



Episode 107: Building Relationships in Law School

Alison Monahan: Welcome to the Law School Toolbox Podcast, today we're talking about building different types of relationships in Law School. Your Law School Toolbox hosts are Alison Monahan, that's me, and Lee Burgess. We're here to demystify the Law School and early legal career experience so that you'll be the best law student and lawyer you can be. We're the co-creators of the [Law School Toolbox](#), the [Bar Exam Toolbox](#), and the Catapult Career Conference. I also run [The Girl's Guide to Law School](#). If you enjoy the show, please leave a review [on iTunes](#) or your favorite app. And if you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to us. You can reach us via our [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 building relationships in law school with everyone from professors to potential employers. So first off, Alison why do these relationships even matter? Isn't law school all about grades?

Alison Monahan: Well that's certainly one very important component of law school but ultimately your grades are not going to set you up for life and career success or happiness. So part of law school, part of the advantage of being in this type of program is the other people that you're going to meet. These are going to be people who are interesting, they're bright, they're talented, they're ambitious. And these are good people to know in life. Even if whatever you end up doing, people in law school whether they're professors, whether they're your classmates, whether they're other people in different parts of the school or whatever it is, these are people who are probably some of the more interesting people that you've ever met.

Lee Burgess: That's true. And the legal community, even nationally at times, feels very small. And so you never know where you're going to continue to run into people who know either people you're currently working with, people you used to work with. The degrees of separation, it's not seven degrees of separation, it's like two it feels like.

Alison Monahan: No, it's like two, exactly. Yeah, I feel like almost any other lawyer in the country, if someone came to me and they're like oh I need to get in touch with this employment lawyer who works in Dallas. I think we could as a couple of questions and probably get in touch with that person.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And now with even social media, there was an interesting article that was circulating about the power of online Facebook groups for creating new

communities and there are lawyer specific closed Facebook groups and the amount of communication on there about references or recommendations for lawyers in certain areas. I had a friend who was looking to talk to lawyers in Boise, Idaho and I was able to go on there and basically say like I have a friend who's looking to make connections with people in Boise.

Alison Monahan: Hey my co-clerk was from Boise.

Lee Burgess: There you go.

Alison Monahan: You know, so there, problem solved, not a problem I'll send one email to my co-clerk and you've got what you need, done, next.

Lee Burgess: Exactly, yes.

Alison Monahan: Give me another one.

Lee Burgess: I know, right? It's like anywhere in the world. So it is interesting how these relationships really stay with you and it's worth it to spend some time investing in them.

Alison Monahan: Oh absolutely. And it's not like this has to be drudgery.

Lee Burgess: No.

Alison Monahan: Like you're probably not going to want to just spend all of your time locked in the library in law school anyway, so this is a great opportunity to take things that you might be already interested in doing and find other people to do them with, even if you're very introverted. There are lots and lots of ways that you can get in law school, meet some people, have some friends, you're going to need friends anyway to get through this. But let's start off with professors.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Because I think a lot of students find professors really intimidating but they also want to get to know them. So what can they do?

Lee Burgess: Well I think the [best way to find out about professors](#) is to just start with the good old internet. You can Google them, you can read their bios on the faculty pages, they've got some sort of a faculty page on the law school. You can find out about topics that interest them, pretty much every professor's going to have some sort of area of research that they write on or lecture on or do speaking or they might even blog. And I think you can learn a lot about a professor by seeing what their kind of pet interests are. And that can give you something to kind of break the ice if you also are interested in that topic. And you never know, two L's and three L's might be able to share some nuggets about certain professors that can help make it easier to get to know them.

For instance, one professor at my law school was a brilliant, brilliant lawyer who was obsessed with celebrity news. And she loved celebrity gossip, and so if you came to her office frequently, somehow celebrity gossip would be wound in. And that's if you like a good hour or so with people magazine when you're getting your nails done or sitting at the doctor's office you might have some interesting things to talk about. So, you never know what will get a professor to lower their guard and really kind of bond with you.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, so basically number one, internet stalk your professors ...

