



Episode 88: Self Care - Keeping your Mojo in Law School

- Lee Burgess: Welcome to the Law School Toolbox Podcast. Today we're talking about keeping your mojo in law school as things get challenging, since we have been hearing from a lot of stressed out law students lately. Your Law School Toolbox hosts are Alison Monahan, and Lee Burgess. That's me. We're 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're the co-creators of the Law School Toolbox, the Bar Exam Toolbox, and the Catapult Conference. Alison also runs 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 reach us via the contact form on LawSchoolToolbox.com and we'd love to hear from you. With that, let's get started.
- Alison Monahan: Welcome back. Today we're talking about keeping your mojo in law school, in the face of lots of challenges and, shall we say, growth experiences. Let's be honest, Lee. We're getting a lot of mail right now from stressed out law students.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: I don't know whether it's because it's second semester and people have grades, or every time we get on the internet there's even more disturbing political news. Maybe it's winter that's taking its toll, but I feel like a lot of people are really stressed out and anxious right now. How about you?
- Lee Burgess: I think that that's totally true. I mean, I love reading. Even I was reading the New York Times this morning and I love scrolling down where it's like, "News That Will Make You Feel Good," where they've got a whole section. It's like everybody's acknowledging that the world is a little stressed out outside of law school, which just makes law school even worse, because everybody's stressed out in law school no matter what.
- Alison Monahan: No. I feel like the background level of stress just in the entire universe right now is probably actually unprecedented.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. You know, we can't change that, unfortunately.
- Alison Monahan: Unfortunately.
- Lee Burgess: The world is going to happen no matter what we do, but we can talk about practical ways to keep it together while you're in law school, so you can enjoy

the journey as much as you can, and arrive at a landing place where you would like. We don't want you to be miserable for three years, or even miserable as a lawyer. We want you to get the most that you can out of this experience, and set yourself up for career success in the end.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think that's a key point to keep in mind. Sometimes you're really stressed out in law school but you still have that feeling of, "Oh, you know, I'm working hard, but it's something that I'm excited to work at. I feel like I'm going to end up in the place that I want to be, in the job I want to be in." Hopefully the salary you want to be at. Then there's a situation where, you know, things are going poorly and you feel like maybe you're going off-track, and then you're going to end up in someplace you don't even want to be in.

We're going to talk a little bit more later about that, but, the first line of defense: What's the stuff everybody knows but nobody does?

Lee Burgess: I mean, except for me. I'm perfect. I would do any of these.

Alison Monahan: Right. I know you're like, "Oh, I've got a cold. My kid's puking. I'm coughing. I haven't slept."

Lee Burgess: Yeah. All the things that we know we need to be doing are eating well, because if you put crummy things into your body, crummy things usually happen. We're supposed to be exercising and doing positive exercise, like yoga or a running program that gives you endorphins or something like that. Then something that you and I oftentimes are terrible at is getting enough sleep.

Alison Monahan: Yup. I think a lot of people in law school are terrible at that, as are a lot of lawyers.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: I think law school, the legal profession probably attracts a very type A type of personality, and the reality is, it's really hard to turn that off. I had chronic insomnia pretty much the whole time I was in law school. Part of it I think was being in New York, but a lot of it was just , if you're studying all day and you're really thinking, and your brain's working a lot, and you're trying to put these pieces together, it can be very, very difficult to decompress and actually wind down and go to sleep in the limited time that you have available to sleep.

Lee Burgess: So true. I think to date ourselves, it's a little more challenging even now, since a lot of us have at times really terrible habits now of bringing our laptops to bed, or phones to bed, and the last thing...

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I've been on the late night Twitter train. It's literally a compulsion. Every night I'm like, "Okay, I'm not going to do it. I'm not going to do it. I'm just going to set my alarm, then I'm going to go take out my contacts, and then I'm going to come back and I'm going to put on my calming lavender lotion, and then I'm going to go straight to bed." Then I look at it, and then it's another hour, and I'm all riled up about all the crazy stuff that's happening, and retweeting a bunch, having conversations. I literally cannot stop. I admit it. I'm a night-time Twitter addict. I admit it.

