



## Episode 116: Life as a Young Law Firm Associate

Alison Monahan: Welcome to the Law School Toolbox Podcast. Today, we're here with Jeremy Richter to talk about life as a young lawyer. Your Law School Toolbox hosts are Alison Monahan, that's me, and normally I'm with Lee Burgess, my co-host. 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](#) or rating; and if you have any questions or comments, don't hesitate to reach out to us. You can always reach us via the [contact form on lawschooltoolbox.com](#), and we would love to hear from you. With that, let's get started.

Welcome back. Today, we're talking with Jeremy Richter, an attorney with Webster, Henry, Bradwell, Cohan, Speagle & DeShazo, wow, in Birmingham, Alabama. That's a lot of names.

Jeremy Richter: That's a lot of names.

Alison Monahan: I love how those firms do that. Jeremy practices civil defense litigation, and focuses on commercial, auto and trucking litigation, premises liability, general business liability and various other aspects of insurance defense litigation. He also writes a very interesting blog, which spans a variety of topics; and you can find that at [JeremyWRichter.com](#), which we will link to in the show notes. Jeremy, welcome.

Jeremy Richter: Thanks.

Alison Monahan: We are excited to have you here. You're gonna have to explain some of what you do.

Jeremy Richter: Sure.

Alison Monahan: Before we jump into stuff, can you just give us a little background about your legal career, and what made you go to law school, and how did you end up in these practice areas?

Jeremy Richter: Okay, some of that was really happenstance. I graduated from college in 2003, and taught high school in Birmingham for about six years.

Alison Monahan: Oh, what did you teach?

Jeremy Richter: Mostly history, but it was a small private school, so there was a lot of gap-filling; so, some photography and English, just whatever needed done. And then, I was just ready to do something else. I had a really good time teaching, but I was ready for something else. It was either pursue a PhD in history or go to law school, and it basically came down to a coin flip, more or less.

Alison Monahan: Wow. Okay.

Jeremy Richter: So, I went to law school.

Alison Monahan: Obviously, here you are.

Jeremy Richter: Yeah, here we are. When I graduated, like, I guess, most graduates at this point, I was toward the middle of my class, I didn't have a job. I took the Bar exam without job prospects, and then after that sent out dozens and dozens of resumes and cover letters, and ended up getting a job at the firm I'm with now through some folks that I had clerked during my 3L year.

Alison Monahan: Like a job that you had during law school?

Jeremy Richter: Yeah. I had worked for some solo practitioners, and they weren't going to be able to take me on. They just didn't have that kind of work. They got a call that led to this, just saying, "Hey, do you know anybody?" And here I am five years later at the same place.

Alison Monahan: Right. Are you essentially doing- Would you say that you're a trial lawyer? Where do you fit on that spectrum?

Jeremy Richter: I do a big variety of insurance defense type work, that most of it is personal injury type work, some of it isn't; but yeah, trial work, and a lot of the stuff I do is car wrecks with personal vehicles, and truck accidents, and defending the folks who were sued, or the companies that are sued, whichever the case may be.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I found some of your blog posts on some of the more colorful aspects of some of your clients to be pretty interesting.

Jeremy Richter: Yeah. You don't get to choose your clients on this side of things, and that can be really ... Colorful is probably good way to put it.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I have to imagine, when you were starting law school you didn't necessarily think you'd be finding yourself chased off of your client's porch by a pit bull, or whatever it was.

Jeremy Richter: No, not at all.

Alison Monahan: You just never know, you never know in lawyering, what you're going to get into.

Jeremy Richter: Yeah. I thought I was going to do criminal work, and then one summer at a District Attorney's Office changed that pretty quickly.

Alison Monahan: How did you go about exploring your different alternatives? You just said that you had an idea you were going to do criminal work when you started law school; but how did you go about figuring out if this is really what you wanted to do or not?

