



**Episode 127: Resumé Nonstarters
(with ex-BigLaw Recruiter Sadie Jones)**

Alison Monahan: Welcome to the Law School Toolbox Podcast. Today we're talking with ex-recruiter Sadie Jones about some resume not to do's. Your Law School Toolbox host today is Alison Monahan, normally I'm here with 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 that you can be. We're the cocreators of the [Law School Toolbox](#), the [Bar Exam Toolbox](#), and the career-related website, [CareerDicta](#). 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 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 have guest Sadie Jones, an ex BigLaw recruiter, here to talk about some resume no gos: all those things that you should never do on your resume. So first off, could you give our listeners a sense of your background if they haven't listened to your other guest episodes?

Sadie Jones: Hi, thanks for having me back.

Alison Monahan: Thanks.

Sadie Jones: I have worked at three large law firms on both coasts and I've worked in main offices of some firms and smaller offices of other firms. And I've done summer recruiting, lateral recruiting, LLM recruiting so I have seen lots of resumes.

Alison Monahan: It does sound like you have seen a lot. I mean I've seen a decent number in my day, but definitely you have seen a lot more than I have. So, other than typos, which are a definite no go, but we've talked about this a hundred times before, what is the number one thing that you hate to see on a resume? What just drives you crazy?

Sadie Jones: What really drives me crazy is when things don't line up.

Alison Monahan: What do you mean by that?

Sadie Jones: That is my number one pet peeve. Like the margins, where they write the dates on the side. If those don't line up, if your bullet points don't line up. If anything's wonky and it's over in the paragraph. So, I really think that if it looks neat and it all lines up, it's just much easier for me to read and quicker.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I agree. The thing that drives me the most insane is when people try to full justify so they justify on the left and to the right. And the stuff on the right doesn't align to the right. I'm just like, oh, how can you not see this, you can't have a jagged edge there, if you want to push the date over there you have to make them line up.

Sadie Jones: Yes. And even if it's not a substantive thing, you know the dates might be accurate, but it just starts it off with thinking, well, this person didn't really look that carefully and so, what else are they not careful at.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. I think it's just that attention to detail that you don't want someone looking at your resume and wondering what else you're going to mess up.

Sadie Jones: Yes. Exactly.

Alison Monahan: I mean because this is sort of your first impression, so even if you have to get out a ruler and lay down the ruler on the piece of paper and make sure that everything lines up. I mean, the alternative is just don't try to full justify things, it's actually is pretty hard to get right. I think it can be nice when it's done properly, but-

Sadie Jones: I agree, I think it's really easy to mess it up.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean I did that with mine, but I went to design school, so I was super picky. But even then, I remember within paragraphs because you have to do the full justification typically within the paragraphs to, so you have tidy line on the right and the left. And then what that does is sometimes it puts weird spacing in the middle because they've had to spread it out and so I would literally sit there and try to make lines slightly shorter or slightly longer, so it didn't look like that. Which seemed crazy, I mean it seems crazy when I'm talking to you about it, but I think that's really what you have to do.

Sadie Jones: Yeah and I always think, have someone else who's never seen it before take a look at it. If they think it doesn't look neat or it doesn't look right, or a couple people think that, I would rethink how you're doing it.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, the other one that drives me nuts on formatting is when people don't use things like bold and underlines and italics consistently. It's just like okay, come on. Or small caps and not using small caps in certain places. You need, you better pick a style and kind of go with it. But you have to be really picky because you know, a lawyer who's looking at this is thinking is this what a court document that they turn in is going to look like?

Sadie Jones: Exactly and everything, like you said, needs to be consistent. So, the dates all need to look the same, be the same font, the same size. The headers, if you're

underlining then you need to underline for each of them. So, you just, you know I say keep it simple.

Alison Monahan: I agree, I think keep it simple. Sometimes people for example will put the location on certain jobs but not on other jobs. That drives me crazy. You know it's just these things-

Sadie Jones: Or if you're going to spell out the state, you need to spell out all the states or you need to abbreviate all the states. It's just, consistency I think in all writing is really important.

Alison Monahan: Yeah and you know, you're applying to be a lawyer typically so these are the nitpicky details that a court is going to be concerned about. You know the person you're working for is going to be concerned about. You just need it to look right. I mean for me, I guess my current pet peeve is around this sort of thing but a little bit different. Which is, people are getting really, I've gotten a lot of resumes recently where people are very, or I've seen a lot I've haven't actually gotten them, but I've seen them. Where people are very creative shall we say with their layout and their formatting.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely, I agree.