Lee Burgess: Right? In a non-creepy way, next.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, just kidding, not creepy. I probably don't want to go to them and be like "Hey, so I understand that you're really into celebrity gossip." Be subtle, slide it into the conversation ...

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: See how it's received.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, a lot of professors, they're people, they have outside interests. Some of them might be involved with things like student groups, different groups if you really, really want to get to know this professor better, maybe this is worth going to a meeting of the board or the organization that they're very involved with.

Lee Burgess: True.

Alison Monahan: You always have to think sort of strategically without being creepy about how you can stay in touch with a professor. Particularly one you have now or one that you've had in the past. So this is basic. [Go to their office hours](#), we have an entire [podcast about going to office hours](#). Send them email, ask them questions, again not every day but a couple of times in the semester, ask a good question via email. The professor's probably going to remember, oh this person was very engaged, participating in class is a great way to show a professor that you're interested in what they have to say. Sometimes you might, if you internet stalked them and you know what they're interested in you know what they're writing about, you might actually come across an article that your professor would find interesting.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Nobody can read everything. Whether the article is about the latest Johnny Depp news or about something more substantive.

Lee Burgess: It's true. It's very true.

Alison Monahan: This is something you can do with employers, with people that you have met that you want to keep in touch with. I do this all the time. Literally this morning I saw something on Facebook that I thought our friend Nathan Fox, who runs Fox LSAT would be interested in, and I sent it to Nathan, and he wrote back to me. And so now we're building our relationship, we already like each other but ...

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: Regardless. It shouldn't be something stupid but if it's something like hey this is really on point for you and you might not have seen this, people are really going to appreciate that.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I also found that there were times when, I think especially as a two L or three L I would kind of have gaps in classes or I'd find myself kind of near the faculty offices killing some time. And sometimes I would just walk the hallway to see if any of the professors that I liked or had a relationship with just happened to be sitting in there with their door open.

Alison Monahan: Oh, for sure.

Lee Burgess: And I would just do a quick knock and stick my head in and if they had a minute go have a 15-minute chat and then walk out. Often times they're happy if their door's open to have somebody interrupt them to give them a break from doing their work.

Alison Monahan: They're a little bit bored. Even if you literally just wave at them as you walk past and you're like hey you look busy, just wanted to say hi.

Lee Burgess: Yep.

Alison Monahan: You're building that relationship, you're staying top of mind. If you've had a class with someone and the class is now over and you're looking for ways to stay involved, go talk to them about your exam.

Lee Burgess: True.

Alison Monahan: This is something that students do I think far too infrequently, but just go have a chat with them. Hey, I'd like to get some feedback on my exam, is there anything I can do better? Professors typically are really going to respect that.

Lee Burgess: I think that's true. Another way that I got to keep up with some professors was I used to go to admitted student lunches for the admissions department, and professors always go to stuff like that. I think they either want to or have to, who knows. But, I would frequently see professors there and they're always happy to talk to their current or former students. And that was a nice way to get

bonus points for helping the school but also remind them who you are and have a nice chit chat.

Alison Monahan: You're less threatening to them than these strangers that they're supposed to be making chit chat with.

Lee Burgess: Right, exactly. But it looks good if you have a rapport to the prospective students.

Alison Monahan: Exactly. If there's a professor you really enjoyed, I always say take more classes with them.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Even if it's not a topic you might be inherently so interested in, if it's a great person and a great teacher, you're going to get something out of that class. And so, eh whatever, it's three credit hours, just go and take the class, kiss up a little bit. And this person is probably going to think wow, this student is so interested in everything I have to say, I love them.