Jeremy Richter: Trial and error. I did the District Attorney's Office after my 1L summer, and I knew pretty quickly that just wasn't for me. It was really interesting, but what I saw was the same people in and out of the legal system for 40 years, doing the same things at age 60 that they were doing at age 20, and that just didn't interest me. My other clerkships were just- it was just a collection of really random things that didn't all fit together. I worked for a Municipal Court, and I worked for a real estate attorney, and then a couple of solo practitioners that shared some office space, and they had a pretty broad variety of things. And then, I ended up doing something completely different from any of the things I'd clerked at.

Alison Monahan: I actually think that's a helpful viewpoint for people to understand, because my experience was sort of similar. I did more the big pharm path, but the area that I ended up practicing in, which was patent litigation, I literally had never taken a class in law school, I had never really worked on it in the summers. In the end, it was actually good fit for my background; but I think sometimes people feel like they have to have it all figured out from the first day. I think the reality is, A: you just can't know what you're to be into until you start trying it, and B: You kind of got to go with the flow, particularly in today's economy, I feel like.

Jeremy Richter: Oh, absolutely. It ultimately came down to, this was the one job that I was offered in, that it was a really good fit, and I really enjoy what I do. But it wasn't like I was a student that had a ton of options, and people were just clamoring for me.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think that's something we try to convey to a lot of people is, particular that first job is ... You just gotta find something. It may not be your dream position, it may not be something you stay in for the rest of your life, but it's about getting your foot in the door, getting that experience. Not to say that you have to settle for something you don't want, but you might have to settle a little.

Jeremy Richter: Yeah, you might have to do that. And then, you can build up your resume and your experience, and figure out what path you want to take and what's available to you.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and you can position yourself for the next job. One of my friends, who's probably the happiest being a lawyer, didn't get that big firm job out of school, and spent several years positioning herself, through a series of other jobs, some of which were more glamorous than others, but did eventually break into that, and now is probably one of the few people who might actually stay in a large law firm. I feel like you've got to be pretty flexible as a young lawyer.

Jeremy Richter: Yeah, I totally agree.

Alison Monahan: You've actually got some really useful blog posts on life as a young law firm associate. Tell me a little bit about that life. For example, one thing I found interesting was [how different your experience could be, depending on exactly what lawyer you happen to be working for](#).

Jeremy Richter: Yes. Over the first two or three years, I worked almost exclusively for one lawyer who just had a huge volume of trucking defense work. I really got ingrained in that aspect of litigation, and trying those cases, and developing them. Then, for the last couple of years, it's been much broader, as far as I've been working for five or six different lawyers, all of whom have different workflows and want to manage me in different ways, and they had different expectations. I feel like my job, in those situations, is just to figure out how they want briefs written. Each one wants them done differently, how they want me to interact with their clients, and just me be flexible to their needs, and their wishes, as far as how they want cases worked.

Alison Monahan: Right. I had a partner once tell me in a fit of anger, "Your job is to make me look good." At the time, I thought that was kind of obnoxious, but later, I actually went, no, he had a valid point; that kind of is my job.

Jeremy Richter: Sure. I've had frank conversations with partners who were like, "Look, I don't care what your writing style is, I don't even care if your writing style is better than mine; this is the way I want it to sound."

Alison Monahan: Right. I definitely had that too, where you're like, okay, we can do it your way.

Jeremy Richter: Sure.

Alison Monahan: The reality is, these are people paying your bills, so you basically need to do what they want.

Jeremy Richter: That's right, you adjust.

Alison Monahan: And I think it's a fine line. I think there have to be times where you push back, but I think learning how to walk that line is probably, I would say, one of the hardest things that the new lawyer has to do.

