



Episode 133: Being Strategic About Your Legal Career (Starting in Law School)

Alison Monahan: Welcome to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today, we're talking with legal recruiter Liz Stone of Stone Legal Search about ways to proactively manage your career from law school onwards. Your Law School Toolbox hosts are Alison Monahan, that's me, and normally I'm here with 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 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 your favorite listening app 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're talking with legal recruiter Liz Stone of Stone Legal Search, about ways to proactively manage your career from law school onwards. So, welcome Liz and thanks so much for joining us.

Liz Stone: Thanks for having me Alison. It's great to be here.

Alison Monahan: My pleasure. First off, can you just give our listeners a sense of your background, so they know a little bit about where you're coming from?

Liz Stone: Yes. I graduated from law school in 2005 and I litigated for about six years. I started at Pillsbury and then I was at Goodwin Procter and then Buchalter Nemer. For the last five years I've been a legal recruiter in the Bay Area and this past fall I opened my own search firm, Stone Legal Search.

Alison Monahan: Congratulations.

Liz Stone: Thank you. I am also the chair of the American Bar Association Legal Career Central Board of Directors and that is a group of legal professionals with a career focus that provides practical career advice to lawyers of all levels in all practice areas. When I am not working I perform stand-up comedy at night.

Alison Monahan: Nice. If somebody wants to find out more about the board that you mentioned, how can they do that? I'm not really that familiar with this, to be honest.

Liz Stone: Our website is [ABALCC.org](#) and there are tons of resources for all kinds of lawyers at all different stages in their career and there's also live webinars that you can attend and a file of all the past programs that we've put on.

Alison Monahan: Oh, sounds amazing.

Liz Stone: It is a great resource.

Alison Monahan: Now, you work primarily at this point with mid-career lawyers who were looking to make some type of a switch or they probably wouldn't be talking with you. When you talk to these folks, what advice do you wish that they had taken earlier in their careers and what should they have been thinking about sooner?

Liz Stone: Well, one thing I think every lawyer should understand is how competitive the market remains even as you get further into your career, and this applies even for people with the best credentials, who have been at top firm say for four years. Accepting the fact that your next job still might be a stepping stone to get to your long-term career will really help people plan their move and I really advise everyone to stay apprised of the market, even as a young lawyer, because you want to understand realistically what your options are instead of working for four years with an idea in your head of what you're going to do only to find out it's not realistic. That will really set back people's job search or career transition. So, really thinking sooner about what you want out of your career and then continuing to talk to people as you have ideas so that you can figure out how to set yourself up to get there.

Alison Monahan: I mean, that sounds great. I'm like, "Okay, I'm a third year in a firm. I'm thinking maybe this isn't going to be my lifetime career path. I should find out about the market." How do I do that?

Liz Stone: People call me to ask questions all the time. Definitely having a relationship with a good legal recruiter is helpful, but honestly, your own network is always a great place to start. So, people who have been in your job and moved on to something you think is interesting, reach out to those people, either people that you know or ask for introductions, keep your eye on what moves people are making that are posted on LinkedIn. If you see someone get an interesting job you can talk to them and find out what they did to get there because usually when you see someone make an interesting move or get a job that looks really good, they didn't just accidentally land there, that's a very rare. Usually they've made a lot of effort and maybe they've taken a class on the side, someone retooled themselves as a privacy attorney to get in-house. There are usually extra steps people have taken. Talking to people who've made a good move or an interesting move or has already gone through the process will put you light years ahead in your own process.