Lee Burgess: It's really hard, and I even had an experience a couple of weeks ago where I really try and not look at Facebook and things like that right before bed, but I did, and somebody I know posted something very personal and very, kind of upsetting about something that was going on in their life. Then you read this, and you can't really do anything about it. Now you have this information, and then you turn the light off, and it's all you can think about. It's not that I didn't want to share in what she was going through, but I probably didn't need to share it at 10:00 at night.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. You probably could have waited till the next morning to send an email that's like, "Oh my gosh. I'm so sorry you're going through this. Is there anything I can do? Would you like me to bring food over?" You know?

Lee Burgess: You know, it's very challenging to manage the information, because I think law students and lawyers, we're researchers. We like to collect a lot of information, but sometimes that information isn't helping us, especially when it comes to winding down.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. It's funny, a friend of mine who actually is a lawyer, she posted on Facebook yesterday evening, and was like, "So, I've been offline all day, but I kind of have the sense that today is maybe one of those days I should just take a break from the news, huh?" Literally every person on the thread was like, "Don't even look. Just don't even look." You know, "This is not a day you need to be totally up to speed. Just go to sleep. You can think about it in the morning." I think that's probably right, you know? We all have to keep ourselves under control with these things.

Lee Burgess: It's hard, and even if you don't find yourself going down the news or the social media rabbit hole, there's all of this study out there right now about blue lights, and that that makes it hard for us to fall asleep, or your body doesn't know that you should be falling asleep, and of course I've got a blue light filter on my computer, but that doesn't mean that it's a good idea for me to be staring at a screen before bed.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. I have the one on my iPhone that makes it more red, but I'm still reading Twitter at one in the morning.

Lee Burgess: Right. One of the things that I have been trying to do since the New Year, although I do it in spurts, is really be much better about shutting off the technology and just reading before bed. It's amazing how much better I sleep. You would think that would make me do it every single night, but you know, I still have my moments. But it is almost like a comforting meditation, to read a tangible book that doesn't have a backlight to it, that doesn't have any alerts going off. It's very peaceful. Especially as the world seems to be getting noisier and noisier at an exponential rate, I'm finding that to be a bit of a safety net at night, to be able to say, "I have to go to bed early tonight. I'm just going to unplug and read [Ruth Bader Ginsburg's book](#), and pretend that this is all that's happening in the world."

Alison Monahan: You're such a nerd.

Lee Burgess: I am such a nerd. I am such a nerd. But it's really quite good, if people want to read it on your break. I think that that's part of it, too, is you really just have to start thinking about, what are those triggers for you that kind of lead you down the rabbit hole? If it's taking your phone to bed, plug your phone in in a different room.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Buy yourself an old-fashioned alarm clock.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Of course, I had tried to do that, then I think I lost the batteries or something.

Lee Burgess: Way to just continue to create stumbling blocks for yourself.

Alison Monahan: I know. Well I do remember there was a time when I actually put my phone in the other room when I went to sleep, and I did that consistently for several months, and I loved it. Then something happened and suddenly I'm back on the late night Twitter train. I don't know. But in law school I did a better job. In law school I had one book that I just read over and over at night, because it was a Pema Chodron book. I think it was called [The Places That Scare You](#), and it was just this book about meditation practice, and it's very friendly, and very easy to read. Yeah, I read that continuously basically every night for 20 minutes before I fell asleep. It worked. I should probably go buy the book again.

Lee Burgess: I think it might not be a bad idea. Don't download it on your phone, though, because then that's just...

Alison Monahan: No. You've got to go old-school. You really do. I would say the last thing I guess a lot of law students want to do is read more, but you know, it should be something light, fun, frivolous, relaxing. You know, like the biography of Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

Lee Burgess: Hey, you know, when you compare that to the news... And it's not even her whole biography. This is just her writing and speeches, so it's really easily digestible. You know, the chapters aren't particularly long, because a lot of them are just transcripts of speeches. It's interesting.

Alison Monahan: It could be inspirational.

Lee Burgess: It is. It is. It allows you to pretend that there was a different time when different things were being said. I was reading a part that they were talking about her Senate confirmation hearing, and I think she was confirmed with only three "no" votes. I was trying to imagine a world today where that would happen.