Lee Burgess: So true. And your school might have some sort of a writing requirement where you have to have a faculty advisor work with you on a writing requirement which is going to be a more in-depth relationship. And one way to find that professor can be building relationships, finding a professor who has some shared interests with you, and then being able to ask them to be your faculty advisor if you have to do some sort of large writing project.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. You should pick whoever that person is carefully and often times you have to have a couple of those people, but that's a great way to continue building that relationship. I think it makes the professors look good if they're like I'm supervising three notes this semester, here's what they're about. They have requirements and all this stuff too.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Another option, if you've taken a class and you presented yourself well is does this professor need an RA? Do they need a TA? They might be looking for someone to help them with research, they might be looking for a TA. Obviously, you can't necessarily demand that they pick you, but it's worth bringing up. You know, hey I'm really interested in this area that you work in, if you happen to have any need for an RA I would be very open to doing that, I'd love to talk about it.

Lee Burgess: And I have friends that worked as RA's over the summer as a part time job to make a little extra cash when they were working for free doing pro bono work.

Alison Monahan: Oh, for sure. And inevitably if you apply for clerkships and things, the people that you've done this work for, that you've TA'd for, that you've been an RA, that they've supervised your note, these are the people who are really well qualified and well situated to write a great letter of recommendation for you.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: So you need to be thinking ahead. If all you've ever done in law school is show up to class and then leave and [you've never gone to office hours](#), you've never emailed your professor, or you've never done anything, you never talked to them, realistically what do they have to say about you other than yeah, this person did pretty well in this class, which you can tell from your transcript.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Also, if you are on the law review or the moot court board or another kind of organization within the law school, you will probably have faculty advisors and that's another area where you can really make some interesting connections with professors who are really your mentors. We had kind of a staffing issue at one point on the law review and I had some very in-depth conversations with the professor who was the faculty advisor to handle this. And we were, I knew him already, I'd taken classes with him, but we'd never talked about like staffing management issues, you know, or handling, and he used to be a partner at a large law firm and so it was actually a really interesting dynamic of shifting our conversation into a much, a very different space. But it was just a different way to learn about him and his expertise but also, he got to learn more about me in a totally different arena.

Alison Monahan: Yeah exactly. These people are people and they have their own interests and their own background and they often have some pretty interesting stuff that they can talk about.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: So I think you want to be smart about how you develop these relationships but don't be afraid to try to develop relationships with certain professors that you find interesting because it could pay off in a big way.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. All right, so what about your classmates? How do you build relationships with your classmates?

Alison Monahan: Well there's your enemy, right? Yeah, I think some people do have that idea that oh you know, I'm here to dominate these people, that's my goal is I need to be at the top of the curve and blah blah blah. Whatever I have to do to get there is justified and if I get good grades it's going to pay off. Well, the problem with that approach is that your law school classmates end up being your network.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: So they're your peers. And that annoying guy beside you in torts in your one L year, might actually go on to do some really interesting stuff. So it pays to try to make friends but at a minimum, not to leave a really bad impression.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alison Monahan: So, you don't necessarily have to be best friends with everyone in your class, but you may as well be polite to everyone because you don't want to have, people remember. I could tell you a number of stories about people who behaved very badly their one L year in my class, and I still remember those people. And I remember what they did and I remember who they are.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alison Monahan: And in some cases, there may have been opportunities for me to promote them or not promote them. And I remember those stories.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm (affirmative), yeah. And like we said because it's a small community, I have a friend locally who was a law school classmate of mine who was trying to get a local political appointment and he was reaching out to all the network of local lawyers we'd all gone to school with, to help write letters on his behalf. And we might not be the type of friends who get to hang out every Friday but of course I'm happy to help him. But it's like he needed a pull on that network and it's something that you may want to call on one day. Your reputation does start in law school. Not to make you paranoid, you don't have to be paranoid about it, you just need to remember that you may need to ask these folks for a favor someday.

Alison Monahan: Right, it's rarely going to hurt you to have a reputation as being a decent human being.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: That's really all we're asking for here. You just don't want to be remembered as that person who was actually really not a decent human being.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that is true. That is true.

