools do this, where you come to law school and from the very first semester, you get no choice.

Alison Monahan: Right, you're just told what to do.

Okeoma Moronu: Yep and then the next semester they let you pick one class.

Alison Monahan: If you're lucky, yeah.

Okeoma Moronu: There is that conveyor belt. Someone is going to make decisions for you and especially once you come into big law. Your CLE's are figured out for you. They tell you when to go. They tell you what you need. They pay them for you. There's very little thought into your progression. You get moved up to a second year.

Alison Monahan: When the clock changes they're like, congratulations, it's January 1st, you've just advanced.

Okeoma Moronu: Exactly so people become very passive in their own careers and they don't realize that meanwhile, people who are, I don't even know what kind of jobs other people have but I'm constantly shocked by my friends who didn't go to law school, who didn't go to grad school who will have one job and then quit and go into a totally different industry. I'm like, how did you do that? How did you know that job even existed? As far as I'm concerned, there was a litigator and there are corporate attorney's and then there are people who work in the government. Then, there's non-profits and that's basically the four kinds of lawyers.

Alison Monahan: No exactly and I think that's the impression a lot of people have and the reality is, once you start talking, once you get in the real-world and start talking to actual attorney's, you're like, oh, wow, you can specialize in that or this or this? You find out there's this incredible array of things that you were never aware of existing. I think some people are totally miserable doing one thing but it might be the case that you're perfectly happy doing something else. A friend of mine, who was a big law litigator realized she hated fighting. She's like, I went to Yale. No one ever asked me if I liked to fight all the time when I told them I was going into litigation. I feel like maybe someone should have followed up on this a little more but okay. Anyway, she basically spent the better part of a year really exploring. What do these other options look like? She did a volunteer stint of the DA's office and ends up basically working in a start-up doing their law department stuff and loves it.

Okeoma Moronu: That's a great story. It's so interesting to me that on both sides, no one asked her and she never asked herself.

Alison Monahan: It never occurred to me. No one, I was like, basically your choice at Columbia is like, oh, are you going to do corporate or litigation and I was like, well, I didn't really like contracts so I guess I'll do litigation. That's the extent of it. That's crazy. You shouldn't be making career choices because you didn't like once class. It's just nuts.

Okeoma Moronu: Not that the classes are even a good indicator of what you would be doing on a day-to-day.

Alison Monahan: Oh, yeah, I'm sure I've dealt with as many contracts on the litigation side as you do on the corporate side just when they go bad.

Okeoma Moronu: I never thought about that. That's totally true.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, the one jury trial I did was literally a contract, it was a contract case. What does this contract mean?

Okeoma Moronu: It's always funny when I talk to litigators and the way litigators read contracts and the way transactional corporate attorney's read contracts. It's always a funny conversation because you guys are definitely more likely to see the potential pitfalls in our drafting.

Alison Monahan: Oh, I think this, I don't remember. It's been a while but I literally think this case came down to the placement of a comma.

Okeoma Moronu: Mm-hmm

Alison Monahan: It's like, no one thought about this. We all know. The lawyers know, the client knows, the judge knows, the jury knows. Everybody knows no one was thinking about this but it is what it is. We work with the material we are given.

Okeoma Moronu: We try to do our best to give you guys good material but it's hard to think of everything.

Alison Monahan: That's what makes the law interesting. It's also, when you think about the conversation we're having compared to your first-year contracts class, it's almost laughable what people are learning.

Okeoma Moronu: Have you seen, you work and talk to a lot more law students than I do, but have you seen a change at law schools at all in that direction? I know there's been conversations that people want to have more real world application.

Alison Monahan: I think some schools are starting to change in certain ways that are positive. On the whole, I would say they are still pretty much the same as they've always been. I think certain schools like Georgetown comes to mind, they have a very robust first-year program that tries to help students figure out, well, what is a good fit for me. Not just, do you want to do litigation or corporate. Really, what are my values? What are my goals? What's going to make me happy? I think that's a great start. I think they also do some stuff about self-management and mindfulness and all this sort of happiness training stuff that we've, I'm sure, both read which I think is great. A legal career is a long career. It's a lot of stress and that sort of thing and I think giving people the skills to deal with that earlier really is only going to help in the end.

Okeoma Moronu: That makes me really happy to hear because the reason I started the happy lawyer project is because I do feel like we don't give people these skills and some of the best people in the profession who I know personally, leave because they don't have these skills, not because they wouldn't be great lawyers or great advocates for their clients. I think when only a certain personality type is staying in the law, we do a disservice to the profession.

Alison Monahan: I think that's absolutely right. I think this is essentially, on some level, a helping profession and I'm not sure that the lawyers who stay are necessarily the ones who view it that way. Tell me more about The Happy Lawyer Project because we are actually almost running out of time and I do want to hear more about this.