Alison Monahan: Right. That used to be pretty normal.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. It was kind of shocking to me how different the judicial process is. It's also fascinating, they're talking about right now in the book how the Court goes through and makes all of its decisions, about the different meetings they have, and how they assign out all the opinions, and I knew some of this stuff at some point, but it's quite fascinating to read all of that process, if you're nerdy like us and like to read this stuff in your free time.

Anyway, I think that reading is a great distraction, but like you said, it's hard when you've been reading case books all day, so you have to come up with something that you can do as downtime to let your mind rest. I think it's important to start evaluating what those things could be. One of the things I always love, Alison, that you have done is you oftentimes take a lot of classes.

Alison Monahan: Mm-hmm (affirmative). That's true.

Lee Burgess: You did pottery once.

Alison Monahan: I did pottery. It's very meditative, it turns out. Anything that you can kind of turn your mind off. I think exercise type of classes - as I've said that I'm imagining Jane Fonda, you know, 80s style, like aerobics. But you know, now I have a trainer, but I do boxing. I think the combination of some sort of skill-based exercise is great because if I'm not focused on what I'm doing, he's going to punch me in the face, you know? Sometimes I'll feel my mind starting to wander, and I'm turning over whatever problem, and he's counting out punches, and I'll look up and realize, "Oh my gosh. I'm about to get hit if I don't pay attention to what's going on." Or yoga is good for this. Anything that kind of gets your mind off of the other stuff you're worrying about can be good, and I mean the reality is, if you do exercise in a day, I think you're much more likely to sleep.

Lee Burgess: I think that that's very true. I went through a period of time where I did a lot of Bikram yoga, and including when I was studying for the LSAT. One of the things

about Bikram was, it was that sensory experience, because it's very hot in the room. It's hot, so you're thinking about the heat, and then you're doing all these poses, and if my mind started wandering, I literally fell over.

Alison Monahan: That's a pretty good signal.

Lee Burgess: It was a pretty good signal that I was not in a meditative state while I was doing yoga. I am no longer hardcore enough to do Bikram on a regular basis, but I still find yoga to be one of those things where you can easily tell if you're not present, because you do the wrong arm, or you fall over. I have terrible balance, so it's not that hard for me to fall over, but I need to pay attention so I don't, you know, hurt myself.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I could always tell, some days, if my mind was really scattered, and we're doing the tree pose or something, I would struggle much more than those days where I was like, "Oh, I'm so calm. I'll just focus on a point and stay like a tree." Other days nothing in the world could make me stand up on one foot.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Now that I think of it ...

Alison Monahan: Kind of the other thing ... Go ahead.

Lee Burgess: The other thing you can do this time of year is springing places. Although I know that some parts of the country it doesn't feel like spring yet, is to really try to get outdoors. You know, there's study after study after study that talks about the mental and emotional benefits of outside time, and I think when you're stuck in the library, especially as you are running furiously towards finals, a good walk in the park or a hike with friends, or anything that can get you outside and put your feet on the ground to do something different is likely going to help you feel a little more, I guess, grounded, to make the pun kind of bad.

Alison Monahan: Complete. Right. I think the reality is, it doesn't have to be, you go take a walk for an hour. You can set up your life in certain ways so that maybe you go to a coffee shop that's a little bit further away, or for me, I made sure my mailbox where I was getting packages and things like that was a decent distance away so that I felt like I was being productive. "Oh, got to go check the mail." But it at least got me 10 minutes each direction, outside, getting some fresh air. It doesn't have to be... Sometimes people I think get overwhelmed, like, "Oh, I don't have time to go hiking." We're not talking about hiking. We're talking about taking a walk around the block, or around your campus if you don't have blocks, versus just parking in the closest spot, going to class, getting back in your car, driving home, that kind of thing. Even just parking on the other side of the parking lot can give you at least a few minutes to sort of refresh your brain.

Lee Burgess: That's true. If you have free time on the weekends, and it's stuff that you like to do, that is when I think hiking or longer walks can really help you. In San

Francisco, where I was in law school, the weather turns really bad for a while, but you can drive 20 or 30 minutes outside the city and it's sunny and gorgeous. I had a non-law school friend, and every weekend towards the end of the semester I'd be like, "We have to go hiking every Saturday morning, because I need vitamin D. I need to go out of the city. I need to go be outside and get some sunshine so I can go into the city, where it's cloudy, and sit in the library." I think that really helped me, knowing that I had that carved out time. I'm not talking about being gone all day. I was back at the library at 11:00. You still had plenty of time to get your work done. It wasn't like you can't get your stuff done, but I think it is important to listen to yourself and what your body needs to make those decisions of how to use your free time, because you still do have free time. If you don't have any free time, then you're not managing your time effectively, to be honest.