Jeremy Richter: I agree. I guess I've been really fortunate that, once I got my feet under me, I've worked with a lot of people who were really collaborative, and who were interested in other ideas, or even ideas that oppose their own. That's been really helpful for me, in being able to express my thoughts, and develop arguments, and work through things, rather than just having to be a drone or receive instruction all the time.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think you totally nailed it with this idea of like, are you just a person who has to be told what to do all the time? Because that's not what anyone's looking for. But, at the same time, how to balance your perspective, and your style, and your thoughts with what someone who has a very specific idea of how they want to work is looking for, I think can be a difficult balance. Do you have any tips on how people can pick up on that? Like, how to figure out what your boss is actually looking for, when they may not sit down and tell you, "This is how I want it done."

Jeremy Richter: No. That can be really tough. Some of it is looking at their past work product. If we're talking about writing, you just go look at what they've done in the past. Or, as far as managing cases, it's just one of those things, for me, that I had to learn as I went along who wanted what; and sometimes that was either by over-reaching, or not being proactive enough and having to get some feedback from them saying, "Hey, that's not what I want."

Alison Monahan: Right, this is not what I'm looking for. You're not meeting expectations.

Jeremy Richter: That's right. It just takes time, and experience, and working together to figure out a balance.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I remember one time I was at trial, and the partner was like, you know how they do this hiss-yelling, or whisper-yelling at you in the courtroom, because I, apparently, had made the exact right number of copies of some exhibit or something. On the one hand, someone could have told me that. This isn't totally my fault, like, where's the paralegal here? But, at the same time I was like, well I guess it kind of is my fault to know that he wants seven copies of this, not six like everyone else. You can't beat yourself up about it, but those are definitely memorable experiences.

Jeremy Richter: Yeah. I think some of it comes down to just being teachable; and the other is, like in a situation like that, only have to be told once.

Alison Monahan: Right. And I owned it, I was just like, "Hey, I'm sorry, I should've known this." I think that's probably, even if it's not your fault, I think that's probably your best strategy, at that point.

Jeremy Richter: I totally agree.

Alison Monahan: I could have had the argument. It's just like, no, I'll take responsibility, we'll move on, this won't happen again; don't yell at me in court, it's not going to look good in front of the jury. [Talk to me a little bit about being in trial](#), or in court- Not necessarily even trial, because this is something I think a lot of people aspire to do, but is becoming less and less common. I clerked for a trial judge, so I got to see that, but what's that like?

Jeremy Richter: In Alabama, the State Bar has recently released a study that, of all the cases that even get filed, greater than 99% are settling before they ever [get to a jury](#).

Alison Monahan: Right.

Jeremy Richter: It's becoming more difficult to get that courtroom experience. But, if you want civil courtroom experience, some of the fastest way to get it is either go to a personal injury plaintiffs firm that tries cases, or go to an insurance defense firm where they have a large volume of cases, and they don't have any choice but to get you experience.

Alison Monahan: Right. A friend of my law school roommate became a public defender in New Orleans, and she's like, "Yeah, I walked in the first day and they handed me about 50 files, and said, 'You have a hearing in 20 minutes.'"

Jeremy Richter: Yes, that's a great point. The criminal side is the other way to do it, is that you go work for a prosecutor or public defender's office, and you're going to get thrown into the fire, and you're going to know really quickly if that's what you want to do or not.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly; probably you should try it out in school before you do it long term.

Jeremy Richter: My second day here, I got handed and file and said, "There's a hearing at 9:00. Do not let the judge set this for trial." Uh, okay.

Alison Monahan: Wow. Yeah, I mean, once I left the clerkship, I did one trial in two and half years, and actually, the firm I worked for got hauled in at the last minute, like a month before trial or something when it going downhill fast, and the clients were concerned, so we kind of literally parachuted in. But, they definitely didn't let me speak at all. No one within two or three levels of me was speaking in court, literally.

Jeremy Richter: Sure.

Alison Monahan: I think that's right. If this is really the path that you want, probably outside of a large firm is going to be a lot more practical place to get that experience.

Jeremy Richter: Definitely.

Alison Monahan: Okay, so let's actually talk a little bit about this business of law stuff too. I think part of it is just understanding how the business works; law is a business, and how the different aspects of the business work. I imagine this is a smaller firm that you're at?

