



Episode 95: Top 1L Questions – Time Management

- Alison Monahan: Welcome to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today, we're talking about a perennial 1L problem area, which is organizing your time and your life so you can get everything done in law school. Your Law School Toolbox hosts are; Alison Monahan and Lee Burgess. 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. Together, 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](#).
- If you enjoy the show please leave a review or rating [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 would love to hear from you. With that let's get started.
- Lee Burgess: Welcome back, today we're talking about a perennial 1L problem area; organizing your time and your life so you can get everything done in law school and still be a somewhat normal human being.
- Alison Monahan: Somewhat.
- Lee Burgess: Somewhat.
- Alison Monahan: Somewhat yeah.
- Lee Burgess: Oh my goodness, we get so many questions about this because time management in law school is a challenge for everybody. I don't think there is anybody who doesn't struggle with managing their time in law school.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah absolutely, I think there is a lot to talk about and there is a lot to get done in law school so let's jump right in.
- Lee Burgess: All right, so what about the basics; what type of obligation are students going to have in law school and how can we plan for them?
- Alison Monahan: Well, I mean I think a lot of it is pretty obvious; you are going to have to go to class; that's probably going to be several hours a day most days. If you are lucky, you might get one of the five working days off. For example, I don't think I ever had a class on Fridays, which was kind of amazing.
- Lee Burgess: That is kind of amazing.

Alison Monahan: Even as a 1L, but of course it meant you had more class the other days, but it's a tradeoff. You are obviously going to have to do a lot of reading for class, I think for most people this ends up being several hours every single day plus time on the weekends. You are going to have a lot of legal writing work; legal research and writing is one of those classes that can really take up a bunch of time and can somehow it seems like it always takes over your schedule whenever anything is due. That's something to watch out for and really plan for.

Also, I think one of the things that's really critical is the deep work of putting this stuff together—making sense of it, doing practice tests—that's easy to push aside, but really critical to success. Then you are going to have all that optional stuff that looks great on your resume, but you do you have time for it? I don't know; it's your choice.

Things like pro bono work or club meetings or even social events. Are you going to bar review night on Thursday night, so whenever your school has it? It's a great way to network, but if it leaves you hungover for Friday classes, I don't know, it might not be the best choice.

Lee Burgess: My 1L year I had something like an eight or a nine o'clock contracts class on Friday mornings.

Alison Monahan: That's pretty brutal.

Lee Burgess: It was pretty brutal, yes.

Alison Monahan: All right, so that's the stuff you have to do. How can you plan for this stuff?

Lee Burgess: Well, I think there are a lot of ways that you can plan for it. One thing before we go on, though, that I want to make a point about classes is often times 1Ls don't get a choice in when your 1L classes are.

Alison Monahan: I think pretty much that's true across the board.

Lee Burgess: Some schools let you take one elective like one semester of your 1L year. But as an incoming student, especially if you had a lot of control over your schedule in [undergrad](#), maybe it's going to be a little surprising to just have a schedule handed to you. I'll be honest, I would not have volunteered for a first thing in the morning contracts class on Friday.

Alison Monahan: You are probably not going to have a choice in which professor you take, either.

Lee Burgess: No, because you are all broken into these sections and then you take a lot of these classes with the same people. That's just something to keep in mind if you are coming in to law school, is that you may have these ideas of what your ideal schedule would be. Maybe you are not a morning person and would prefer not to go to class first thing in the morning, but if your school decides that you are

going to class first thing in the morning, get used to it. Get up early, drink some coffee.

Alison Monahan: Exactly. I do know one person who somehow managed to switch classes because he really, really hated the professor but it took weeks of effort and it was a lot of work. If you have a legitimate situation like you have to drop your child at school and there is just literally no way that you can get to an 8 a.m. class, maybe they'll let you switch out of it. It's worth asking, but it's got to be a pretty good excuse and even then, it might not work.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm (affirmative). This isn't just a full list of stuff, though, that goes on in your life, [because almost everybody else should have other activities they do and they need to schedule for, too](#). What are some of these other activities that people should be taking into consideration?

Alison Monahan: Well, I always say you should schedule your [exercise](#), I mean some people think like, "Oh, [I'll just do that whenever I can](#)," but that's a recipe for not doing it. At least I found in law school, I was much more likely—if I had joined a gym class and paid something for it, even if it was a minimal amount—I had it on my calendar. Every Tuesday at noon I was going to this weight lifting class or I had belly dancing -- I took some more crazy classes. If you schedule it, you are much more likely to show up.