Alison Monahan: So ideally you find some of your life long besties in your law school class which happens because it's a very intense environment and people are working together closely. You're going through the same thing so often people will find really close friends. But you also just want to think long term about this and at a minimum be polite, if someone needs help and they ask you for something, you know they're sick and they miss class and they want your notes, just give them the notes. It's not going to impact your grade, it's really not. And it's good for your karma.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And if you're [having a hard time meeting people](#) that you feel like you really click with in law school, I think it makes a lot of sense to try and join different clubs or anything else that sounds interesting. Try not to over commit but try and gather with folks who have similar interests to you, it's likely that those are going to be your tribe that you can bond with and maybe build some of these personal or professional relationships that might serve you later.

Alison Monahan: Right, it could be anything from the Christian Legal Society, to the Women in Law School or whatever it is. But surely you share some sort of interest with certain people in your class who are probably in some sort of group. And these groups can be great social supports, they can give you outlines, they can give you exam tips.

Lee Burgess: They can have mentoring programs.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, parties, they often have budgets, so ...

Lee Burgess: More pizza.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and if you're sick of eating pizza you can probably join the committee to plan the events and then you can order something other than pizza and everyone will love you. So there are a lot of opportunities to pretty easily get involved in things. You can also just sign up for a bunch of stuff in the beginning of the year, go to a few meetings, see what resonates with you. A lot of these groups will have events, they'll have lunch time speakers, these are low commitment ways to find your people.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think that that's really true. And law schools do have a social scene, I think different law schools, the more of a commuter law school you might be going to maybe the less of a social scene it has. But law schools have a lot of social engagements. Bar nights, some schools have trivia nights, sports leagues, [clubs and activities](#), intramurals, barbecues, different groups throwing parties, students throw big parties. There are a lot of ways to socialize, and so you have to think about the ways you like to socialize and then try and engage in those activities.

Alison Monahan: Right, so you want to do something that's fun for you.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: If you are not a person who enjoys going out to the Thursday night bar review and having a few drinks in a crowded bar, well maybe you want to join the multiplayer gaming association at your law school and you want to sit around and play, I don't know, Settlers of Catan. Which is totally fine, it's really what's fun for you. So don't feel like you have to push yourself to go to these events that may not be comfortable for you, but you do want to try to find something social.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: And also, interesting law related activities. You're in law school for a reason, presumably you have some interest in this. So you can go to different talks after classes, during lunch, these are a great way you can hang out afterwards, particularly if only a few people show up, well those people are probably interested in the same thing you're interested in. So don't just show up and then immediately run for your life as soon as the talk ends because you don't want to have to talk to anyone. At this point you've gone to a talk, if nothing else you can say oh, what did you think of this?

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: And then you've started a conversation. So these are also networking practice opportunities because it doesn't really get much easier than five people in a room listening to a speaker, to chat about it afterwards.

Lee Burgess: That's really true. Conferences are also a great opportunity and we've thrown conferences in the past and we learned that law schools often time even have budgets that students can apply to access to go to conferences.

Alison Monahan: For sure.

Lee Burgess: That are of interest to them, and that's another great way to share experiences or get one friend to go with you and you can meet a lot of different people and increase your network, but also make new friends.

Alison Monahan: Yeah exactly. It's going to be, I know like the Miss JD for example, they have a conference every year for women in law and a lot of times the law associations will show up. You know, they'll bring five or six people from a school. So, if you're listening to this and you're a woman, hello obvious opportunity.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: Meet some people, have some interesting opportunities, learn something, go on a trip. Because if you've spent a weekend with someone at a conference, you're going to bond with them.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, absolutely.

Alison Monahan: That's just the way it works. Even if you're not best friends afterwards, you're always going to have that like oh hey, we had that great time when we went to DC do you remember that?

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yep.

Alison Monahan: That's what we're looking for.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. That was one of our first big trips together, wasn't it? We went to DC.

Alison Monahan: We did, for the Miss JD Conference. Yeah exactly. And you know, we're still friendly with a lot of people that we either met or increased our relationship with at that conference.

Lee Burgess: That's true.