Alison Monahan: And you know again, I think just keep it simple. Because a lot of times what this does, and I don't know, I mean I guess there's advice out there on the internet or at law schools or something telling people, oh you know, you can use a different colored box to highlight your skills or something like that. Just don't do that.

Sadie Jones: I agree, I mean I think if you were applying for a design job or a PR job or something in a more creative field, then I understand why you might want to have a more creative resume. For a legal job it should not have colors, not have weird boxes. It should just be bullets, jobs, education, that's it.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and you know certain schools have opinions on whether you should use bullets or not use bullets or paragraphs or not paragraphs. Honestly, that sort of thing I couldn't possibly care less about as long as it's easy to read. I think Columbia made us get rid of the bullet points, which I thought was kind of stupid, but whatever.

Sadie Jones: Well, and I think that's a chance to, unless your school is telling you you can't for some reason, I think those are individual decisions. Then like you said, I wouldn't really care either, it's just a matter of it being easy to read.

Alison Monahan: Yeah exactly. I think you just need for a legal resume keep it simple, make your formatting decisions, keep them consistent, make sure their consistent. Obviously don't have any typos, duh. Another thing that I've been seeing, which

is definitely a not to do, is people who have resumes with incorrect contact information on them.

Sadie Jones: Yes. Like you have an old email or people even make typos in their own phone numbers and emails.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, which is kind of crazy.

Sadie Jones: If I can't contact you, I'm not going to spend the time to figure it out.

Alison Monahan: Yeah exactly, I mean it would be very sad if someone submitted a resume and someone who sees it, the hiring manager or someone at the employment place is saying, oh gosh, this person sounds really fantastic I'd love to talk to them, let me send them an email. And the email bounces back.

Sadie Jones: Yeah. I also, I think the same thing sort of with your name. I know some people have longer names and they use a nickname. Or they have a legal name and they use their middle name. I would try to make the name on your resume the name you want them to call you. Don't make it difficult for the person if you use your middle name, maybe you just want to start it with an initial of your first name and then write your middle name. Or something in quotes. I just think I've seen a lot of that also and it shouldn't be hard for the person to know what they're supposed to call you.

Alison Monahan: Right, exactly. I mean also I think another thing to keep in mind, again detail but kind of important, is if your email name doesn't match the name on your resume maybe you've gotten married. Maybe it's just a name you don't go by. I feel like, set up a Gmail or something that, you want everything to match. And also, we'll talk about this later, but your LinkedIn profile should be consistent with whatever's on your resume including your name. So, you can be named whatever you want. Like no one really cares, but you want to make that consistent across all of these ways that people might find out about you. Because otherwise, it creates doubt about well who am I talking to, is this the right person, did I call the right person, did I email the right person? Was this a mistake on my part? You know, you don't want people to be wondering who they're talking to.

Sadie Jones: Or is this an alias? Did they, did something happen, and they had to change their name? And I agree with you on the email address. I think that if you have maybe a funny email address or a silly email address or something that isn't your name, you might want to set up a second one with Gmail that's just something close to your name that you're using for work. Because you want it to be professional.

Alison Monahan: Right exactly.

Sadie Jones: You don't want it to be Sparkle Princess, you know, @yahoo.com, but I've seen stuff like that.

Alison Monahan: No, people just don't think about it, though. Their like, that's my email address, it's like well you have a Hotmail address that you had when you were in high school. Maybe this is not the most professional face to be presenting.

Sadie Jones: Correct.

Alison Monahan: I think typically it's good to use an edu, an educational address if that's, if you're currently in school. The problem there is you have to remember to forward that once you graduate.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, I've seen a lot of mistakes there.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, so if I'm using my Columbia.edu or like alum@Columbia.edu, whatever to be like, oh I'm so impressive. But then I forget to set up mail forwarding on that account, I'm never going to get responses.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely. I think that's all the stuff, you know you really want to double check because it's shocking how many people make those types of mistakes.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think it's just because people spend a lot of time and energy at some point in the past laying out this resume and making it really nice and then they just use it over and over again and they don't realize, this is another pet peeve of mine, that they're sending you a resume with a file name of Alison Monahan 2015. It's like, okay, we're in 2017.

Sadie Jones: Exactly.

Alison Monahan: Like this is the last time you've updated your resume? Again, is this your attention to detail.