Lee Burgess: I think breaks are really important to schedule in, too. If you need date nights with your best friends, or movie nights, or time away from the law school grind. R and R is incredibly important. Whatever you do to relax, and it doesn't always need to be with law school people. I really encourage you to schedule in some time off with some non-law school folks, if you have those folks in your community where you are going to law school, because they can really keep you sane.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think again scheduling that time off, that's a great idea, because otherwise, your work is just going to bleed into things. If you know that you have plans to go see a movie with a friend on Friday night, you are much more likely to do that otherwise you might find yourself, "Well I'm kind of bored, I don't really have anything to do, I'll just study some more." That's a recipe for burnout.

Lee Burgess: Exactly.

Alison Monahan: I think one other thing people should think about at least is you got to plan around [how you are going to eat](#). I mean it sounds kind of crazy, but essentially, you either have to spend a lot of money on this or you have to spend a chunk of time on it.

Lee Burgess: It's true.

Alison Monahan: When are you going to shop for food, or are you going to use a delivery service that's might be more expensive? When are you going to prepare your food, or are you going to go out to eat which might be more expensive? If you are someone who wants to shop and prepare your own food that's going to take time and you are again, much more likely to do that if you actually schedule the time for it.

Lee Burgess: The beautiful thing about being in law school is often times you can run some of these life errands when it's much less time consuming to do so. When I was in law school I used to go to Trader Joe's on Monday mid-morning between my class breaks.

Alison Monahan: There is like nobody there.

Lee Burgess: There was nobody there and if anyone listening to this is from San Francisco, there is one particular Trader Joe's where the parking lot has a line running ...

Alison Monahan: It's awful.

Lee Burgess: ... yeah, running down the street, I mean it's really intense in the evenings and on the weekends. Going to Trader Joe's is like a full-contact experience. So, when I realized that I could start running those errands mid-morning between classes, that cut my grocery shopping time in half basically.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly, and I think if you have a mental list of things that you need to do to keep your life running smoothly, you can fit those into times where you are not going to be effective studying anyway. If you just have a little bit of time between classes or if you've already been studying for seven hours and you just feel like you can't read another case. Instead of just sitting around and watching TV, it can be refreshing, actually, to walk to the grocery store and do your shopping and come back. Then you are like, "Oh I'm so virtuous. I bought all these vegetables, this is great."

You can think about ways to fit things in in chunks of time that aren't going to be productive for studying anyway.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think that's really true, and you can get creative on how you get your items. I have a friend who was explaining to me the benefits of the [Amazon Subscribe and Save](#) which ...

Alison Monahan: I can see that.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, where she basically said once she figured out how many paper towels her home used in a month and how much toilet paper and how much dish washing detergent, that she was able to take a bunch of these home items that you basically just need to have stocked and have them delivered on a regular basis and you can do that at a discount. It's all automatically set up, so you never run

out of toilet paper because the toilet paper is just like showing up at your house when you are going to need toilet paper.

Although it can seem a little tedious to set that stuff up, I do think that removing those lists of things that you need to remember whenever possible: things like toothbrush heads, if you use an electric toothbrush, or razors; stuff we all run out of on a regular basis that can cause you to go to the drug store every couple of weeks because you forgot. Or you shop at Whole Foods and you can't buy razors at Whole Foods, or whatever it might be. That's always my complaint about Whole Foods, you can't do all your shopping at Whole Foods. You have to go to multiple stops.

That's just something to consider that maybe over the summer before school starts or even on a break, you can try and set up some things to make your life easier and it may not even be as expensive as getting food delivered.

I've also heard some really great things from some folks about [AmazonFresh](#) which does deliver your groceries and the price difference is really not that much. It's another thing, maybe, to experiment trying out before school starts to see if that's another way to reduce some of the time that you need to spend feeding yourself and keeping your kitchen stocked.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, when I was in law school we did a CSA, me and my two roommates, so I mean, honestly, at some point, we were just like we cannot look at another rutabaga. But it was New York in the winter, what were they going to send you?

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: It actually was good because we had food arriving regularly, someone would deal with it. We would have to experiment with some new recipes or something and then often times we would eat together if we made stuff together, so that was kind of nice, it was social. Most importantly the refrigerator was never barren because we always had at least something in there.