Alison Monahan: Another, pro bono work is a great way to meet people, you're always going to have people you're working with, mentors, that kind of thing. Any sorts of like receptions, symposiums, there's always stuff going on in a law school. I don't know if this still happens but pre-crash, in the Spring semester in New York City at law schools, big law firms would actually throw receptions multiple times a week. So, if you wanted to go out Tuesday and Thursday night, somebody else was paying for that.

Lee Burgess: Yep, so grab that professional attire and go out and have a cocktail on big law.

Alison Monahan: Exactly. Thank you, Akin Gump, you know? Cheers.

Lee Burgess: Yep.

Alison Monahan: People are sometimes intimidated and don't want to talk to lawyers, you can just go and talk to your friends and it's fine. It's like free happy hour basically. So there's always something going on, and hey, worst case you can always build relationships by studying.

Lee Burgess: Yep, that's true. Study groups are notorious for building relationships, interpersonal relationships, so if you like studying with other people, that can be a great way to kind of bond and go through this experience together. Or, I always worked a little bit better when it was just one or two study partners and we weren't really an official group. But those folks did become some of my better friends. Just always check in with yourself and make sure that that's a positive social environment for you and doesn't turn into just a bitch session or ...

Alison Monahan: Source of stress.

Lee Burgess: Source of stress, or things like that.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, one of the judges I interviewed with on, I think it was in the Southern District of New York, actually showed me a picture of her study group that she kept in her room where she changed into her, like robing room I guess they call it.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alison Monahan: But she was like oh this was my first-year study group and we're all still very good friends. This one is a federal judge and this one is whatever. They were high achievers.

Lee Burgess: High achievers. Yeah, good group of people to pick.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, but they became lifelong friends and that definitely does happen.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. All right, so what about others at law school? The staff, the people who work at law school, did you ever build relationships with those folks?

Alison Monahan: I did actually, in fact one of my favorite people at the law school ended up being the person who was in charge of running the Law Review. So she was staff of the law school but she was super nice and we became friends and we've hung out, I mean I've stayed at her house for Thanksgiving, we've visited each other, anytime I'm back in New York City I always go, she gives me all the law school gossip. A lot of these people are in these positions because they're nice people and they want to help. And so I think if you're not so comfortable talking with your professors, maybe you can talk with somebody in academic support or whatever it is and that person might become a good go to resource. Maybe again, you might not be best friends, but you're really looking for someone that you can turn to if you need support.

Lee Burgess: Yes. And what's interesting is I made friends with some people in academic support, or I guess it was more like faculty support services who supported the Law Review, when I was a TA you could go make copies and all that kind of stuff. And then I came back as an adjunct professor and then needed favors from them. Because I was trying to be a professor and all the sudden you're back in a different role, but those relationships still existed and they actually did really go out of their way to help me. Although one of the funny moments was I walked in, and I was dressed up I was going to go teach, but I walked in and it was final exams and they're like you can't be here. Because they thought I was a student walking into the room with the final exams.

Alison Monahan: And you're like I'm not a student anymore.

Lee Burgess: I know, but then he was totally like oh sorry Lee, sorry. But it was so funny, it was such a like visceral reaction from him. He's like stop, do not walk back here.

Alison Monahan: This is a security barrier, okay?

Lee Burgess: Exactly, exactly.

Alison Monahan: Another thing I think sometimes people overlook is if you're a JD, consider getting to know some of the LLM's.

Lee Burgess: True.

Alison Monahan: Particularly if there are a lot of international LLM's at your school, because these people are super interesting, they're lots of fun, they're very social, they go out a lot, many of them. And it's just a different mix. A lot of these people are coming, they've already been lawyers in their home country, they may have a civil law background, so you just end up with these very, very interesting conversations, where you might have someone who's a French lawyer, and a German lawyer, and a Mexican lawyer, and then there's you who's a two L, and it's kind of fascinating.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah, it really is. And you never know again, where you might run into these folks in the future. A lot of LLM's stay in the US and work, sometimes they work abroad and you never know where your career might take you or your vacations. You may make new friends that will end up living in different locations that you may want to visit someday.