Sadie Jones: I was going to say the same thing. You should always be updating your resume and you should always make sure that it's current and the person who's reading it is going to see the name of the document. And so, you want to make sure that sounds right. You don't want it something, edit's version or anything like that.

Alison Monahan: Right, exactly.

Sadie Jones: It's good to be a final name in pdf.

Alison Monahan: Definitely a pdf, don't sent a word doc. Yeah, another one that bugs me is when people, they're applying for a legal job and their resume is Monahan 2017 Legal. Which might sound fine, except when I receive that as the potential employer, I'm thinking, well are they applying for nonlegal jobs? What else are they applying for? It's just not necessary.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, or a specific practice group, I think as doing the same thing. You know, oh, they're applying for litigation with me, does that mean that they're applying for corporate with somebody else?

Alison Monahan: Right, I get that it's easier to keep track of your own files if you give them different names, but you need to think about how it's going to be perceived when you upload that file. It's not going to kill you to have a folder where you just put the very, very clean version that you're getting ready to upload and you keep the labeled one in the folder of application materials for this particular job or whatever it is.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, I think there all slightly small little extra steps that aren't a big deal that can make a difference.

Alison Monahan: Right, I mean there not a big deal, but it makes it look like you have paid attention, it makes it looks like you have attention to detail and these are the things that lawyers are looking for.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely.

Alison Monahan: All right, well let's talk now about some pretty specific questions that we've been getting about resumes and what's okay to have on it and what's not okay.

Sadie Jones: Sure.

Alison Monahan: Well first off, particularly for a law student. What's too long and what's too short?

Sadie Jones: So, I think the rule of thumb is a page and for a law student, I think sometimes you can't fill up a page and that's okay. It can be a little bit shorter, you can adjust the font. You know there's usually a way to fill it in though, so it fits sort of a page nicely. And I also don't think you want to go much over. The only time I think you're going over is if you have a lot of experience and if you're a law student, you don't have a lot of legal experience. So, there you have to cut back on other things. Occasionally you might have someone who really had a full career and there's a real reason because let's say they were an engineer before and they're going to be applying for IP jobs. That stuffs all relevant, so I think you could go over. Or you know, you were published a lot or something like that. But I think those would be really special cases. So, for me, a page is right.

Alison Monahan: I think that's right, I mean occasionally I've had students that I've helped with their resumes and maybe there a 3L and they've done a lot of very extensive say clinic experience or internships or externships. And it's very relevant to the jobs they're applying for. In that case, if they really need to put that detail in, I might let them go over a page. The problem then is you've got to really fill the second page, which is hard to do if really you're only going over by a few lines.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, you don't really want to see a bunch of white space.

Alison Monahan: No, I think you've got to really, I agree, do everything you can to get it on a single page, but if you're going to make it longer it needs to look like it actually needed that space and not just that you were self-indulgent and couldn't be bothered to edit.

Sadie Jones: And you better be ready to justify why that stuffs on there.

Alison Monahan: Right. Exactly. I mean in the case I'm thinking of the student was applying for positions he really wanted to do appellate law and he had done several appellate law internships and that kind of thing. He really did want to dive into like, well this was what I was actually doing, this might be relevant. I was like fine, okay. You can have a little bit of extra space. But, that's pretty rare.

Sadie Jones: And I agree with that, but yeah, I think for most law students you want to stick with the page.

Alison Monahan: Absolutely. And how do people know whether to focus on education or prior jobs in terms of what should come first, what should get the most space?

Sadie Jones: Well if you're a law student I think most likely you're always going to start with your education first because you're more junior. I think you start switching it after let's say you have a few years of work experience, five years of work experience. You have enough where your experience becomes more important. So that would be more for a lateral search. But, for the law student I would start with the education.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think that's right and later on you can kind of weigh well are my jobs more prestigious, is my schooling more prestigious. Those are the kind of calculations you can be making later on. But I think if you're in law school people basically want to know where you're in school, what are you doing there, how are your grades. If you're allowed to put that on the resume, which we weren't.

Sadie Jones: So, I think you're thinking what is the first thing you want to catch the person's attention with. How are they reading your resume, that's how you should read your resume.

Alison Monahan: Yeah sometimes people also ask if they can leave off situations say where they transferred, either undergraduate or law school. I think that's a really bad idea.

Sadie Jones: I agree.