Alison Monahan: Right. If you don't have any free time, you need to start making free time, because otherwise you're not using the time that you're spending studying effectively. If you're never taking any time off at all, you just wake up, study, go to bed, study all weekend, you need to talk to someone about how you can be more efficient with your time, because you're not being as efficient as you could be. You just aren't. That's the reality of it.

Lee Burgess: Right. I guess one final thing is, you know, as I drink my hot tea during this podcast, it's still cold and flu season. I think second semester, a lot of people end up getting sick, because it's the wintertime, and everybody goes away for the holidays and comes back, and it's just the cycle. You need to give yourself time to get better, because just pushing through and pretending like you're not getting sick is not a great idea. Your classmates don't want you to be there hacking all over them. You need to get rest so you don't end up being sick for a couple of weeks, or end up being on antibiotics because you let something turn into a chest infection, or whatever it might be. You need to take your health seriously and give yourself time. My opinion, it's better off to take one or two days off to get better than be sick for two and a half weeks.

Alison Monahan: Oh, for sure. I remember second semester I had literally the busiest day of my entire law school career planned out, starting from seven in the morning until 10:00 at night. I had all this stuff I had to do. I think it was the day of the PILF Auction, and I was on the committee, and I had like on, and on, and on. It was ridiculous amount of stuff I was supposed to do this day. The night before, I woke up at two in the morning with the worst food poisoning of my entire life.

Lee Burgess: Oh. That's awful.

Alison Monahan: I was literally throwing up the entire night, to the point my muscles were sore because I'd been throwing up so much. I ended up, like, "There's no way. I can't." I didn't sleep. I was throwing up all night. Ended up totally dehydrated. Ended up having to go to the Student Health Service and get re-hydrated with

IVs all day, and ended up getting called on in two classes. I wasn't there. You know, people were like, "No, she's really..." Thank god my roommate was in the class. She's like, "No, she's legitimately sick. You can get a note about how they're giving her IVs right now, but she might have to go to the hospital." Point being, I ended up not doing a single thing I was supposed to do that day. Did the world stop turning? No.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: I think you have to also maintain a little perspective. If you've run yourself ragged and you have to step back a little bit, the world is not going to end.

Lee Burgess: To that point, this morning while I was taking care of my son who was snoozing on me between throwing up, I was catching up on some reading on my phone, because my book, my Ruth Bader Ginsburg book was too far away. I could not reach it. I was reading actually an article about how to talk to your kids about coping mechanisms with anxiety. Then I was realizing that it was really good advice for adults, which happens all the time. I feel like everyone should start reading articles on [Huffington Post Parents](#). We should all just subscribe and read the advice we give to children, because it's so much better than the advice they tell us to give to adults to cope with anxiety.

Alison Monahan: I think that's totally true.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: I have a friend who has a kid, and sometimes I send her articles about child-rearing that I think are particularly relevant, and she's always, "Why are you sending me these? Why are you reading these?" I was like, "Because they're really good."

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: "This is good stuff. It's not just for your three-year-old."

Lee Burgess: Exactly. Some of the stuff is really helpful. What they had in [this article](#) - and we'll link to it in the show notes so you all can also read about articles about children, even if you don't have children - they called it "the sphere of control." They said you can do it on a paper napkin, but we could also do it on a legal pad. It has you draw a circle on the inside of a much larger circle, and the inside circle has to be titled "can control," and the exterior circle is "cannot control." The idea is that you start to put the things in the tiny circle that you can control. These could be things like "What I'm going to eat." "Am I going to meditate?" "Am I going to study?" Whatever they might be. Things you can absolutely control. Then on the outside sphere are things you cannot control, and that could be the news, or ...

Alison Monahan: Your law school grades.

Lee Burgess: Your law school grades, or your job opportunities.

Alison Monahan: What your class rank is.