Alison Monahan: Oh yeah exactly, and once you're Facebook friends with people you can always just check back in then with them when you happen to be passing through their country.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. That's so true.

Alison Monahan: A lot of these sort of casual relationships, I remember one summer an LLM was living in my apartment and we're Facebook friends now, so of course if I ever find myself in the Netherlands like or in London, I can't remember where she is now. But you know, she was Dutch, I'll look her up and we'll probably go out and we'll have a drink and we'll catch up and it'll be interesting and fun.

Lee Burgess: Yep.

Alison Monahan: And these are the kind of relationships that you can make in law school that end up, even if they're loose relationships, they can follow you throughout your life.

Lee Burgess: It's true, social media is just such a game changer for that. It used to be very hard to keep in touch with people but on my Facebook feed I have friends that I met traveling years and years and years ago that I still keep up with. And if I go back to some of the destinations where they live, I will look them up and we will all have tea or a drink because that's what you do now.

Alison Monahan: Oh yeah, I remember when we were speaking at the NALP Conference in Seattle and I had a friend from law school who is a professor at one of the universities in Seattle now. And so of course, I met him for lunch, because why not?

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Exactly. And I think it is also just interesting, yeah even if you end up relocating somewhere, I know we kind of already talked about being able to find someone in Boise, Idaho, but even when you headed down to Mexico City, I found out one of my friends from law school was in Mexico City and then I was able to connect you guys so you could go out and meet and things like that.

Alison Monahan: Exactly, and we went to have fantastic Yucatan food, it was fun.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, so it's a small world.

Alison Monahan: Exactly.

Lee Burgess: After all.

Alison Monahan: After all. Yeah, another thing I think people sometimes overlook, and this depends a lot on the type of law school you attend, but if your law school is part of a broader university, don't overlook people outside of the law school.

Lee Burgess: It's true.

Alison Monahan: So you might actually, for example, business students. Business school students are fantastic people to know, again, they're like LLM's, they're generally very social. I used to study a lot in the business school library because it was a lot less stressful, they were just hanging out, chilling, doing some group work.

Lee Burgess: Yep.

Alison Monahan: I don't think I actually had like close friends at the Business School of Columbia, but I did have classmates who had really close friends in the business school. Some of the younger people made friends with undergrads, frankly they were usually dating them, but these are, you're actually in a very academic environment and you can meet a lot of different types of people.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that's really true. And just be open to that. I was talking to a friend and I know this is going to sound a little woo hoo, but you know ...

Alison Monahan: We're a little woo hoo.

Lee Burgess: It's okay, I'm going to go for it. But she was just talking about being conscious of the energy that she projects into the world. And about, like she really finds when she's got kind of an openness to just meet new people that just interesting things happen. Interesting connections are made when you're willing to smile more, when you have a bit more gratitude about as you move through life than being like closed off and cranky or very worried and concerned. And I think as law students, if you can kind of keep some open energies so other people might want to talk to you as well, that you can really, moving throughout your world unintentionally or intentionally meet people that could be part of your story. It's something that's important to keep in mind as you get more stressed, how you're moving in the world, I think.

Alison Monahan: Yeah absolutely. I was talking to someone this morning about a friend of mine who met her now husband walking to the bus one day.

Lee Burgess: Oh, interesting.