Alison Monahan: I mean, you need to be straightforward about where you went to school. I transferred after my first year of college and I just put it on there. Here's the

college I was at, this is where I was studying, this is what I did, there for one year. Next. You know no one really cares.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, and I've also seen people who don't put it on but then submit a transcript from the school they didn't put on.

Alison Monahan: Which looks weird.

Sadie Jones: Yes, because all of a sudden you're like, wait, I didn't see it on there. What is this, what does this mean, what did they leave out and why?

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly, like you don't want people to be asking these questions about what are they trying to hide on their resume or on their background?

Sadie Jones: And there's nothing wrong with transferring. I think the reason people do it is because they in their head think there's something wrong with it and there's not.

Alison Monahan: Yeah I mean it's just a thing that happens. I mean with law school typically you've upgraded when you transfer, and I think typically employers like to see that because it shows someone who has initiative, somebody who worked really hard to achieve a goal. It's not like, oh I couldn't get into this amazing school to begin with. I think in some ways I would have more respect for a transfer student than someone who just started out there.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, we actually would always hire a lot of transfer students and thought of it as a positive. And there's the occasional time you know you might have transferred because for another reason, like for location or personal reasons. And I think, just be prepared to explain it quickly in an interview or your cover letter or something.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. It doesn't really matter that much to be honest. I think the key is, you're only going to be messed up by that if you try to hide it, so just don't try to hide it.

Sadie Jones: Yes.

Alison Monahan: All right, so what about kind of non-prestigious jobs? For example, working in a restaurant, working in a coffee shop, working in retail. Sometimes people come to me and they say well, I don't really feel like this job is the sort of job that a legal employer would be interested in, but it is what put me through college. Do I have to leave it off or should I include it, what do I do?

Sadie Jones: I think this depends and I think if it is what put you through college, then I would put it on your resume. And if you worked let's say a 40-hour week or a strenuous amount while you were also doing well in school, I think that's great. I think that shows initiative. Maybe you worked your way up and you were a

manager in the restaurant or something like that. I think that's fine. And some of these jobs might have some skills that you can kind of put in that transfer over to anything. I think if it was just something that you did during the summer in college or something like that, I would probably leave it off.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I agree and some of this also has to do with how much other work experience you have. If this is literally the only work experience you've ever had in your life, I think it probably has to go on there.

Sadie Jones: Yes. Absolutely.

Alison Monahan: You know, I mean I worked definitely a variety of random jobs in college and when I was applying to law firms, not every one of those, probably not any of those really was on my resume just because it wasn't relevant. Like I'd had other careers.

Sadie Jones: And sometimes they fall off your resume as other things get added.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly.

Sadie Jones: And I think that's okay also.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I don't think there's anything inherently wrong with this type of job, I think in a lot of cases it can be a plus. It shows, I mean I worked straight out of college for example at Eddie Bauer for a few months doing retail. And, is that a prestigious job? No but it actually taught me a lot about customer service and I was trusted with money and all these things that if you think about it, actually are relevant to working as a lawyer.

Sadie Jones: I agree. I think this is really case by case and you have to ask yourself what skills, what part of my life was this, why is it important?

Alison Monahan: Right and it-

Sadie Jones: I think this is what you should ask yourself every time you're putting something on your resume.

Alison Monahan: Right, and also is this something I would want to discuss in an interview?

Sadie Jones: Exactly. Good point. Most of the times that I would see it on the resume, it would be in the case of someone saying I supported myself doing this.

Alison Monahan: Right.

Sadie Jones: Or let's say you took a year or two off from school to save up or something like that, I think that's relevant.

Alison Monahan: Yeah and working as a paralegal obviously relevant. Yeah, I think I agree, case by case but I don't think people should be inherently afraid to put something like, oh I was a barista or waitress. I mean, I used to work for someone who actually almost never hired someone who had not worked as a waitress or waiter at some point because he thought it was great training for handling stress and multitasking and all this other stuff. I got in because I had been a barista, but he was like well, it wasn't quite perfect but close enough. So, you just never know. Maybe somebody themselves grew up waiting tables and they think this is a great thing for you to do. So yeah, I mean I'd say play it by ear.

Sadie Jones: And I think if your resume is getting too long, that's not the one you're going to leave on.

Alison Monahan: No.

Sadie Jones: More relevant experience. That's the times where think it's odd when a resume is too long, and they had a bunch of those kind of things. I'm thinking, well not good judgment.