Jeremy Richter: Yeah. We have three offices in Alabama. We've got a total of right around 20 lawyers, I think we're at just under 20.

Alison Monahan: Okay.

Jeremy Richter: I would say here, we're a medium-sized firm. But the business difficult, it's evolving, and in my experience with the business part, it's probably different from somebody who doesn't have corporate clients; because mine is a mix on the insurance defense side of the corporate client is hiring you, but your actual person you're representing isn't the insurance company; in most instances, it's their insured.

Alison Monahan: Okay, I was curious about that. The insurer is basically like a repeat client?

Jeremy Richter: That's right.

Alison Monahan: I mean, client loosely termed. I don't know if they're legally your client.

Jeremy Richter: Yeah, that can be really messy.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, they're a return visitor, let's call them. But then, your actual client is the, perhaps, meth-addled truck driver who shouldn't have been driving.

Jeremy Richter: Yes, yes, that's about right. By and large, that's how it goes. The business side of that, and this is probably true of most corporate clients, is they're becoming increasingly cost conscious. Where they are a multi-state business, they're using metrics, and spreadsheets, and calculations to determine, "What are our lawyers doing? Are they working efficiently? How are they measuring up to other lawyers in other locations?" Or, if they have multiple firms they use within the state, they can have a pretty good grasp on what you're doing, whether you're doing it well, whether you are keeping the client informed of what's going on; and just reporting, and communicating, and handling their cases and their other matters in a stewardly way.

Alison Monahan: Right. I found that really interesting, when you were talking about performance metrics. That's something that I was a little familiar with the existence of, and I have other friends and other contacts who have talked to me about it; but it's not just they're looking, "Oh, how much money are you spending?" It sounds like you're saying they may be even going back to your actual client, who is their insured, and saying, "Are you happy? Do you feel like you're being taken care of? Are you getting updates?" That's interesting.

Jeremy Richter: Yeah. With a lot of insurance defense clients, you have time periods that you reporting, that's either triggered by a set number of days, or it's triggered by events. So, are you doing that reporting to the insurance company? Are you evaluating the risk in a way that is actually helpful for them, so that they can do their risk management on their end, and are you taking extra depositions, or doing billable tasks that aren't necessary, and are just running up costs. They keep a pretty good watch on those things, and if you're a firm that does that, you may not get to do that for them for very long.

Alison Monahan: Right. That was another interesting pitch, where you were talking about, was the efficient lawyer going to starve. And that was one of the things that, I was coming from a programming background. When I went to law school, I'd been a programmer for a couple of years, three years; and I remember getting my first summer job. They walked in at one point on Friday afternoon, or Thursday, or whatever it was of my first week, and dropped this box of documents, physical documents, and handed me a highlighter. They were like, "You're gonna need to go through these, and look for these words, and make a spreadsheet."

I just remember looking at this guy who was giving me this assignment, I'm like, have you ever thought about OCR and scanning these? I'm like, I could write a program that would do this in like 20 minutes. And they're like, "Oh. Oh, you don't understand what's going on here, do you?" And it was this moment of like, oh, really? I'm supposed to want to spend all this time on this? I mean, come on.

Jeremy Richter: And you know what? I think that when we started, you could probably do that.

Alison Monahan: Right. There's no way, now, that they would not be- I mean, I was right, basically, they should be doing this.

Jeremy Richter: You were definitely right.

Alison Monahan: And eventually, they had to be doing it.

Jeremy Richter: And now clients know that, and a lot of clients, I think, are even doing that before engaging lawyers to help keep those costs in-house.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I have some friends who do e-discovery platforms and things like that. It makes a lot of sense, the idea that you'd be paying an associate hundreds of dollars an hour, as a client, to sit with a highlighter is like ... Come on. There are bound to be other things we could do. I think that fundamental tension, though, about this model of the billable hour, which worked, sort of. You talked about this too in your post, when you talked about there being trust on both sides. I trust that my lawyer is doing what they need to be doing and nothing else, it works. But now, it's kind of like, I don't really know what they're doing.