Alison Monahan: I think that's true. I remember a friend of mine who actually wrote a series for the Girls Guide Site on how she not only left a big firm, but she also left litigation and it was a fascinating process because she was a sort of discontented and realized being a litigator wasn't really what she wanted to do, but she had no idea what to do next. It was a fairly long process where I think she took a leave of absence and then she volunteered as a DA. She did a bunch of stuff and then

finally lands in-house with a job she really likes, but it was kind of fascinating. If you looked at it and it's like, "Oh, she went from Quinn Litigation to being in-house, isn't that great?" But it wasn't like-

Liz Stone: Yeah. It always looks so simple. It always looks so simple, but when you start talking to people you find out it really isn't. I always talk to people who are practicing law and interested in getting into recruiting or professional development because I went through such a long process to figure out what I wanted to do instead of practicing law that I feel like the background information that I have, that helped me make a decision, is really useful and can save someone all that time just by referring them to resources and giving them just the insight that I got. I try to help people out who are looking for information as well just to save them some of the time I spent on it.

Alison Monahan: I think a lot of people are willing to do that. I mean, I said I was getting e-mails from people who are interested in becoming an entrepreneur and they're like, "Well, how did this happen?" I'm happy to tell them. I mean, like why not.

Liz Stone: Yeah, exactly.

Alison Monahan: People like to be appreciated and if somebody comes to be and genuinely wants to know like how do you do this and you think it's a good idea for me to do a similar thing. I mean, I'll tell them what I think. I may not be right, but I'm at least trying to help.

Liz Stone: Yeah. I remember my husband was a litigator for eight years at a firm and he really wanted to move in-house and he got together with an attorney that he had worked with at a firm who had two different in-house jobs and from the outside it seems like she had just stumbled into these amazing jobs that were the most sought after jobs at a tech company and he found out that the first in-house job she got, she had been contacted by a recruiter and she had really specific experience that this company wanted, but then she made a list of up and coming companies in the Bay Area that she might ultimately be interested in working for one day and was really tracking the business of these companies.

She identified one company, and I don't want to say it just in case, people could figure out what it is, but a really hot company in the Bay Area and began going to every networking event where either she saw the general counsel of the company would be or suspected he might be so that she could build an in-person relationship with him and two years later, when a litigation position opened up at that company, she was able to send her resume directly to the GC, and obviously, who was first in line for that position, and in addition had done extensive research on her own about all the legal issues that that company was facing. So, she was able to have be an expert in this area even though it wasn't part of her practice. It was really a long, long game and plan that she had to get that job.

Alison Monahan: I think that's a great point you make, that even after ... sometimes we tell people, "Your first legal job is the hardest one to get." Like, "Don't worry, after this will be easier." But that's not necessarily true. These are people who are highly qualified, from great schools, have great credentials and they're still hustling.

Liz Stone: Exactly. I really think that people who work really hard and network to get their first job are better poised to handle career changes down the road because they've been through it. Sometimes someone who has done really well in school and is the top of their class and got this summer associate position that led to a big firm job, they tend to feel like they have every advantage on the market, but then when they're a fourth year associate and want to go in-house, then they find out how important networking is and how important really preparing for interviews are and understanding the market and they are a little behind the ball on that. Whereas I see a lot of people who had to really work for that first job and by the time they're ready to make a job change they know the whole process, they're able to dive in really fast and give themselves every opportunity on the market.

Alison Monahan: I think it's a great point. What do you think people should be doing not to get ... I mean, I guess basically not to get lazy in the first job even if they're not quite sure, maybe they don't have a five-year plan or they're not sure exactly what they want to do, but just to sort of keep their options open?

Liz Stone: I think every lawyer, no matter what they may think they want to do when they start practicing, should really do something to stay involved in the community beyond their own firm because the worst advice comes from people who are at the current job because they're still at that job. I kind of made this mistake when I was at a firm and I thought maybe I don't want to do this. I would talk to the senior associates and junior partners and they were always-

Alison Monahan: Maybe not the wisest career move, Liz.

Liz Stone: Yeah. They're like, "Well, I mean, yes this job is pretty terrible, but every other job is terrible too." But they have never had another job or another career, so they had no idea. I was finally like, "I don't think these are the people I should be taking advice from." And I talked to so many attorneys who were just talking to people at their own firm and they were just getting advice from people who are risk averse or not interested in looking to move or are too scared to take a risk themselves.