I'll currently admit that I have been out of paper towels for two weeks because I normally get them at Costco. For some reason, Costco did not have them the last time I went to Costco, so I could not get the paper towels I wanted. I thought, "Oh, no problem, I'll go to the supermarket nearby," which, I know they sell the exact ones that I want. It's been two weeks, and I still have no paper towels. Why? Because I haven't gone to that exact supermarket.

Lee Burgess: The stuff that you can just not have to think about just lightens your overall load. I always think about the decision fatigue they talk about with really high performing people you know the fact that ...

Alison Monahan: The Steve Jobs.

Lee Burgess: Steve Jobs and Barack Obama wear almost the exact same thing all the time so they don't have to decide what to wear.

Alison Monahan: That's another one we're not even thinking about, but what are you going to wear? To the extent you can simplify your closet and have that choice ready to go before you start school, really going to make your life easier.

Lee Burgess: It's true, because all of these little things that nag at you are exhausting. It can be so nice to have stuff show up at your house or go to Costco and as much as you might have cabinet space or garage space wherever you are living, try and stock yourself for a good chunk of the semester. Because if you have to constantly be thinking about things or constantly realizing that all your t-shirts have holes in them and that you don't have any clothes to wear for school, that can be kind of kind of nerve wracking.

Alison Monahan: That can be a distraction.

Lee Burgess: It can be a huge distraction. I think that you are wise to maybe take a little bit of time over the summer and think about how to make it easier for you to just survive and thrive during this time, where it can be easy to get bogged down in school and then you realize you are eating like crap and then you are sleeping like crap and your house is a disaster. You don't need all of those additional things on your plate.

Alison Monahan: Exactly, you are going to have enough to worry about without worrying about whether you have paper towels.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, but the clothing one is a good one and especially if you are transitioning from perhaps being in a working role into a student role. For me I was working full time when I switched to law school and I realized I didn't have enough casual clothes to wear to school, I really didn't. Because I used to dress in business casual every day.

Alison Monahan: Right and you know if you want to wear that to class great, but you are probably going to be a lot more dressed up than everyone else.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, and when you have the option to wear jeans and a fleece, come on. Take it.

Alison Monahan: True, so yeah, think about what you can plan for ahead of time. And the other thing is seasonal. I was coming from California to New York and I remember coming back to California for the winter break and then I landed at JFK and it was five degrees and sleeting.

Lee Burgess: Oh my gosh.

Alison Monahan: I realized like I don't have winter clothes. This would have been a better realization to have had in the two-week break that I had before I got back to New York City, and suddenly had to spend the first three days trying to buy clothes. And it's January, we now have our spring collection! "It's freaking five degrees and sleeting, I need winter clothes!" That shouldn't have happened.

Lee Burgess: That's a very good point, if you are changing location and changing temperatures you better be prepared for it.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, so plan ahead. Other things people might consider scheduling for in their time: [study group activities](#).

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Now these can be a huge time suck or they can be really productive, but I think you do probably want to think through what's a reasonable amount of time you should be spending. You can't necessarily do this so far in advance but once you meet people and you talk about forming a study group, you want to be really sure that you are on the same page about how much time you feel comfortable devoting to this. Because if one person wants to meet twice a week for an hour and other people want to meet 10 hours a week, you should not be in the same study group.

Lee Burgess: I think that's really true. And the activities you are going to do in that study group; what's that time going to be spent doing. Because there are a lot of people who just want to talk about the law.

Alison Monahan: Right, or if they're like, "Well we'll just figure it out as we go."

Lee Burgess: Yeah you may not have a lot of extra time.

Alison Monahan: Figure out what to do as we get started. You want to make sure you are on the same page, like, "Okay we're going to work on our own and then we're going to come together and we'll discuss points we don't agree on or don't understand." Or, "We're going to all take the same practice question, and we're going to come together and talk about that." Or, "We're going to go over every point of the substantive law that we've studied in every class." These are really different.

Lee Burgess: I think that's a really good point. Students have to actually remember that at a certain point in the semester and during that 1L year you are going to have to [start looking for jobs](#) and ...

Alison Monahan: Yeah and that comes faster than you think.

Lee Burgess: It does come faster than you think, and that's actually quite a lot of work. You want to be ready for that and realize when that's going to kick in in the semester for some, isn't it November 1st, I'm I remembering that right?