Jeremy Richter: Yeah. It's difficult, and it creates a difficulty in the relationship. If either side has broken that trust, if the lawyers are doing unnecessary tasks, or if the client, and

I think this is pretty prevalent with insurance clients, where, whether it's a person on the billing side, on their end, or whether it's a computer program cut costs, or cut bills, and some of it is for good reasons, and some of it just seems arbitrary. When there's difficulty in that trust relationship, [the billable hour](#) kind of breaks down and becomes less effective.

Alison Monahan: I think that's right. To be honest, I will not hire a lawyer on a billable hour any time we need. But our stuff is to file a trademark or whatever, and sometimes people still want to bill by the hour for that. I'm like, "I'm not gonna pay you by the hour. This is what you do, you just tell me what it costs, and then I tell you if that seems reasonable or not, and we go there." I'm not paying you by the hour to file a basic trademark. Come on, you should know what this costs you.

Jeremy Richter: Sure. And even with smaller litigation lately, I've seen a movement toward flat rates, like you're talking about there. Look, if you have a volume business, for example, personal auto; if you have a volume business, we can set a flat rate, and some cases you're going to settle early on; some cases, you're going to try and you're going to make as much money on it. But, over the course of time, they're going to average out, and it's going to work out for everybody.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think more and more clients want to be moving that direction, just for certainty. Obviously, there still will be cases, or situations where that's not practical. I did patent litigation; if we were at trial, they were spending a million dollars a month. But even then, actually, sometimes they were talking about flat fees, which is these very esoteric, very elaborate schemes of how we were going to- Essentially, it's all about assigning the risk. Talk to me a little about actually tracking your time, because I think that's something law students are pretty mystified about when they start working. How do you actually do this?

Jeremy Richter: I didn't realize, when I went to law school, but I was basically just going to be an hourly wage earner for the rest of my life, but that is essentially what it is. There's different ways to track your time. We do it in six-minute increments, which breaks it down into tenths of an hour.

Alison Monahan: I'm having flashbacks.

Jeremy Richter: Oh, it's terrible.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it's awful.

Jeremy Richter: Every task you do has to be broken down into tenths of an hour increments. If you exchange emails with opposing counsel, then that's a .2, or whatever. It's just every minute of your life is broken down into these increments, and then it starts seeping into other aspects of your life, like church, or going to the movies, or whatever; and you start to think, "Okay, that's 2.4 hours of my day-"

Alison Monahan: Right. That just cost \$500 to watch this movie.

Jeremy Richter: That's right, because you could've been doing something else. But it's really interesting, I actually am really nerdy about this sort of thing, and I have a system that I use. I have a yellow notebook that I write all my time down in, and I have stacks of them from going back to the very first day of practice.

Alison Monahan: Wow.

Jeremy Richter: And then, I have a white notebook that's my to-do lists, and it keeps me organized, and knowing what I'm doing, and what I need to be doing.

Alison Monahan: Right. Yeah, I have to admit, apparently there's a personality type that cannot be bothered to track time, and I am definitely in that category. I've been listening to you talk about the yellow notebook and thinking, wow, that sounds so aspirational. That would be amazing if I do could that. I was that person who, at the end of the week was trying to recollect what they had done on Monday afternoon, which is a nightmare. It is an absolute nightmare. Do not do that, if you're listening to this, do not be that person. I know some of you will anyway, you'll probably end up quitting your law firm jobs, because it drives you literally crazy. I just couldn't do it. I could not do that mindset of like, what am I doing every six minutes. I just literally drove me crazy.

Jeremy Richter: Yeah. It's within arm's reach every minute of the day at work, and when I get up in the morning and work before the toddler wakes up, it's right beside me then, too. It takes over.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it's a mindset. I started to feel like the firm literally owned my life; not just the time I was working, but my entire life.