Alison Monahan: Just as an example of how completely random life can be. If she had left her house five minutes later that day, the entire course of her life would've been different.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: And so you never know, if you decide to study outside of the law school library because it's stressing you out, and you go to a different library, you might meet the love of your life standing in line for coffee. Like you have no idea. So you may as well, I'm not saying you have to go out with that idea, but again, I think your point of just being open to it is good. And also, kind of setting up those opportunities. So maybe you take a class outside of law school.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alison Monahan: Immediately you're going to meet other students who are not law students. You're going to meet professors who are not law professors. For me I had studied architecture before and found out that this guy who's like a guru of architectural theory, taught at Columbia. So I said, I am not leaving without taking his class. People worship this guy, I had read his book when I was my first semester of architecture school and thought I was unbelievable. So of course, I took his class, and it was unbelievable.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. That's awesome, you do just have to look for those opportunities.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. And it can give your perspective and remind you like there's life outside of law school, you know? When I had to write a paper for my architecture class in the middle of law school exams, A, it was kind of a pain, but it was also a good reminder that oh there are different ways to look at the world. And just getting so focused on my law school grades might not really be the most life enriching thing I can do.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think that's true. So even outside the school I think it's great to stay open to meeting other lawyers in the community. Local bar associations love love love to have students come to stuff. You can often times join for free if you contact them and it's a great way to meet other lawyers in your local community. You might be able to get involved in some pro bono projects or you might even volunteer and help fundraise for legal organizations, there are a lot of pretty incredible nonprofits, I think especially right now in this current political climate, that are doing really important work. And you might be able to get engaged with them and meet some different people but also feel like you're contributing and doing some good work in your free time or over the summer.

Alison Monahan: Right, don't overlook the sort of non-lawyers too, like you can always volunteer for non-legal organizations. I know you've had experience being on the board of

a non-profit, it was a great experience. Things like charity fundraising events whether it's one night or whether it's more involved like you're going to train for a 10k with your team of fundraisers. This sort of stuff, it's enjoyable, it's useful, it might get you out of the house, might get you some exercise. These are the things to be looking for. Not just sitting in the library, like that's going to get old really quickly.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, it's probably going to make you feel crummy too, you got to get out and do other stuff. You can only study and stare at your books for so long.

Alison Monahan: Right, and that's not the entire point of your law school experience. Speaking of the bar association, like the local ones can be great, but also, I remember after law school I kind of learned all of these things about the sort of more high-level bar associations and they have all these student events and you can join conferences and do mock trials. And I was like nobody told me any of this.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, you kind of have to go out and learn a little bit about them, but it's worth investigating and talking to other students at your school to see if they've gotten involved in any of these national organizations.

Alison Monahan: Right, yeah or even just Googling if there's an area of law you're interested in and seeing do they have a student branch, do they have some sort of contest, a writing contest whatever it is. A lot of them, you can really get very involved in a pretty big way by the time you're three L. You have to kind of start as a one L, you can't just jump into this at the start of your three L year. But if you're a one L, even a local situation, go to a few events and then maybe they're looking for somebody, a student to join a committee and you join the committee and by the time you're a three L everyone in the local bar knows who you are. They're all willing to help you, I think you're going to have a lot easier time finding work than someone who never left the library.

Lee Burgess: I think that's really true. And what about mentors and sponsors. How, I feel like the people aren't talking about this as much of a hot topic as they were a few years ago, but it's still something that folks feel like they need to have.

Alison Monahan: Right, so we get a lot of questions, how do I find a mentor, how do I find a mentor? And I always say, well you need a mentor but you also, ideally you want to be looking for a sponsor. So what's the difference here? A mentor is basically someone who kind of explains things to you, they take you under their wing, they give you some advice, and that's extremely helpful. The sponsor, particularly in the working environment, is someone who really goes to bat for you when you are not there. So in a law firm environment it might be a partner who when it's time to decide who's going to be partner next, they're really the one in the room saying, Lee is amazing, I can't do my work without her, she needs to be a partner.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: They're putting their reputation on the line. Or I know that she is capable of handling this case, we're going to give her this case even though it's a little bit of a stretch. Those people are very, very difficult to find, you basically, in large part you find them by doing really good work and making yourself invaluable to them. But I think in law school probably, a sponsor could also be a professor in law school. If you have a professor who's willing to call a judge on your behalf, that person is sponsoring you. They're putting their reputation on the line for you.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: Mentors, anyone you have an interest in. I think to find a mentor, is sometimes people will get really up in arms about it. I think a lot of it's just showing interest in someone and then expanding that relationship over time until like you, the story you told earlier with your professor, you feel comfortable going to them with a more complicated problem that they then help you solve.