Lee Burgess: Right. You know, what job offer you're going to get. This way, you can just focus on what's in that inner circle, and it just reminds you that there are things that you can control, that can make you happy or feel less anxious, and then there's things that are outside of your control. You have to respect them as such, and have that separation. I thought this was really amazing advice. Probably something that we should start doing with all of our tutoring students.

Alison Monahan: That's really true. I've never seen it framed quite that way before. I often talk to people about, "Look, you know, you don't actually control your grades. Those are outside of your hands, so you can't worry about, 'Are you going to get an A?' What you control are the inputs. You know, you control, 'Did you work hard?' 'Did you study hard?' 'Did you study smart?' You know, 'Did you do your reading?' 'Did you do your outline?' 'Did you take practice exams?'" All of these things, you control. You do not, however, control the outcome, so worrying about the outcome is completely a waste of time and energy, so just stop.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think that it's empowering to realize you do have control over certain things.

Alison Monahan: Exactly.

Lee Burgess: There are times when it can feel very challenging. I don't do well if I eat gluten and things like that, and I remember when I changed my diet about five years ago now, right before we met, actually, Alison.

Alison Monahan: Which is ironic, since one of my favorite hobbies is baking bread.

Lee Burgess: I know. I know. You just have to learn how to make gluten free bread, just for me. When I went through that journey, and I remember talking to the nutritionist who suggested it to me, and sending her these kind of crazed, panic emails that were like, "I don't know what I'm going to eat." You know, I'm just flipping out over email, because I felt like everything was outside of my control. She sent me this very wise email that was just, "It is just food. Take a deep breath. You will not starve." You know, it was very direct!

Alison Monahan: "It's pretty much just bread. You could probably have something else."

Lee Burgess: Yeah. It's not a big deal, but it was such an interesting reaction, that it was this core thing that was so panic-inducing, and her reminder of, "Hey, take a step

back. This is just about choices. You're not going to starve." It would have made a really big difference, kind of to have this moment where I'm, "Oh, maybe I'm overreacting just a smidge."

Alison Monahan: Yeah, although I had a nutritionist or whatever, acupuncture person, tell me, "Oh, yeah, you should be gluten free." I was like, "Okay, I'll try it." I have to say, I was like, "This is horrible. I don't want to do this."

Lee Burgess: Yeah, but you also don't eat much meat, which makes it a lot harder.

Alison Monahan: I don't eat any meat. I'm a vegetarian. I'm pescetarian. So yeah, once you start putting a bunch of restrictions ... Plus I was like, "I'm, Irish. We're people of the bread. I think I'm fine."

Lee Burgess: Yeah. It was just an interesting thing that I constantly go back to, where it's basically, I just felt like things were spinning out of control, and someone was able to just focus me down and say, "You will survive." There was of course chemical stuff going on, now that I've read more about it. You know, you're going through withdrawals, basically, but that being said...

Alison Monahan: You know, people ask me, "Oh, I could never be vegetarian, or, you know, only eat fish." It's pretty easy. You just only look at that part of the menu. I'm not saying you want to do it, but if you did want to do it, it's actually not that overwhelming.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. It is interesting, once you make that kind of make that leap. I actually remember somebody asking me, "How do you not eat the bread?" It's like, "I don't."

Alison Monahan: "I just don't pick it up. I don't put it in my mouth." It's like if somebody put a steak in front of me on the table, I'd be, "Oh, well actually, I don't eat that. Could you bring something else? Thanks."

Lee Burgess: Right. Exactly. Food issues are just one example, but the more stuff that you can put into the sphere of control and say, "I have things that I can do to make these things better in my life," I think it's going to make that exterior circle of things that you can't control a little easier to manage.

Alison Monahan: Right. I think one of the things that's really driving a lot of people crazy right now is that the political climate in the world is so fraught in so many ways, and a lot of people who are in law school or lawyers, they're basically called to fight the good fight, right? I think a lot of people feel like they should be out saving the world right now. You know, they should be out at the airport helping immigrants or potential immigrants. They should be out marching the streets or being legal observers, or doing whatever it is. Fighting for women's health, or

whatever it is that you're concerned about that's happening, because the reality is all this stuff is happening, but where do you find the time?