Alison Monahan: Right, they go to two pages so that they can list their freshman year of college like spent at the library doing campus work service. Like, okay. That can probably go. I think if you're going over one page, you can ax these types of jobs.

Sadie Jones: Yes.

Alison Monahan: What about other time-consuming activities in college? For example, somebody wrote recently asking what to do about her sports career because she was a serious athlete in college, did a couple at a time. It didn't really allow her to do internships and she just wasn't really sure how this is going to be perceived or if she should even put it on the resume.

Sadie Jones: I think it's great. I actually think that's a really big positive and we always liked people who had excelled in something like that. I do think it's something if you want to put it on there that you should have excelled at and really spent time on. It was an important part of your life, you want to talk about it. So, I think all of that is good. I don't think I would put it on if you were on some sports team for a semester.

Alison Monahan: Right, I mean I played like pickups or not pickup, but like club soccer for a semester in my first year of college. That wasn't on my resume.

Sadie Jones: Well you could put, if you're still playing that for fun, you could put it under an interest section, but yeah I wouldn't put it on for that. But if you were on a real team and it took up a lot of time and you don't have other things that are going to be in that section for that reason, then I would make sure you put in on there so that they will ask you and you can talk about it.

Alison Monahan: Right and you might even put what the time commitment was. If it was something that went on for half the year or maybe the entire year, twenty hours a week in season, ten hours a week off season. Whatever, just so someone kind of gets a sense of, oh, okay, this was a real commitment. This is what they were doing, and this is maybe why they don't have these other things they might be seeing on different resumes.

Sadie Jones: And I think sports show lots of great skills that translate over like you were saying about working in a restaurant or other things. I mean sports is a commitment and it's a team activity a lot of times. You know there's lots of skills.

Alison Monahan: Yeah it's discipline, you can make yourself do things you might not want to do, you're probably coachable. All of these are things that you can bring over to a legal career.

Sadie Jones: Correct.

Alison Monahan: All right, well this is a little bit more controversial. Another question we've gotten recently about time consuming activities in college. What about Greek affiliations, I mean how much if any should someone mention being in a fraternity or a sorority?

Sadie Jones: So, I think this is hard because you don't know who is reading your resume.

Alison Monahan: Agreed.

Sadie Jones: And how they feel about it. So, I would say I would potentially put it on with caution. I think that if you had a leadership role or you were involved in some kind of organizing activity and there's really a reason that you're trying to bring this over then I could sort of see it. I'm hesitant to recommend it because so many people kind of have negative connotations of what it means. And so, I think there's possibly a bigger chance of sort of kind of turning someone off to your resume versus someone being really excited about it.

Alison Monahan: I mean I think that's right, I definitely would not see it as a particularly positive as someone's like, oh I spent four years basically binge drinking in my fraternity. Which, I mean, let's face it for a lot of people that is the perception, fair or not fair. I agree with you if there is a leadership role or say you did substantial volunteer work and it was legitimate. But again, there you need to quantify it. You can't just put on, oh I was in Kappa Kappa whatever and we did Toys for Tots. It's like, okay great, was that between binge drinking? So, and fair or not, it's probably not a fair perception although I did go to a school that had a large Greek population and I had a lot of friends who did that. And I went and hung out with them and we were all binge drinking. But, that's basically my perception. I think it depends also possibly on this one sort of regionally.

Sadie Jones: Yes. Good point.

Alison Monahan: I went to school in the South and I think there if you're applying for jobs in Charlotte or Atlanta or wherever, it might be more potentially of a positive. Whereas I feel like if you're applying for jobs in New York or California I would generally probably stay away from that.

Sadie Jones: I agree. I think it can be similar in a way to the sports, if it was something that you were in a leadership role and you were involved in a lot of your saying charity stuff or planning things or something like that and took up a lot of your time, so you don't have other things. Then you could highlight the work you did, but I think the regional point is a good one.

Alison Monahan: Yean and also what type of places are you applying to. If you're applying to a human rights organization or a woman's rights organization, probably not going to be that impressive. But there may be other areas where people would be more receptive to that. So, know your audience as with anything.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely.

Alison Monahan: All right, let's do a final question. What about other, on this topic, what about other types of affinity groups? So, the Greek affiliation is sort of an affinity group, but I'm thinking here specifically about things people would probably do in law school, although I guess it could be in undergrad. You know say you're in the Muslim or Christian or Jewish legal society. Or the NLG, which is the more left-wing lawyers. Or the Federalist Society who are more right wing. Maybe a group for gay or lesbian students. Or a parent support group. Whatever it is. How do you feel about including these?