Jeremy Richter: Yes.

Alison Monahan: And I think you have to find a way to manage that, so that it doesn't completely invade the rest of your life. DO you have any techniques about that?

Jeremy Richter: I don't. This is terrible unhelpful, but I am not capable of turning it off, entirely. Most nights when I am going to sleep, it is thinking about the doctor's deposition that's at 4:00 tomorrow, and whatever else is going on. But, I do feel like even with that, even with just not being able to turn it off, you can still have a healthy balance of the time that you spend with family, or with friends, or whatever and accomplish the things you need to at work.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think you have to make deliberate choices, and when you're not deliberate about it is when it can really start to seep over into just no balance at all, and it's all work, all the time, and that can lead to some unpleasant consequences.

Jeremy Richter: Definitely.

Alison Monahan: Let's switch gears, because we're a little short on time, and I do want to talk to you about some other stuff. On that depressing note ... Talk to me a little bit about blogging as a lawyer. This is a big topic; people always wondering, should they do it? It is useful? Why did you decide to start your blog, and how's it working out?

Jeremy Richter: I started my blog last year in June of 2016. I'd been practicing, going on four years at that point, and in the insurance defense world, years five and six is when people either are on track to make partner, or aren't. I don't have a really big personality, where I'm just going to walk into a room and people are going to gravitate toward me, and I'm just going to make a huge impression. I knew that, going forward, in order to establish new relationships with clients, I needed to create a different kind of platform.

Alison Monahan: Interesting.

Jeremy Richter: I've always enjoyed writing. I identify myself as a writer, and it's something that I just wanted to do, and this was an outlet to do that. I just did it on a whim. I started a blog, and since then I've been writing a post, or two, or something three every week, just depending on what's going on. Part of that was to keep up with what's going on around me, as far as appellate decisions and things that affect my practice area, things that happened to me during working out cases, or trying cases, or taking depositions, and just communicating law practice management things with other lawyers that can help them along the way.

It also gives me a platform where I can talk to potential clients. It's led to opportunities that didn't directly lead to more business, necessarily, but it just continued to help me create a platform for myself, where I can either have more experience, or more confidence, or just establish it a way that people can find me.

Alison Monahan: I think this flows into another thing I wanted to talk to you about, which was, you have a [post on networking as an introvert](#), which I think is an issue for a lot of law students and young lawyers. Lawyers tend to be disproportionately introverted, but then there's still this idea that everybody's supposed to be going to cocktail parties and picking up clients, I don't even know.

Jeremy Richter: That sounds horrifying to me.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I can fake it, although I'm in the midpoint of introvert, extrovert spectrum, so I can come off as more extroverted. But what advice do you have for people who are really struggling with this? I think your idea of starting a blog as a lawyer is great. Can a law student do that?

Jeremy Richter: I know that there are law students who have done it. I think, as a law student, I would probably be disinclined, because you just don't know what you don't know.

Alison Monahan: Right, have to be a little careful.

Jeremy Richter: Yeah. There may be things that you're perfectly competent and able to blog about that would help. And even as a young associate, I don't think, in the first three years, that I would've been particularly comfortable with it.

Alison Monahan: Right. You think you have to have some expertise before you have anything to say?

Jeremy Richter: Definitely, because it takes a long time, and it takes a lot of extra time, aside from what you can even bill to establish that knowledge base of your, either one practice area or multiple practice areas, to know what you're talking about be able to add something to a conversation.

Alison Monahan: I think that's right. Now, on the Internet, there's this idea, like oh, everyone's an expert. It's like, well ... It's not, really.

Jeremy Richter: That's right.

Alison Monahan: You and I might be experts in having gone to law school or being lawyers of a certain type; but if you asked me to start a blog about insurance defense, I'm like, I was a patent litigator. I'm not even current on that anymore. There's no way I would be able to do this.