Lee Burgess: Yeah. If you are feeling a call to action and you're in law school, I think there is also that responsibility you have to ask yourself, are you going to be better to serve if you rock the rest of law school? If you are successful in law school and become really good at your craft, and then if you decide that these are the fights that you're willing to take up, you may be better at taking up those fights by reaching these other goals. It may not feel like you're doing enough today, but maybe what you can do tomorrow is going to be much more meaningful.

Alison Monahan: I think that's a fair point. I also think it's possible to get involved in things that invigorate you in law school, and I think that's very valuable. I would personally make the argument, I think in some cases, it's sort of fine to say, "Okay, maybe my grades are going to suffer a little bit because I am spending 15 hours a week doing pro bono work. That's a fair choice to make." You know, that might be an okay trade-off for you, but that's something you have to think about and think seriously about. It probably depends on what your actual plans are. You know, if you're looking for that big firm job, and all they care about is grades, maybe not. But if you want to do public interest work, that's how you get jobs, actually, is being a person who's on the ground, who's known in the community, and people care less about your grades than they do in other situations.

I think, you have to know yourself, and you've got to make this a balance, but again, I think this metaphor or this image of the circles you control and what you don't control, I mean, you don't control what happens to be in an executive order. What you can control is, "I'm going to go and take on a pro bono case, and learn about asylum law, or refugee law, or take a class," or something like that. I think you could be strategic, and you can certainly help people, but at the same time you have to understand at this point, particularly, you cannot personally save the world.

Lee Burgess: Right, or you can forego your Starbucks and donate it to the ACLU. There are lots of things that you can do to say, "I'm going to contribute in this way right now." Then I think you can feel like you have done a little bit of action.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think there are certain things that are time-limited. You know, for example, when I was in law school, one of my roommates was really involved in being a legal observer for Critical Mass, because Critical Mass was at that point clashing with the NYPD- maybe they still are- once a month. Once a month on a Friday, we would go down and put on our legal observer hats, and run around New York City on a Friday night, and see what the police were up to. It was actually really fun, and they had a big party afterwards, but then we felt like, "Okay, we've done our part. We can go back and study on Saturday." I don't have to then go do 12 hours of something else the next day, but if you want to and you can make that work, great. But I think you have to be a little bit

cognizant of keeping your own self - It's like the airplane mask. Put your own mask on first before you can help others.

Lee Burgess: Yup. I think that's so true. What about, though, we've been talking a lot about the world. What about law school? Are there things about how law school is set up that also just kind of pushes everybody to the edge?

Alison Monahan: Well, yeah. I think that's true. I would say the number one top of everybody's list has to be the grades and the curve and the competition. Along with that, not really fully understanding the pedagogy and what it is that you're going to be tested on, which then leads to doing a lot of work but not being sure if you're going to get the results that you want, and then getting obsessed with, "Oh, I have to be in the top 10% or I'm not going to get a job." As we talked about, you don't really control that anyway. I think also these questions about, "What am I here for? What am I doing? What type of work should I be doing?" Depending on the school, there could be a lot of pressure to shift in ways that you might not want.

Lee Burgess: I think that's a very good point. I think the one thing that's kind of refreshing about second semester is if you're a 1L, you've lived through exams once.

Alison Monahan: Right, so hopefully it's less overwhelming.

Lee Burgess: Hopefully it's less overwhelming, but you also, if you haven't done so yet, need to take a step back and remind yourself what the end game is. It's about time for most schools to have spring break, and spring break is a very critical time because although you might have some fun spring break plans, you also need to critically realize you're halfway through the semester, and it's time to think about the end game. If you need to change what you're doing to make sure you're ready for the end game, that is incredibly important. You know, if you're doing the same thing that you did last semester, but it's not going particularly well, then that's a problem.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. We've got some podcasts on this. We can link to them in the show notes, but I personally recall finding that I felt like exams came up faster second semester.

Lee Burgess: I think once you get back from spring break, the semester is just gone. It just feels gone.

Alison Monahan: Yeah.

Lee Burgess: I think first year, or first semester, you don't have that same mid-point break where you kind of come back and you're like, "Oh, I got that post-vacation lull. Gosh, it's hard to get rolling. Oh my gosh. My exams are in a month." Then there's always other stuff. There's typically moot court competitions, or...