Sadie Jones: I'm 100% in favor of including whatever you were in. I think it gives an idea of who you are, what's important to you if you're trying to highlight certain things. That's a way for the person to understand where you're coming from. Some of the political stuff, I guess you are taking a slight risk because you're putting that out there and so like it or not, they might have preconceived ideas about what that means. But, if that is important to you and that is who you are, then you probably wouldn't want to go somewhere where that's a problem.

Alison Monahan: Right, I think that's the key point. People are sometimes very reluctant, like oh I might miss out on an interview if I put that I'm in this organization and I know that they're not going to like that. And it's like, well why are you applying there? You know?

Sadie Jones: Yes.

Alison Monahan: I get this a lot when talking to people about clerkship's, particularly because it is very specific. It is one person, that person has certain viewpoints on things. So sometimes I'll get someone who's like well, I am gay, and I have a partner and

we've been together for a few years now, but I think I'm going to have a really great shot through a professional connection about getting a job in this really conservative area of the county with a really homophobic judge. It's going to be awesome right, like I'll just leave off this part of my resume. I'm like are you out of your mind?

Sadie Jones: Yeah and that's just something bad waiting to happen.

Alison Monahan: Why would you do this to yourself? I mean a, it's probably not the only clerkship opportunity if you really are in a position that that's feasible, it's probably not the only clerkship you're going to be able to get. And also, you're going to go back in the closet for a year? What about your partner, what are you thinking?

Sadie Jones: Yeah, I think some people are clouded by just being desperate or really wanting something and I think they don't think about the bigger picture, which is you want someone to hire you, but you're also looking for somewhere you want to be. And you're going to be comfortable.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it has to be the right fit. I mean I think it probably is true that if you put certain of these affinity groups on a resume for certain employment opportunities, you might not get that opportunity. But, I think it also means that's probably not the right place for you to be working.

Sadie Jones: Yes. I also think you don't, you also don't want to mislead people.

Alison Monahan: Right.

Sadie Jones: So, I think, you might want to make sure you are really in that group and this is really important to you and it's a real thing. Yeah, because they're going to ask you about it. I have seen people sort of do the opposite and kind of act like they're involved in something that they're not because they want to seem diverse.

Alison Monahan: Right, I have students who have joined both the Federalist Society and The American Constitutional Society, which are pretty diametrically opposed.

Sadie Jones: I've seen that to.

Alison Monahan: And they just pick one or the other depending on which resume they're, you know, which sort of area they're applying too.

Sadie Jones: I think it goes back to what we were saying about putting transfer stuff on your resume, which is that you want to be honest.

Alison Monahan: Right. Well-

Sadie Jones: And maybe you are interested in both.

Alison Monahan: Well you're probably, I mean, that doesn't really make sense. Basically, if you're in both of them and your legitimately interested in both of them, that just doesn't, I mean, there not the same.

Sadie Jones: Like you kind of have to exempt one. I mean there are certain things right where it could be a little bit different but that's something where it's probably your core beliefs. So, you probably only have one side of that.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I mean if you're in NLG, you're probably not also going to be a card-carrying member of The Federalist Society. You have to choose. Actually, you just mentioned this, but I was going to ask you. Is it ever okay to exaggerate or make stuff up on your resume?

Sadie Jones: I think it's not. I think there are ways to spin some of your experience and tell a story with it. And take some skills and try to have it go in a direction, but to me that's different than really exaggerating or lying. I just think you're always going to end up getting caught.

Alison Monahan: Yeah.

Sadie Jones: It's never going to work out well for you and it's going to be a hard thing to keep up. And I've seen people do it, I've seen people fudge transcripts.

Alison Monahan: Wow.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, which is shocking, but it happens. So, I think you just really got to be careful. I would be as honest as you possibly can.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, the one I always thought was funny was when people lied about their language fluency in a second or third language. They'd be like, oh I'll put this random, sometimes it was people who were diverse candidates and they thought oh you know, nobody at the firm is going to speak Hindi or whatever. Like people are just going to assume I speak Hindi I'll put it on there. Then of course they get the interview with the partner who grew up in India and just for the fun of it decides to talk them in Hindi and it turns out they've got kindergarten level vocabulary. Doesn't look good.