Jeremy Richter: Yeah. That's something I'm always careful to do, is not step outside of, and start talking about things that I don't know what I'm talking about.

Alison Monahan: Right.

Jeremy Richter: I'm not interested in doing that, people aren't interested in hearing that. You've just gotta stay within the scope of what you know. As far as advice for people who have introverted personalities, sometimes you just have to turn it on. For me, what I've found, is if I go to a conference, or if I have a social event, I can turn it on for a while, but afterwards I need to be alone. I need to recharge. It just is very exhausting and taxing for me.

Alison Monahan: Right. I think conferences are a good place to look to, and this is actually something a lot of schools will pay for. Because at least at a conference, everybody's there for a reason. You have things that, inherently, you could talk about. "Oh, did you see the panel; and so-and-so, what do you think?" I think that can be a lot less intimidating than just, "Oh, go to a Bar Association event."

Jeremy Richter: Yeah, for sure.

Alison Monahan: It's like, please, no.

Jeremy Richter: Yeah. I've always been really terrible at small talk. I'm not interested, for one, because I'm just probably not gonna see you again- and I know that's really terrible, but I recognize that, and I don't know.

Alison Monahan: Gotta play to your strengths.

Jeremy Richter: That's right. But I've read a lot, and this is kind of absurd, that as a human, I have to read a lot about how to interact with people; but a lot of times, if you just ask questions of people about themselves, they will walk away thinking, "Man, that was a really great conversation."

Alison Monahan: Exactly.

Jeremy Richter: All you did was just ask them about them, and have them talk about themselves.

Alison Monahan: That's my number 1 tip. I'm like, if you want to be an excellent networker, basically position yourself by the food table, then there's the inherent, "Oh, have you tried these shrimp things? They were great." You've got your opening. "Oh, what kind of work do you do?" All you have to do is keep asking follow-up questions, they'll love you.

Jeremy Richter: Yes, absolutely.

Alison Monahan: Actually, I think your point about doing research on this is actually a good one, because I think sometimes people think, "Oh, well I'm just an introvert, there's nothing I can do about it." But the reality is, there are actually a lot of techniques that you can use to become better at interacting with people in these situations that are not necessarily comfortable. This applies to anything. If you listen to our early podcasts, I'm sure they're terrible, which is really embarrassing, because those are the ones that get the most listens. But you get at better things the more you do them.

Jeremy Richter: Sure. And networking that you need to do, as a law student, in order to position yourself to get a job- it doesn't go away once you have the job; because then, you're not networking for work anymore, but you're networking to be able to earn a living, and have clients, and position yourself within the firm so that you're important and they can't get rid of you, because you have your own clients.

Alison Monahan: Right.

Jeremy Richter: It's not just something you need for three years and then you're done. It's a skill that you have to obtain in order to be a successful lawyer.

Alison Monahan: I think everyone can do that in their own way. People hear about building a business or whatever, and again, think of like, you're out at the steakhouse,

schmoozing or whatever; and maybe that happens sometimes, but it could also be something like your blog, where you develop a reputation as an expert, people come to trust you. You can send them to that when you meet them. Like, "Oh, I have a post on that," whatever. That sort of thing can really open a lot of doors, as well.

Jeremy Richter: I agree, and I've found that helpful, because there have been topics on the blog that have come up in litigation where I'm representing somebody, and I'll send it to the adjuster or whoever at the insurance company and say, "Here's something I wrote. I think it can really help your team," or, "Here's what's going on." It just really explains it in a way that makes sense to everybody, and they understand what's going on, and what to expect in the future.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. That's highly, highly valuable. All right, let me ask you one last question before we wrap up on this point. You talked a little bit about hiring, and we just talked about what firms are looking for. What are the top qualities that you're looking for in a young lawyer or law student who's applying, and how can they convince you that they have these?