Alison Monahan: I think you can actually, well, I think you can start talking to the career services in mid-October or early November. Then you can actually, if it's a NALP job, so like firm jobs, and probably most jobs people would be applying for are NALP certified. Those you can apply for starting December 1st, I believe.

Lee Burgess: Okay.

Alison Monahan: Right in the middle of getting ready for exams, suddenly, you are stressed out because you don't have a resume, you are not sure where you want to apply. If you miss this, it's not the end of the world, but there are certain types of jobs that if you think you are going to be applying for them, you need to be applying that first day.

Lee Burgess: It might behoove you when you are thinking of your larger schedule to make notes for yourself warning you when some of those deadlines are coming up. You can make sure your resume is up to snuff, make sure you meet with career services, and all of that stuff is ready to go. Because really, December 1st is usually one week maybe two weeks before all of your finals, and you don't want to be spending a good chunk of one day working on your resume.

Alison Monahan: I remember sitting on the floor like November 31st or 30th or whatever it is—30th, I guess—stuffing paper envelopes with me and my roommate, we're each sending out a hundred resumes to try to get a 1L summer job. We were just like, "Can you believe we're spending time on this right now?" But at least our stuff was ready to go like weeks before. We only had to spend two hours that one night watching *Sex and the City* and stuffing envelopes.

Lee Burgess: Then one thing that we see students really cut back on when you shouldn't is [sleep](#). Often times, when—especially like a first semester 1L will reach out to us mid semester and we start kind of talking about what's going on, one of the questions we definitely ask about is, how much are you sleeping? I will hear things like; five hours a night, every night. I go to bed at mid night and I get up at 5:00 to go to the gym. There are people who can survive on that much sleep, but that's not most of us.

Alison Monahan: No.

Lee Burgess: Most of us need more sleep than that, and diminished sleep can cause a whole host of problems; you can get sick more often, you don't have the cognitive processing abilities that you do when you are rested. You are basically legally drunk to a certain point.

Alison Monahan: Exactly.

Lee Burgess: There is advice out there that you should be working so many hours a day that sleep is the first thing to go. We really recommend that you don't do that, because it's not going to go well. You are also going to be a little older than you

were when you were an undergrad. Maybe you were able to pull off stuff when you were 18 and 19 sleep-wise that you just not going to be able to do even if you are 26, 27. It could be a whole different ball game.

Alison Monahan: Yeah for sure and the cognitive overhead of law school is so high that if you are not fresh you are going to burn out pretty quickly.

Lee Burgess: I was just reading another book, this book called [Wired to Eat](#), by a guy named Rob Wolf, that is kind of a really interesting biochemist and has done some interesting books on health and food. He had a section on sleep in this new book and one of the things he was talking about was that for some people it's not just how many hours to sleep but when you go to sleep. He really says, often times, a true circadian, a normal circadian rhythm is going to have you waking up at like between 6 and 7 every day and that you need to go to bed at 10 to get those hours. Now, Alison, I know you are a super night owl.

Alison Monahan: I must be highly abnormal.

Lee Burgess: I know.

Alison Monahan: Because my actual sleep schedule left to my own devices pretty much shifts to 2 a.m. to 10 a.m.

Lee Burgess: Yeah so you might not be the norm, but I think it is an interesting idea. When people think about sleep, often times, we think about sleeping in, but I think that sometimes going to bed earlier can get us those extra hours especially if you are someone who just wakes up early. You have to get those hours on the other end.

The other things that were in this book that you all know about, but many of us don't adhere to, is the dangers of laptops and iPhones in bed. The blue light and really trying to control for that kind of stuff.

Other interesting suggestions he made around sleep, which I hadn't really thought of, are things that I'd try and do for my kid. Create a night time routine and that even as adults, we can really do well with some night time routine, be it how we get ready for bed or if we then read before bed. He was even suggesting doing yoga or meditation before bed, but that all of those things signal to our brains that it's time to lie down and it can make going to sleep easier.

If you are finding sleep to be challenging, [there are tons of things that you can do to play with to hopefully get a little more shut eye](#). Then you are going to find that everything else is going to be easier if you are not strung out and have no rest.