I think if you are able to stay in contact either through your own network or really joining an organization that exposes you to people, even if it's the same practice in other firms that's really helpful, but the broader the network is, the more exposure you're going to have to people at different phases of their career who have gone down different paths, you're going to see more options that are out there. I think one thing that is so important is seeing people who've made a

career move that makes them happy because they can really give you some context and say, "No, I felt the way you did, and I thought there was no other option, but then I did XYZ and now I'm really happy." And if you're only talking to people in your immediate work world, you're not going to get that perspective. So, it doesn't have to be a ton of time, but being involved in a bar organization and being on ... especially if you're on some board of directors or you're working closely with other people, I think all those things can be helpful.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think also pro bono work is a great way to kind of reposition and meet people in different areas. When I was thinking about leaving the firm one of the things I was thinking of was actually opening my own practice in family law. Well, thank goodness I took a pro bono case for two reasons. One, because I made some amazing connections, including with someone who was a leading practitioner who I had her helping me on this pro bono case and I went to her office when I was still working, and she asked me like, "What do you do?" Blah, blah, blah, and she's like, "You realize you should quit the job and open your own practice?" And I was like, "Well, actually I'm thinking about doing that." It was really interesting conversation where she's like, "I would help you. Other people would help you. We want to see the next generation of lawyers succeed do this." In the end, I hated the pro bono case, so it told me I didn't want to practice in that area, which is also really valuable to know.

Liz Stone: Also very helpful, yes.

Alison Monahan: So, I did not spend several years going down that path and then realizing I did really want to do divorce cases.

Liz Stone: Yeah, and another thing, not everyone is able to take pro bono cases at the place that they're currently working, but there are so many good conferences out there and if you attend a conference and pay, even if you pay for out of pocket and you go to a conference and you get enough information to learn you actually don't want to do what you thought you wanted to do-

Alison Monahan: Good to know.

Liz Stone: That's incredibly valuable. I actually did that. I thought I wanted to get into professional development at a law firm and I was really interested in professional development and Goodwin Proctor had the leader in law firm professional development at the time and he was so helpful and kind and he directed me to a PD NALP conference and I thought, "Okay, this is great. I'm going to network. I'm going to get all this information and find this job." And it was not too far into a two or three-day conference when I realized, "Okay, this is not going to be a fit for me." I am not patient enough to do this work at a law firm and if I'm going to be in a law firm I think I'd rather be doing litigation.

I was demoralized because I thought I had found the answer and it was so hard for me to figure out what I wanted to do and in hindsight, it was so great that I

attended that conference, I was able to rule out an area that I thought I might be interested in and it helped me find the right thing faster. If you don't have a chance to do pro bono work and there are people that are doing what you think you might be interested in, there is probably a conference somewhere on it and I recommend finding it and attending it.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, or even just CLE. Your local area's probably going to have CLE or online CLE on just about everything. If you think, "Trademark law sounds so cool." And then you can't force yourself to sit through like a three-hour CLE on the basics of trademark call. Probably not a great fit.

Liz Stone: That might not be your thing. Yeah, and also, I do think the CLE programs, anything you can find online, if you're not able to meet people in person is going to still be helpful, but to the extent you can meet people in person who do what you're interested in, it is so helpful to figure out if that is a potential fit because different areas of law, different working environments really do have kind of different personalities and if you ... I am a pretty hyper person and I would say patience is not my strong suit, although I recognize that about myself so I'm always working to dial it back, but if I end up in an environment where it is clear it is a really slow paced and it's clear that everyone around me is a little bit on a more mellow wavelength than me, I'm probably going to be pretty annoying in that environment. It was probably thinking not going to work out.

Alison Monahan: That's a good point. And when I left the firm I did go to a bunch of CLE's in person for that reason. I just wanted to meet people and people are there for a reason. Either they're practicing in the area, they're interested in practicing in the area. I mean, they're generally amenable to like, "Oh, those are really interesting. Do you want to grab a coffee at break?" I mean, people, they're there for a reason. They're there to meet people too. Yeah, you can kind of see like, "Okay, are these my people or not my people? I don't know."