Jeremy Richter: When I am involved in hiring, certainly I'm not a decision-maker at this point. But, what matters to me isn't necessarily the skills that they're coming out of law school with, because most everybody has the same skills, and your experience level may vary, but what I'm really interested in is, is this person teachable. Can they be coached, and are they willing to own up to mistakes? Are they willing to learn from what other people are doing around them? For me, that's one of the most important things, is teachability.

Alison Monahan: And how do you assess that?

Jeremy Richter: It's really difficult. If it's a cold interview, where they haven't clerked before for you, or you don't know anybody that they've worked for, it's just a tone of conversation for the 30 minutes that you have with them, or if you all go to lunch afterward, or there's a second interview, I don't have a really specific or a good answer for it. It's just going to be how the person comes across to me. But, certainly keys that trigger me are, if they come across as arrogant, or if they're trying to teach me things during the interview, something that I don't know, then maybe that's an indicator.

Alison Monahan: Let's not be sexist, but if they're man-splaining, you're like ... I asked you the question, actually, because I think that's something everyone's looking for, is something we're looking for; and I don't have a very great answer to either. I think from the interviewee position, try to drop those situations where maybe you learn something. I think people are reluctant to talk about the case where maybe they failed, or they had to learn something the hard way, or they got yelled at in court, or whatever it was, because there's vulnerability around that. I want to look like I'm competent and in charge, but that can actually come off as arrogant and someone I don't want to work with.

Jeremy Richter: Yes.

Alison Monahan: It's a balance. You don't want to be that person who's a total mess, who only talks about their disasters.

Jeremy Richter: Too much self-deprecation is not helpful.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it's definitely a fine line. That's usually the theme of this talk, is there are a lot of balancing going on to be a successful, young attorney. Unfortunately, we are out of time. I want to you a lot, Jeremy. If we want to learn more about you, where can they go to do that?

Jeremy Richter: I think the best place to do that is my blog, which is at [JeremyWRichter.com](http://JeremyWRichter.com). I've just got an instruction to myself there, and, more importantly, the things that I write about that are important to me, and hopefully to other lawyers who come across it and are experiencing similar things.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think there's some great stuff on there, even though I literally had to stop and think about, "What would trucking defense litigation even be? What is he talking about?"

Jeremy Richter: Don't think about it too much, don't do it.

Alison Monahan: No, no, this probably has some bad stuff. If people are interested in these topics, there's a lot of substantive stuff on there, and then, if you're not so interested in those topics, but you're interested in trial litigation, or even just the experience of being an associate, I think there's some really fantastic material there. We thank you for sharing it with our listeners, and definitely thank you a lot for taking the time out of your very busy day to do this non-billable podcast.

Jeremy Richter: No, I appreciate the opportunity to do it with you.

Alison Monahan: All right, thanks so much. If you enjoyed this episode of Law School Toolbox Podcast, please take a second to [leave a review or rating](#) on iTunes, or your favorite listing app; we would really appreciate it. And be sure to subscribe so you don't miss anything. Typically, we release episodes on Monday morning. If you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to reach out to Lee or Alison at [Lee@lawschooltoolbox.com](mailto:Lee@lawschooltoolbox.com) or [Alison@lawschooltoolbox.com](mailto:Alison@lawschooltoolbox.com), or you can always contact us via our [website contact form at lawschooltoolbox.com](#). Thanks for listening, and we'll talk soon.

**Resources:**

- [Jeremy's Website](#)
- [Jeremy on Twitter @richterjw](#)
- [Three Steps to Becoming a Better Associate Attorney](#)

- ["Efficient Lawyers Starve to Death"](#)
- [\(Why\) Should a Lawyer Have a Blog? An Interview with Keith Lee or, What's on an Associate's Mind?](#)
- [Networking for a Job as an Introvert \(Law School Edition\)](#)
- [Knowing When to Stop Arguing Your Point](#)
- [How to Voir Dire a Jury: Goals, Tactics, & Effectiveness \(Part 1\)](#)