Alison Monahan: I think that's right I think for a lot of people it's difficult to shut off the brain after you've been studying or reading until late at night. A good friend of mine who was in a different law school later told me his whole first year he basically would leave the library between 11:00 and 12:00 at night and go to a bar by himself. He's like, "Yeah basically I had to have two or three drinks every night to wind down and then I would go home at like 2:00 and go to sleep." He's like, "Yeah, in retrospect, I realize there probably were better ways to cope with that."

Lee Burgess: Yeah. If you are someone who already struggles with getting enough sleep, before you take on this challenging time in your life of being in law school, maybe something to think about over the summer is trying some different techniques to hopefully sleep a little bit better.

That's, I think, where exercise also plays in. If you sit all day, sitting is not super great for us. So, if you sit all day that can be really problematic also to having you feel good enough to go to bed. That's why things like exercise or taking walks or doing these other activities that don't include looking at a computer can be so important.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I would sometimes take my commercial outlines when I was studying for exams or something, I would take them to the gym and be on the elliptical with the outline and a highlighter. And was it totally perfect? No, but it actually was pretty good.

Lee Burgess: You've got to try stuff to help you mix it up so you don't feel like you are tied to your desk and defeated by the fact that you have to sit in front of a laptop all day.

Alison Monahan: All right, well on that note what about balancing law school with some other outside responsibilities people might have. Then these could run the whole gambit; significant others, [children](#), pets, working, maybe community involvement, religion, non-law school friends, parents, maybe they want to go on vacation. [What about Thanksgiving?](#) What do you think about this?

Lee Burgess: Well, you've got to be really honest about what other demands you have in your life and maybe give them a bit more time than you think they are going to need. Because I think you can say, "Oh, well, I can just see my significant other this may times a week," but then they might also feel neglected. Then that can cause relationship stress, which is not going to make it easier to be in school.

I think erring on the side of the fact that these other pieces of your life might need a little more time than you might first think that they need is probably a good idea.

Alison Monahan: I think that's great if you can do it. I think also being really clear about the certain periods of time where you are not going to be as available can be

helpful. Maybe you frontload time with whoever you need to see in the week before you have your first legal writing assignment due. Then you make it really clear to them, “Look, this week, I really need to go underground and get this done.” They may be more sympathetic if you are a little more available before then, certainly during exams. That’s the classic, “I need this time.”

Lee Burgess: I think just having really open dialogues with everyone in your life that is supporting you through this about what you need to have them be part of your village to be successful. If your parents really want a lot of time from you during the semester, you might have to have a really serious discussion with them about what’s practical and what’s setting you up for success. Maybe Thanksgiving and a lot of travel around Thanksgiving isn’t going to be setting you up for success, but you can negotiate a little more time at home over the winter break.

If you are really involved in maybe your church or your temple and you have a lot of volunteer activities, but you are looking at your schedule and going, “Oh my gosh, there is no way I can do everything.” Then you need to go to the folks that you’ve made commitments to and say, “I need to readjust. I really want to stay involved, but I don’t want to feel like I’m not cutting it, that everybody is getting what they need.” Because if you feel like you are failing everybody, that’s not going to help you be in a great mind space to be successful.

Alison Monahan: No, and people don’t want you to feel that way.

Lee Burgess: No.

Alison Monahan: I think getting them on board and saying, “Look I’m going through this intense experience. I still want to make sure that I stay involved in this organization, but I do need to cut back. Here is what I feel like I could do. Hopefully that works for you,” basically.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Also, using that time to decompress. If you are like volunteering with kids, you should be in the moment volunteering with kids, not worrying about your torts final that’s coming up. A lot of the people who I know in law school who are most successful are actually highly religious and basically the dictates of whatever religious that was demanded that they take certain days a week off and they did that. They did perfectly fine because that was their day to rest and recuperate and take a break, and then they came back fresh.

Lee Burgess: I think it’s a really good point. The other thing with children and pets and those who rely on you for things is to, depending on the age of children, to try and set the expectations, but also call in your village. Especially during challenging times like legal writing final exams or final exams, maybe there is a friend who can walk your dog sometimes. You can send your children to a play date or call in

grandparents or godparents or whoever might be the folks that you can ask for a little bit extra during the times that you know are going to be stressful.

Because if you have things set up, it's more likely or not that your kids are going to be having fun doing whatever they're doing, and then you can feel free to focus on what you need to focus on.

Alison Monahan: Right and that's also when it can make sense to have other friends who are similarly situated in law school. Maybe you make some law school parent friends and you guys trade at babysitting time so that if you have three or four of you one person goes to the park with the kids and the other three of you go to the library.