Liz Stone: Exactly. I think meeting people in person gets ... All the technology that we have is great. Obviously, we are recording this podcast remotely. We're able to do this, but I encourage especially all young attorneys to really make an effort to meet people in person because you get so much more information and if you're networking people remember you so much more if they've met you in person than even a phone call and definitely more than an e-mail. Making that effort goes a long way.

Alison Monahan: Once you've met in person you can always follow up, like, "Hey, here's an article that I thought you might find interesting." And like, "Oh, there was that nice person I met at that great conference in San Diego."

Liz Stone: Yes. Yes, definitely.

Alison Monahan: All right. Well, let's back up a little bit. What are lawyers generally looking for when they talk to you? Presumably people are basically talking to you because there's some sort of dissatisfaction, right?

Liz Stone: Yes, I can't stress enough what a huge range it is. I am in a position where I just see just how different everyone's goals and priorities are and it's really important for everyone to remember that there is no one job out there that is going to make everyone happy and I have a lot of lawyers say to me, "Okay, well I want to hear about the market could you just call me if you have something that's really good. I'm pretty happy where I am but I just want something really good."

Alison Monahan: Like, what does that mean?

Liz Stone: I'm like, "I have no idea what that means to you." Because some people want a work-life balance and being able to wrap up their day 6 pm is their priority. Other people want more money. Some people want more meaningful work. Some people want to be really engaged in their work and they don't mind working a lot, but they don't like the billable hour system, and everyone has just different interests and different priorities. They have different career goals. Some people, their location is a priority so they're like, "I'll take any job I can get in California." Other people, it's a practice area. It really varies. One thing lawyers have trouble realizing is that everyone's not living in their head.

What they're thinking about or what they talk about with their friends, it just doesn't apply to everyone and if they're going to be talking to people about finding another job they need to be able to clearly identify their priorities and also be able to identify what sacrifices they're willing to make, because there's always going to be a sacrifice. If you want to get your first in-house job, you're most likely going to have to compromise on compensation, possibly the level of work. Sometimes people have to take a step back before they can move forward if they switch from a law firm to in-house, location. I mean, it just depends on the market and what sacrifices you might have to make, but you need to know personally what's going to work for you and what's not.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. For me, when I was deciding to move back to San Francisco after my clerkship I had very simple requirements. I mean, a lot of people actually ... I talked to people who were like, "This is crazy. You are being too restrictive." But my primary thing was I did not want to commute. I was essentially like, "I want a litigation job that is in downtown San Francisco. I will not interview for jobs in Silicon Valley." I had worked at firms that were perfectly willing to go have me work in their Silicon Valley office. It would have been super easy, they were nice, it was all done, and I was like, "I don't want to commute." They're like, "It's 20 or 30 minutes." I'm like, "I don't want to commute." And it is not 20 or 30 minutes, certainly not know.

Liz Stone: It is not 20 or 30 minutes. Definitely not now. And that is a huge quality of life issue. The commute has gotten so bad between San Francisco and Palo Alto that there are firms that don't want to consider people with the San Francisco address because people will say, "I'm okay with the commute." And then one year later it has worn them down. So, those kinds of things are really important, but I also know people who've been commuting for 10 years and they get up really early and it's no big deal. That's an example of something that is a very important factor for some people and not others and is going to be really important for your job search.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I just knew for me I couldn't do it.

Liz Stone: Yeah, I'm with you on that.

Alison Monahan: It drastically limited my options. I think I interviewed two firms and one of them wasn't really hiring. So, I was like, "Okay."

Liz Stone: When people talk to me with a lot of restrictions ... I mean, I worked with a candidate who was moving from Chicago to Los Angeles and at first, he said ... He was doing mostly private equity work in Chicago and he said, "I want to be in an entertainment law group in Los Angeles." And I was like, "Okay, you're not going to be able to make that happen in one fell swoop."