Alison Monahan: You're looking for a job still.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. There's a lot, lot, a lot to do, and the sun starts coming out, and the days get longer, and you feel like you have all this time, until it's May first and exams are the next day.

Alison Monahan: Right, and then you've also got on the horizon things like the writing competition, if you're going to do journal write-ons and stuff like that, I know I felt like, "Oh my god. It's the exam period. Oh gosh. Now I have this packet of stuff I have to deal with." I made the mistake of starting my summer job way too early, and tried to do the writing competition during the first week of my job, which was not a very good plan. That was stupid. You know, I should have just started a week later, had time to decompress, had time to do a good job on the packet. Instead, it was just ridiculous. Don't do those things to yourself. Don't be stupid like I was stupid.

Lee Burgess: Learn from Alison's mistakes.

Alison Monahan: Learn from Alison's mistakes. Better to forego a week of pay, even if it's a lot of pay, not to drive yourself totally crazy.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think that that's pretty true. You just have to check in with yourself. Maybe if you're really bad at checking in with yourself, you could even schedule on your study schedule a time to remind yourself to check in, or create a reminder on your phone. You know, there are all these apps now that you can load on your phone that will remind you to stand up from doing your work, or remind you to take 10 deep breaths. You can create all sorts of reminders for yourself, of, "Have I checked in with myself? Have I drawn my circles for the week? Am I feeling stressed and anxious? What am I going to do this week to kind of serve myself?" It sounds super-duper cheesy, but when things get out of control, I think you have to build in structure, or you don't ever stop long enough to regroup.

Alison Monahan: Right. As you were talking, I was like, "Well, this sounds totally ridiculous, but you could even have a reminder every night that's like, 'Go to bed.'"

Lee Burgess: Yeah. "Shut off your computer."

Alison Monahan: You know, when that reminder pops up, you're like, "Oh." You're going to at least have that thought of, "Should I go to bed?"

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: Then you'll be like, "Oh, maybe I should go to bed."

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Oh, wow. What have we done to ourselves in this crazy world?

Lee Burgess: "Turn off Twitter." "Turn off Twitter." That's what your new reminder needs to be. "Turn off the Twitter."

Alison Monahan: It's horrible. It's literally a compulsion. I admit, it's the first step. We should have Twitters Anonymous. "I'm, you know, helpless in the face of this compulsion."

Lee Burgess: That's right. I guess. The first step is to admit you have a problem.

Alison Monahan: Right. Exactly. I'm trying to think of the 12 steps of AA. I'm sure there's one. I'm sure they're probably applicable, but I think you've got to be aware of it, and nobody's perfect in this regard, but if you're really spiraling, it behooves you to try to get this stuff under control, even if it seems more fun to, play on the internet all night long and get no sleep.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think that that's really true.

Alison Monahan: There are people who can help. We'll give our standard push. If you think you need therapy, you probably do. You should go. If you think you need a life coach, you probably do. [If you think you need a tutor](#), you probably do. If you think you need an exercise class, you probably do, so just sign up for these things. You don't have to do this alone.

Lee Burgess: Right. It's so true. You can try out some resources. Therapy is oftentimes free through your school, because they know law students need help. What do you have to lose? You know, an hour of your time?

Alison Monahan: There are also books on this, too. There are books called, [The Happy Lawyer](#). Maybe you want to pick one of those up over spring break and see what they have to say.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, or be a nerd like Lee and read Ruth Bader Ginsburg's new book, My Own Words.

Alison Monahan: Well, I'm going to have to get that one.

Lee Burgess: I can give you my copy next time I see you.

Alison Monahan: Sounds good. Well, with that, we are unfortunately out of time. If you enjoyed this episode of the podcast, please take a second to leave a review and rating. We would really appreciate it, as long as you're nice.

Be sure to subscribe so you don't miss anything. If you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to reach out. You can reach 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. I know you're shocked.

Thanks for listening and we'll talk soon.

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- [Jain, Renee. "Teach your Child this Crucial Life Lesson \(Challenge #2: Sphere of Control\)." Huffington Post, Feb 21, 2017.](#)
- [Ginsberg, Ruth Bader. My Own Words. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016.](#)