Lee Burgess: Right and there are a lot of really creative ways to find your support network. I think it's just really important to remember that you are not doing this alone and that balancing these responsibilities can be something that you share with other folks to lighten the load.

Alison Monahan: I think it's Ruth Bader Ginsburg that says, "Well, one of the reasons I did very well in law school was I had a small child, so even though I was worried about those things conflicting, actually, they were complementary. Because when I went to school I was motivated because I had a kid to provide for and then when I was with my kid I'm motivated because I see why I'm going to law school." She did okay for herself.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, she has done okay. All right, so what about some very specific situations around time management? What about folks who are [commuting and driving](#), should people utilize that time?

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think so. Some people say, "Well that's my time for myself and it's when I just relax," and that's totally fine. A lot of people want to be productive during that time. If you are commuting on the subway, that's a fantastic time to knock out a big chunk of reading. If you are commuting and driving or in a situation where you can't be reading, it's a little more challenging, but there are a lots of audio options.

There are audios. I think basically, if you search for any 1L topic like "contracts audio," you are going to find all kinds of things where they basically explain the law to you. That can be a great way to hear a recap on your way home, you can listen to podcasts, not just our own, there are lots of podcasts that are probably interesting and relevant. So, I think you can use that time productively.

Depending on how long it is you may really need to, but I think if it's just a 20-minute commute, I don't think you need to pressure yourself. It could just be a nice time to get your tea, get in your car, probably not listen to NPR these days. Put on some nice relaxing music and arrive at your next destination a little refreshed; you've had a moment to yourself. I think it can go either way.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think you make a good point with NPR that, I think one of the things—and I know [we talk about this in one of our podcasts](#)—that you really have to focus on is managing the anxiety of the outside world and keeping that contained with everything you have going on in your little world. Because I think that the tone of the news and the tone of what’s going on in the world can just be really distracting and it can amp us and then you are really frustrated about everything.

Stress is something that can go and permeate all parts of your life. You have to think about how you can digest what’s going on in the world while still keeping your focus, or else you could find yourself losing hours and hours reading the New York Times.

Alison Monahan: You arrive home and every day you are in a terrible mood because you just heard about the horrible things. You start yelling at your kids and they’re like, “Wait, what’s going on, mommy?” I think boundaries; you’ve got to put boundaries around the things that are going to be distracting for you.

Lee Burgess: I agree. All right, what about any time management strategies that really help on the daily grind, especially around exam periods. Alison, what are some of your favorites?

Alison Monahan: Well, I think you’ve got to really think about how you are going to use your time during the exam period. Most schools have a few days to a week beforehand. A) you have to clear your schedule. This is not a time to be going to your friend’s bachelorette party sorry.

Lee Burgess: Except I did that during final exams.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, which you can do, but if you are going to do that you need to plan for that right now.

Lee Burgess: To be honest, they came to the Bay Area and I only went to one part of it. I couldn’t go do like a whole weekend.

Alison Monahan: Weekend in Vegas. Yeah, I mean just look at your schedule. Ideally, clear your schedule. I actually started reading Cal Newport’s book, [Deep Work](#), and he makes a really intriguing point about the neuroscience of learning. Which is that when you focus on something that’s hard, if you focus intently on it, your brain actually creates new sheaths of myelin or something I think it is. But if you have a scattered approach where you are doing six different things at once, your brain is actually not able to create those pathways because you are not reinforcing those pathways.

Lee Burgess: That’s interesting. It’s so hard to focus and do one thing at a time these days, it really is. I think with the phones and the computers and everything, [the multitasking that we do is just unbelievable](#). Any time you try and sit down and

say, “I’m just going to do the one thing right now and not multitask,” it’s freeing, but then it’s a little spooky how quiet everything else seems.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I would actually literally lock myself in a back corner of the library during exams without my phone or anything. I would essentially find a quiet cubicle—I had certain rooms that liked—and really just focus, using the circles, my favorite method. But you have to put in that really focused time, because otherwise you get attention residue and you are switching back and forth and your brain is just not working as efficiently as it could be. Whereas, really focus deep work, he argues, and I tend to agree with this, is really the way to set yourself apart and end up being a winner in this economy and in this world where everyone is so distracted.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think that’s really true. Again, we’ve talked in other podcasts about how we read things about kids and we find the advice about parenting kids to be really applicable to our lives as adults. With all of this concern around media and children causing or not helping issues with ADHD, or is it ADD now? I can never, I know that they just switched the terminology...