Alison Monahan: That sound challenging.

Liz Stone: Los Angeles is filled with people who have been networking since before law school to get into this market and you have an amazing resume, you have amazing credentials, but that's just not how the market works and I can give you a list of jobs that would consider you and you could use that as a stepping stone to get down there, join some organizations, start networking and eventually make that transition and he is like, "You know what, no. I'm only going to apply to a job that is my dream job." I was like, "Okay, I probably won't be able to help you." And six months later he called me back and said, "I think you were right about the market. I think I'm willing to broaden my search." And he managed to get to LA and loves his job and said, "I thought I wanted to do this specific thing, then I interviewed at this firm and it turned out it was such a good fit I don't even want to do that original thing anymore." He's up and running at the new job and really happy, but he had decided to broaden his search and it kind of turned out that the location was ultimately more important than that specific practice area, just took him some time to realize that.

Alison Monahan: Right, which I think happens. We all have our dream and then we're like, "Well, maybe this part ... maybe I could give a little bit on this, maybe I could give a little bit on that." So, say I'm a law student and I'm listening to this and I'm like, "Okay, that sounds great. This guy knows he wants this exact job, but I'm not really sure what type of career I want to have. What type of thing should I be

considering right now in law school if I'm going to be able to set myself up for this later happiness and success in my dream job?"

Liz Stone:

Well, great question because, as I just said, there is no one size fits all perfect job for anyone at any level. So, the more clear you are on your current priorities, so it might be location, it might be practice area, it might be lifestyle, figure out what is important to you right now and maybe what you think is going to be most important to you right when you graduate law school and then start networking with people who have that and find out what skills and experience they think are necessary. If you're in law school in San Francisco and all you want to do is live in Chicago you want to know what the legal market is like in Chicago and what kinds of practices are really busy in Chicago, what kinds of practices are appealing to people hiring in Chicago, who might be less inclined to hire someone from California. What can you do to make yourself more appealing to the work in that location?

If you know you want to do patent law and you're in law school in Ohio, where are the busy patent law practice areas? If you have a computer science degree, the Bay Area is going to be a great place to look for jobs. If you have a life science degree, San Diego is going to be great. Even just if you're able to identify one thing that is really important to you and then start networking and researching from that point, you're going to be able to focus your search, but with good information and then be open to the fact that your priorities and goals may change. There's hardly anyone who, 10 years out of law school, is exactly doing the same thing they thought they wanted to do in law school. There are some of those people, but more often than not there are not.

Alison Monahan:

They're few and far between. I know a couple of people who like ... Well, I can think of one person who I know, who came to law school with a very specific goal, positioned herself the whole time to get that job, has that job, likes the job, is keeping the job. Most people are like 180 degrees from where they started out.

Liz Stone:

Totally. I mean, I went to law school this guy who, his whole ... everything he did with his OCR research was geared on making partnership. Where, which firm was he going to have the fastest track to partnership, what was a partnership path. He met on his own with tons of senior associates who'd move firms to find out partnership played into it. He was at Latham, I'm pretty sure, for less than six months before he went and started his own company. Good for him. I mean, good for him. He's doing great, but it's just an example that the best laid plans you know ... It's great to start with your current priorities, but the sooner you realize while you're practicing, that your priorities have changed, the sooner you can get to something that will make you happy and that can be very hard because there's such an investment. You put in the time for law school. You put in the time to get the job. You're committed to doing a good job. It can be really hard to acknowledge, "You know what, I'm where I tried to get to and it turns out I don't like it here very much."

Alison Monahan: Yeah, that happens a lot.

Liz Stone: It happens a lot and it's hard to wrap your head around, but the more people you can talk who have gone through it, the more you realize, "Okay, I'm not crazy. I'm not a quitter. It's just that that is part of life." I think lawyers have a harder time with it than other professions because a lot of people go to law school because they're risk averse and then law school makes people more risk averse and then practicing law makes people even more risk averse. Lawyers just have a harder time making those leaps than other people, but they're out there doing it.