Lee Burgess: I think that's true, and I think when you are looking for a mentor, one mentor doesn't have to solve all of your mentoring needs. And you might have a mentor for your academic type stuff, somebody who you really like how they navigated academia. But you may also want mentors for work or perhaps you want a mentor just to learn more about the practicalities of work life balance, or how to balance family responsibilities and the law. I think you can collect your own village of mentors, but it's your responsibility to keep up the relationship. I think where mentorship relationships often times break down is the mentee drops the ball on following up with the mentor and the mentor really shouldn't be responsible for scheduling get-togethers and follow ups and things like that because they're the ones really giving more of themselves in that relationship as far as, I guess if you would say, value. But it's not their relationship to necessarily keep up with you, you want to invest in the relationship to keep up with them.

Alison Monahan: Right and I think that's an example of what we mentioned earlier about you find an article that could be very relevant to them and you send it to them. And then you're kind of giving back to that relationship.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Or even just, one thing that actually can be extremely effective that I think people overlook, is if your mentor gives you some type of advice and you take that advice and you can report back on the outcome, that's actually a circle that people love because if I give someone, we get questions all the time and I give people advice about oh well I think you might want to consider doing this. And if they write me back and they say hey, thanks so much for your advice, I did what you suggested and it worked out really well, here was the result. I'm going to, I'm very happy to help that person the next time they come ask me.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, absolutely. Follow up is nice on, makes everybody feel better about ...

Alison Monahan: Yeah you might think oh well I don't want to bother them or whatever but if they gave you some advice and you took it and it worked really well, nobody's going to feel bothered if you thank them for that.

Lee Burgess: No, they're actually going to feel nice about that. I think we often times overlook how important those little notes to thank people can be.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and again, you don't have to go out and buy them flowers, you just drop an email, it takes you 30 seconds.

Lee Burgess: Yep, exactly. Well, any other final thoughts on mentors and sponsors just to keep their eye open? Again, good open energy to meet people.

Alison Monahan: Right, exactly, I think it's being open to people and then, this is a little bit more harsh, but you also have to evaluate if your mentor is someone who's providing you with valuable advice or not.

Lee Burgess: True.

Alison Monahan: Just because someone has taken an interest in you does not mean that they are necessarily the right person to be giving you advice. So just something to keep in mind to figure out some polite ways of declining, if you're getting a weird vibe about someone and you don't really want to have coffee with them again.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. No that's very true.

Alison Monahan: Because you know, people sometimes cross weird lines.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that's true. It kind of goes back to the study group thing. Evaluate relationships and make sure that they are working for you.

Alison Monahan: Exactly, exactly, but be polite to everyone, but if you really don't want to have coffee with this person, it's totally fine to be extremely busy for a very long time.

Lee Burgess: That's true.

Alison Monahan: You're in law school, it's what you do.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. Well with that, because we're extremely busy, we're out of time.

Alison Monahan: If you enjoyed this episode of the Law School Toolbox Podcast, please take a second to leave a review and rating [on iTunes](#) or your favorite listening app because we would really appreciate it. And be sure to subscribe so you don't miss anything. Typically, we release episodes on Monday. If you have any

questions or comments, please don't hesitate to reach out to Lee or Alison at Lee@LawSchoolToolbox.com or Alison@LawSchoolToolbox.com or you can always contact us via our website [contact form at LawSchoolToolbox.com](#). Thanks for listening, we'll talk soon, and good luck building those relationships.

Resources:

- [How to Get to Know Your Professors in Law School](#)
- [Office Hours – Should You Go?](#)
- [Podcast Episode 106: How to Go to Office Hours and Make It Worth Your Time](#)
- [Tips for making the Most of Your Professor's Office Hours](#)
- [Video Quick Tip: Office Hours](#)
- [Avoiding Office Hours? Go, and Get Something Out of It](#)
- [Should I Do a Law School Extracurricular?](#)
- [Podcast Episode 59: Conquering Loneliness in Law School](#)
- [Legal Networking 101: Towards a New Definition of Networking](#)
- [Video Quick Tip: Finding Mentors and Sponsors](#)