Alison Monahan: They are actually slightly different syndromes.

Lee Burgess: Okay, well good. Then I am very uneducated on the topic and I will get better at that. Attention deficit issues possibly being fed by the fact that there is so much stimulation. The other night I had been on my phone doing something and the TV was on and then I said, “You know I’m going to lay my phone across the room and I’m just going to watch TV.” It was like I have his moment where I’m like, “Wow it’s a really different experience to just watch TV.”

Alison Monahan: Without your eye like is something popping up? Is it time for me to deal with it? Frankly, most of what’s popping up is not really an emergency type situation.

Lee Burgess: No, even if it’s you, it’s not an emergency situation.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, if you are like if it’s ten o’clock at night you are like, “Okay someone updated a Trello card. Is that meaningful?” Speaking of Trello, let’s talk about a couple of tools we find really helpful for managing your time and your life that I think you could easily incorporate in law school and would probably be life changing.

First among them, our favorite, which is [Trello](#). Trello is an electronic bulletin board, essentially, where you can have lists and any process stuff you need to do. Whether it’s legal research in writing or planning tasks with your study group or whatever it is, it’s an amazing tool for this.

Lee Burgess: And it’s free to set it up and other folks can collaborate on these boards with you. So, I really think that for a study group or any project you are working on

with others, it could be really helpful to utilize an online tool to manage stuff outside the time that you're getting together.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean imagine that you want to do one hypo a week and you are going to have each person assigned to pick a certain hypo in each, in one class. Imagine if you just have a Trello board where they pick it, they attach it to the card, they drop it and then you can assign due dates for which ones you are going to talk about on which dates. Maybe this sounds insane to you, but I really think it could be helpful.

Lee Burgess: Or everybody is supposed to either write their own or find out few examples of multiple choice questions and you could put those on the Trello board and circulate them.

Alison Monahan: And you're not wasting time looking for this stuff; you're not searching your email. It's asynchronous; whenever you are ready to go and do your work, everything you need is right there. It's like magic.

Lee Burgess: It is like magic. It's possible much of our business is run on Trello.

Alison Monahan: It's possible much of our lives are run on Trello.

Lee Burgess: Yes, that too.

Alison Monahan: I mean, if you are looking for an apartment, I've used it apartment hunting. You can use it for basically everything.

Lee Burgess: Vacation scheduling, you name it. We love a good electronic calendar, I personally was really hesitant to switch over to an electronic calendar after years and years of really having a deep love for paper calendars. But especially with some of these tools, an electronic calendar is really the way to go, but you have to commit to putting all this stuff on it to make it work.

Alison Monahan: I think for some people, it's still useful to have a month-by-month large wall calendar. You can totally have that in addition to your electronic calendar, but it's probably not going to be sufficient.

Speaking of calendars, again, you might think this is crazy overkill, however, there is a tool called [Calendly](#), which is also free for basic use, that allows people to schedule meetings with you. Now, this might sound crazy, but say your parents were calling you all the time and they are distracting you, you could have them actually set up a time to talk to you. Or your study group, if you need to coordinate with a bunch of people, just send the link; everybody can sign up with it.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, you can even have—I think you might have to upgrade for this—you can also have a team where you can have a group of people compare their

schedules. There are lots of different things for a nominal fee that you can even do if you are trying to manage a group of people; it can be really effective.

Alison Monahan: I mean that might sound crazy to you to have your friends or your family schedule meetings with you, but if that's the only way you are going to be able to talk to them, it's better than not talking to them.

Lee Burgess: Yeah and as much as it may seem impersonal the beauty of being able to say, "Here, you just have access to my calendar," is really freeing. The back and forth emails of trying to schedule stuff can be so frustrating.

Alison Monahan: Yeah or even, "I want to take the kids to the park for a play date. What's the best time to do that?" 18 back and forth emails or, "Hey, here is when we're available this weekend. Pick a time that works for you. Thanks."

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: It goes through to your calendar, so you don't really have to think about it.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, and that's the other beautiful thing about it is it takes out the user error, which I am really terrible at, which is scheduling meetings and missing information or screwing up the time. Today, I had a meeting at eleven o'clock and the meeting title was "March 31st at eleven o'clock." That's what it said on my calendar. It didn't tell me what I was supposed to do at that meeting. That's how the meeting got saved in my calendar. I was really like, "Okey-dokey..."