Alison Monahan: Right. I think also the whole system kind of these people down so much that ... I hear from people who are like, "Well, I really would like to stop doing this legal job, but I mean nobody else would ever hire me for anything." And I'm just like, "Okay, let's just like put away like the last five or six years where you've been highly qualified and gone to law school. Let's just back up before that. Someone would have hired you then, so they're going to hire you now."

Liz Stone: Yeah. Yeah. It's not always immediate and you don't always get your dream job right away.

Alison Monahan: They might not pay you like you're making now, but they're hire you.

Liz Stone: Yeah, but you can get yourself on a path to get there.

Alison Monahan: The thing that I found interesting, and I'm in the point where people I went to law school with are starting to be in that like, are they making partner stage, it's almost never the people you would have expected.

Liz Stone: I know.

Alison Monahan: You're like, "Wow, like this person stuck it out and they're a partner? Wow, that is really surprising."

Liz Stone: I know. It's funny because ... I left a firm after six years and even by that point, which is fairly early on, I had still stuck it out so much longer than-

Alison Monahan: That's a long time.

Liz Stone: Yeah. When we were in law school I was like, "I don't know if I want to work at a firm. I don't know what I want to do." Then I was like, "Well, these firms made me offers so I will do that. I have a lot of debt." Then I got much more into it than I ever thought I would and it was a hard choice to leave, but at some point, around year five I looked around and I was like, "Wait, why am I one of the last people standing?"

Alison Monahan: Because there was like an 80% exit rate by year five.

Liz Stone: You guys seem so into it. What's going on? It does not shake out the way you think it's going to at law school.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it really doesn't. It's totally unpredictable. You find out people are doing all kinds of crazy things. Again, good for them. Good for the people who decide to stay and be partner, that you never would have expected to be partners. You're like, "Something's working, so great." For people who just really don't know, do you have any suggestions on how to basically figure their life and their career out? Any books, resources, people to listen to? Who do you send people to?

Liz Stone: Well, I mean, I did mention the ADA EI ... Oh my gosh, I'm messing up my own website. The ABA Legal Career Central. So, ABALCC.org. There are tons of resources on there and we even have a career choice series and it is practicing attorneys talking about their day-to-day life in different practice areas and we have government lawyers, law firm lawyers, different practice areas. We have people who have done Jag. There's a huge variety out there and we are constantly creating resources so that people can have them and just to be clear, I am the chair of the board. It's an unpaid position. We're not getting paid for this content. We are just people who care about getting the content out there for people who want it so I'm not promoting it because there is some benefit to me, I'm promoting it because I think it's really valuable and that's why we all volunteer to do it.

I think that that site and it's really meant for everyone across the board, if you're senior, if you're thinking about retiring, but you want to keep practicing there's resources, there's everything. That's a great site. Like we talked about, going to conferences, I think that's really great. Any area you think you might be interested in, even like you said, if it's an online CLE, that is a good place to start and then volunteer in a general organization. Like if you're in San Francisco you can get involved with a San Francisco Bar Association and if you start volunteering on events or volunteering on a committee you're going to start meeting people and in a natural way be able to talk to them and find out about their career and even also if you're a law school, getting involved in some organizations in law school and finding out what other people are interested in. I think all those things where you're collecting information and also at the same time finding out what is a viable option for you, that's all going to be helpful.

Alison Monahan: Awesome. On that note, tell us a little bit about the life of the legal recruiter. What do you do all day? I mean, I've heard you just go get manicures and then people call you and say like, "Oh, we got hired." Great, you get a commission. How does this work?