Sadie Jones: Oh, that's bad.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean you've got to be pretty solid on what you're putting on. Another one I always like is when people claim technical skills they don't have, and you might just decide, someone might, say you're looking for IP work or something and you say that you know HTML. And somebody might just ask you to display that knowledge for them and if you don't have it, you don't have it.

Sadie Jones: And I think, yeah that's the thing I would always keep in mind. You may be called out on anything on your resume. And so, I've seen a lot of people not know certain things that they put on their resume they don't remember.

Alison Monahan: Oh, I remember one-

Sadie Jones: So that's just as bad as lying.

Alison Monahan: I remember once I was in a clerkship interview with the clerks of the judge and one them was just being super aggressive and starts like quizzing me about my undergraduate honors thesis and all the details of it. And I mean, I haven't looked at this for years. Yeah, I mean obviously I did it, I wrote it, it exists, you can go look it up in the library. But, that's one of those situations where you just kind of have to roll with it. But if I'd made that up, there's no way.

Sadie Jones: Right. Well and I think that's a good example of if you know you're going into an interview and know what's on your resume. Maybe quickly sort of review your resume and look through anything that's old or you haven't seen for a long time.

Alison Monahan: Sure, I would say that was the-

Sadie Jones: Because you're putting it on there, you're saying ask me about it.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, that was the one time in like hundreds of legal interviews that anyone ever brought it up, but it is memorable when you're like, oh wow let me think about what the x value of that would have been.

Sadie Jones: Same for hobbies. I think it's okay to put a hobby on there that isn't a huge passion but you sort of do sometimes. But, don't put anything on there that you can't talk about.

Alison Monahan: Right or a place that you didn't really travel to or you passed through because you think it sounds cool that you went to France for one day. And people are like, oh where did you go in France? Well, I went to the airport.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, I know nothing.

Alison Monahan: I know nothing. I had one guy once put baking or something on his resume and I was trying to kill time. Oh, you know, what do you like to bake? "Well..." First he looked at me like I was crazy and I'm pointing at his resume it says it right here. He's like, "Well I mean I guess it's more of an aspiration, like I really like watching cooking shows." And I was like dude, just give me something, tell me you like chocolate chip cookies, I don't care.

Sadie Jones: I know, there's where he could have just made something up.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I really love making my grandmother's chocolate chip cookie recipe. Oh really, tell me more about your grandmother.

Sadie Jones: Because that's the thing about resumes is that a lot of times people ask you about the stuff that doesn't seem work substantive. They'll ask you about, yeah, some random thing that's more interesting to talk about.

Alison Monahan: Yeah because how many times can you have, oh how do you like law school, what's your favorite class? That's not going to fill a total of half an hour, at some point you've got to have something on there, they're like, "Oh, you're really interested in cheese." Which actually a friend of mine put on her resume, but she was legitimately really interested in cheese.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, I think that's great. I think stuff like that is great.

Alison Monahan: She said every single interview she did they asked about cheese. And she's like, I'm happy to talk about cheese for 20 to 30 minutes. I'd rather talk about that than the Erie doctrine.

Sadie Jones: That's funny.

Alison Monahan: All right. So, I think our main takeaways here are just make sure things are really consistent. Don't mess up the little stuff, I mean you may be listening to this thinking God these people are so anal, would anyone really be that anal. You're applying to be a lawyer.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, I mean that's a skill.

Alison Monahan: Anal is what lawyers do. Like if you think we're being picky, wait until you start working for someone or wait until the judge calls the person who submitted the brief out in court because they went over the word limit. This stuff is not tolerated.

Sadie Jones: Also, I think you have to keep in mind the point of a resume, which is to tell your story in an easy and concise way. And these people are getting so many resumes every single day. You want yours to be something they remember that was easy to get through and interesting.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, they remember positively not negatively.

Sadie Jones: Yes. Because I think we tend to remember the negative ones.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, again, I think your advice earlier of just keep it simple is totally fine. It just needs to be a simple document that has the information we're looking for. I think another key is that it really highlights the experience you have that's relevant to this particular position. Sometimes I'll see a resume and it's like, oh okay it isn't really that on point but then you read the cover letter and you find

out they have all this other experience that's relevant and you're like, where is this?

Sadie Jones: Yeah, I think the cover letter is a chance to elaborate on their resume, but it should definitely go back to what is on the resume in the first place.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, you shouldn't have a cover letter where you're like, wait you did this internship with someone who's exactly what we do but I don't see that on your resume anywhere. Why not?