Alison Monahan: Who might I have agreed to meet with and where and for what purpose? Was this a phone meeting? Is it a coffee date? Time to search the email.

Lee Burgess: That user error element can be totally removed by using some electronic tools.

Alison Monahan: All right, well, we are way over time. Let's run some few key takeaways that we want people to remember. Number one, I think as much as people might resist it, you absolutely must plan your time in law school. Then, you need to evaluate how that plan is working, make changes as needed, and reevaluate.

Lee Burgess: You need to know when to stop working, because if you are super tired, you're not getting any bang for your buck, and you're probably on the fast track to burnout. Make sure you take breaks, rest, get some sleep and eat some good food.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, because otherwise, you're literally just wasting your time. Again, back to the focus. If you want to read something over the summer, I think Deep Work is a really interesting book. Multitasking is generally not your friend and you need to be blocking distractions. Because that's the way that you are really going to be able to get this stuff in your head in a way that you are going to be able to

use and remember and be a star student, instead of that person who is struggling through and not really figuring out what's going on.

Lee Burgess: You need to use the study time you have effectively, because you want it to be high value. Activities are going to get harder as you move through the semester. So, in the beginning of the semester if you are thinking, "Oh my gosh, I cannot possibly work harder than this," then it's time to take a step back, because it's only going to get more intense as you have to start studying for exams.

Alison Monahan: Right, and I think for a lot of people that might mean getting outside help, whether that's from someone in academic support, a mentor in 2L or 3L. Just say, "Look, I feel like I'm just drowning here," we get that lot. "I feel like I'm drowning. What should I be doing?" Because someone might be able to help pinpoint the places where you might not be spending your time effectively. Say you get can a 20% increase in effectiveness. That's huge!

Lee Burgess: That's huge.

Alison Monahan: That's like hours a week.

Lee Burgess: Exactly, what else? Anything else?

Alison Monahan: Well, I think we've already mentioned that you got to take breaks; you can't study all the time. That's hard to hear, but your brain has to be able to work effectively or otherwise you are just wasting time and that's not good.

Lee Burgess: With that we should go take a break, because we're out of time. Before we finish up, I wanted to take a second to let you know that you can check out our Start Law School Right course on our website at lawschooltoolbox.com/start-law-school-right. This is an on-demand course which includes feedback from one of our amazing [Law School Toolbox tutors](#), and it's going to help you understand how to excel in law school from day one. Check it out and feel free to contact us if you have any questions.

If you enjoyed this episode of the Law School Toolbox podcast, please take a second to leave a nice review and rating [on iTunes](#). We'd really appreciate it. And be sure to subscribe if you don't miss anything, new episodes are typically released on Monday.

If you have any questions or comments please don't hesitate to reach out to myself or Alison at lee@lawschooltoolbox.com or alison@lawschooltoolbox.com. You can always contact us via our [website contact form at lawschooltoolbox.com](#). Thanks for listening and we'll talk soon.

Resources:

- [Start Law School Right Course](#)

- [Podcast Episode 89: The Leap from Undergrad to Law School \(with Keri Clapp\)](#)
- [How to Calendar Your Way to Better Grades and More Free Time](#)
- [10 Reasons to Exercise in Law School](#)
- [6 Ways to Make Time to Exercise in Law School](#)
- [Amazon Subscribe and Save](#)
- [AmazonFresh](#)
- [Five Myths About the Law School Study Group](#)
- [Podcast Episode 24: Job Search Basics for 1Ls](#)
- [Let's Talk About Sleep](#)
- [Wired to Eat, by Robb Wolf](#)
- [How to Maximize Your Sleep](#)
- [Is Tryptophan Plus Outlining a Recipe for Disaster? How to Decide Whether to Go Home for Thanksgiving in Law School](#)
- [Parenting in Law School: Surviving Your 1L Year While Raising a Family](#)
- [The Battle of Commuting to Law School](#)
- [Podcast Episode 88: Self-Care Tips for Keeping Your Mojo in Law School](#)
- [Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World, by Cal Newport](#)
- [One "Think" at a Time: Why Multitasking Doesn't Work](#)
- [Trello](#)
- [Calendly](#)