Okeoma Moronu: Yeah, so The Happy Lawyer Project is just a passion project of mine that I started to create platform to talk to lawyers who are happy and figure out what the skills and tools and tips they have are. I love having these conversations and I find them uplifting and inspirational because the hardest part, for me, about being a lawyer is hanging out with other lawyers.

Okeoma Moronu: They're just not the happiest people. That's not necessarily, it doesn't have to be the case and with technology being what it is, I've just made some of the best friends I thought, it's unbelievable the quality of people I've met through this podcast that I started. Now, hopefully in the next year, I'm going to build it out so I can start bringing people together more to talk about how they're doing what they're doing and how young lawyers can kind of change the way we practice law so that we build happiness into the equation.

Alison Monahan: What kind of themes are emerging from the people that you talk to?

Okeoma Moronu: A lot of the themes that we talked about today. It's about, one believing that you can be happy in the law. Two, it's doing thing that make you feel good, accomplishing things. It sucks to be bad at things and it sucks to fail at things so

it's good to do things within your strengths that you can be good at and can get better at. It's good to have a clear vision for where you're going. To have goals, to be able to accomplish those goals. I think a lot of people leave big law because they say, I don't want to be a partner but then they don't know why they're there because they're not working towards anything. They're working towards the paycheck.

Alison Monahan: Right and at some point, that's probably not super fulfilling for most people.

Okeoma Moronu: Yup and then last, but not least, it's living a life that's in alignment with what your vision is for where you're going. I think people think they want to have this certain type of life, whether it's having kids, whether it's not having kids, whether it's going on vacations, whether it's living in tiny house on a ranch in Montana. I don't know what your vision for your life is but the people who are really happy have started crafting a career that actually lines up with that. It sounds so, so, obvious but I'm constantly surprised by the number of young lawyers that I talk to who I say, where do you see yourself in five years. You don't necessarily need to know exactly where you are but you need to have had some thought about the direction you're headed. For so many of them, the first thing they say is where they want to be in their careers and I'm like, but you have a whole life. How does that fit into your whole life? They're like, what do you mean?

Alison Monahan: Right, I have a life? The other thing I see sometimes when we ask people stuff like that is they tell you what they don't want to be doing.

Okeoma Moronu: Yup.

Alison Monahan: They're like, well, I know I don't want to be in big law. It's like, okay, well, that's good information but that's not really, you're just going to be in an abyss? What else is out there? What does this look like for you? I hate the five-year question. Leah and I always joke. Actually, it's kind of ironic because we started, I just got a thing saying my Tumblr for The Girls Guide to Law School is five years old. If you'd asked me five years ago, when I started that Tumblr, would my life look like it does now? I'd have been like, no. I value the insight that you need to at least be having some idea of what you're looking for or you're just going to end up in some random place that you're never, not probably what you want.

Okeoma Moronu: There is a weird balance that I also struggle with holding between having a vision for my life but not holding onto it so tightly that it becomes a limiting belief around my life.

Alison Monahan: Right.

Okeoma Moronu: I totally take your point because I also never, ever, ever, if you had asked me as a first-year associate if I would be in big law five years down the road I would have said absolutely not.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think what you said earlier, something about, I can't remember exactly how you put it. It was very well phrased but something about planning around your priorities, not around some outcome or something like that, I think is a good way of looking at it. You were clear on what you wanted your life to look like in at least broad outline and if the big law job fits into that, fantastic.

Okeoma Moronu: Yep, when it stops serving my life goals, that's when I'm done.

Alison Monahan: Right and that's what the judge who I worked for said. He was like, go to big law, make it work and then just make sure you can leave when you want to leave because that day will probably come for most people, maybe not, but most likely so just don't put yourself in a, particularly a financial position where you cannot leave if you decide to leave. I think that's good advice for everything.

Okeoma Moronu: That's the absolute key. The financial piece is so important.

Alison Monahan: We could do an entire other episode on that. Maybe we should but unfortunately, we are out of time. If people want to find out about The Happy Lawyer Project, how can they do that?

Okeoma Moronu: Yeah, the best place to reach me is on the website at www.thehappylawyerproject.com.

Alison Monahan: That's a podcast, right?

Okeoma Moronu: It is a podcast and the website should be launching this month so you can check out more there.

Alison Monahan: Congratulations. Awesome.

Okeoma Moronu: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Well, I'm going to have to subscribe to the podcast. Despite running a podcast, I admit I hardly listen to them but I will put them on the list of people I will listen to.

Thank you so much for your time. We really appreciate it. If you guys enjoyed this episode of The Law School Toolbox podcast, please take a second to leave a review and rating on iTunes or your favorite podcast listening app. We would really appreciate it and be sure to subscribe so you don't miss anything. We release new episodes on Monday. If you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to reach out to me, Alison, one L,

Alison@lawschooltoolbox.com or you can always contact us via our website contact form at lawschooltoolbox.com. Thanks for listening and we'll talk soon.