Sadie Jones: Exactly. Well and I think the other thing is, if you have something sort of strange on a resume, like you have a break in employment or a break where you weren't doing anything. Be honest in the resume so the years should all match up to what they really were, and you know that you didn't do anything in 2012 let's say. Then the cover letter is your chance to explain it. So, it's fine that there's a break in the resume, it's just that you have to know that they're going to ask about it and it's better to address it before they ask.

Alison Monahan: Right I think that's true. Whether it's taking time for family reasons or illness or just because you wanted to go travel around Europe for a while. People get that things happen. Another one that annoys me is when you can tell based on the way that people are doing the dates that they're trying to hide something. So maybe they had a job in January of 2010 and didn't do anything for the rest of that year and then they pick up again. I feel like you can almost always tell when someone's trying to hide something.

Sadie Jones: Well I think that when they drop months and they just write years.

Alison Monahan: That looks suspicious, I mean fair or not. I feel like there almost always there are these tells where you're like that's a little weird. And then you start thinking well why would someone have done that, hmm. Well, I bet something happened and they weren't working this year, or they weren't in school and they don't want me to know that. Well what else are they trying to hide? It's just, I feel like honesty is basically the best policy here.

Sadie Jones: I agree because it's not really about the fact that you took the year off because you had something else going on. It's about the fact that you were trying to fudge this.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think and you're going to get called out on a lot of this stuff anyway at some point. People are probably potentially going to do a background check or they're at least going to get your transcripts, those things. Like these are lawyers, they follow up on stuff, it's kind of what they do.

All right, well we're almost out of time. Any final advice on what not to do or to do on your resume?

Sadie Jones: I mean really my final advice goes back to the beginning, which is to make sure everything looks nice and pretty and neat and double check it. And have somebody who hasn't seen it before look at it and give you an honest opinion.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and not look at it for half an hour, look at it for two or three minutes max.

Sadie Jones: Look at it like a test run of somebody who just gets your resume. And if they have any questions, then the person at the employer is going to have the same questions.

Alison Monahan: Absolutely and I think a good exercise is actually to hand your resume to someone for even 30 seconds and then take it back.

Sadie Jones: That's great, I like that.

Alison Monahan: And ask them, what did you take away from this? And if they have no idea and they're not telling you the story back that you think your resume is telling, then you need to revise it. Because honestly that's about all the time you're going to get a lot of times.

Sadie Jones: And I think sometimes people spend a lot of time on their resume and they take it a little bit personally how somebody reads it. And so, you can't do that, you have to say it's okay, let me adjust it. You have to have someone with a fresh eye look at it.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean you have to kill your babies basically. It's just like, because it is really a design process you know. And you're probably going to want to have several of them. Not with weird names, but for different types of jobs and things. And you could do the same exercise, are you taking away from this what I want you to take away for this specific position? And if the answer is no then reshuffle things until it's like, oh yeah, you are so qualified for this, I would definitely call you for an interview.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely. Because really your resume is just getting you in the door, it's not telling your whole story. It should just be sort of a quick snapshot.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, you're trying to peak someone's interest so that they are like, yes, this person is exactly what I'm looking for for this job, I want to talk to them tomorrow.

Sadie Jones: But do not peak their interest with pink boxes.

Alison Monahan: No because then they're going to be like, what, I don't understand this, is it Valentine's Day? Like this is just ... if the reaction is, "I don't really understand what's going on here," it's probably going to go in the reject pile. Or at least they're going to have serious reservations about it.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely.

Alison Monahan: All right well with that unfortunately we are out of time. Thanks so much to Sadie for joining us and sharing her expertise.

Sadie Jones: Thank you for having me.

Alison Monahan: Oh, our pleasure. If you would like personalized help on your resume you can actually checkout our career site, which is at [CareerDicta.com](https://www.careerdicta.com) for details on how we can help. 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 app because we would really appreciate it. And be sure to subscribe so you don't miss anything. We usually have new 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 could always contact us via our [website contact form at LawSchoolToolbox.com](#). Thanks for listening, we'll talk soon and good luck with those jobs.

Resources:

- [Podcast Episode 111: Resumes and Cover Letters \(with an Ex-Biglaw Recruiter\)](#)
- [Podcast Episode 120: Preparing for the 1L Job Hunt \(with Ex-Biglaw Recruiter Sadie Jones\)](#)
- [Podcast Episode 126: How to Get People to Help with Your Job Search](#)