Liz Stone: It is ideal when you don't have to really do anything and something really amazing happens, but that's not really how it works. What I love about my job is how varied it is and it depends just where I am with different searches, where different candidates are at. Sometimes I am focused on a couple searches and

I'm looking for attorneys who can be a fit and I'm calling them and I'm talking to them, and then sometimes I talk to an attorney who might not be interested in that search, but has other career goals that I'm able to help them with so you kind of never know what's going to happen when you call someone. I'm out pitching clients a lot, which I really like.

It's a big mix and sometimes attorneys who aren't sure what their next move is, they contact me and I'm meeting with them to figure out what their goals are and how I can help them and then, if I'm not busy doing actual recruiting work, I'm often writing articles. I speak at a lot of conferences and like I said, I have the board of directors and we're always working on different projects and managing that. Then at night I'm doing stand-up comedy. I have to say I don't usually have time for a manicure, unfortunately.

Alison Monahan: Maybe I got bad information on what legal recruiters do all day.

Liz Stone: Well, one thing that I do think is great about legal recruiting is you can put as much time into it as you want. So, if you are really busy with other things ... I mean, sometimes I'm traveling for comedy and I'm able to work remotely, but I might work more than some other people who have the same job and that's one of the things that's really great about it is, it is flexible depending on who you are and what your goals are. I'm really into it. I run my own business. I might be putting more time into it than someone else, but I think it's a really great career in terms of how flexible it is for different people with different goals.

Alison Monahan: I think for certain personality type it sounds great. I mean, the reality is you do a lot of business development. Obviously, you're running a business. But the reality is like most lawyers end up doing some sort of business development work, whether it's big law, solo practice, fundraising in a nonprofit. [You actually wrote a really interesting article we will link to](#), about how the lawyer personality just isn't great for what business development requires. Tell me more about why this is and what people can do to overcome these tendencies and basically get better at selling things?

Liz Stone: I mentioned a little bit that lawyers tend to be much more risk averse than the general population, so that's part of it and then, especially as you start practicing law, the idea of what is a success and what is a failure when you're practicing law is really different than what it is in sales. If you're an associate and you write a memo and it's almost perfect, but you have one really important rule incorrect, that's a huge mistake, that's kind of a fail, one mistake will be a failure. Whereas, if you're doing anything in sales or business development, say you call 30 people and two people want to talk to you and one person wants to work with you, that is a win.

Alison Monahan: Good ratio.

Liz Stone: Yeah. You got business. I was talking to a lawyer I know and he's like, "I don't understand how you do recruiting. It's so hard. Say you send out 100 e-mails, you might only get like three responses. That is so demoralizing." I'm like, "Well, I don't want 100 responses. I don't have time to talk to 100 people." I'm trying to find the right people and three responses is a win. I think lawyers do get kind of beat down in their job. It's a job where clients are looking for perfection, partners are looking for perfection. The idea of failure becomes really demoralizing and if you're going to do anything in sales or business development you really need to mentally build in rejection as part of the process and the person I heard this phrase best from is a professional stand-up comic who had heard when he was a young comic that, I don't remember what the number was, but something like, "You can't be good until you've bombed 1,000 times. It's not possible." Which is true. He's like, "Okay, great." He basically put up a poster in his apartment and every time he bombed he came and checked a bomb off on this thing where he was keeping track of it." There's nothing worse than bombing. I mean, it's really demoralizing.

Alison Monahan: Particularly again and again and again.

Liz Stone: Honestly, it is really ... It will give you thick skin for everything else you do in life, but when you reframe it so that it shows you can actually see that you're getting closer to your goal and this is just a necessary step. It's like training for a marathon and you've never run before, you have to be able to run three miles before you can run 20 miles and so you're checking off your progress along the way and if you make three phone calls to try to get some business and all of those people kind of reject you or say no, you check that off because it means you're closer to getting to yes, because it's a numbers game and you're never really going to bat a 1,000 for business development. So, finding a way to reframe it mentally I think goes such a long way. It's really huge and honestly, the minute you have your first success and you get that first client that high just takes over all those failures that you had, and it makes you more resilient for the next time that you have it.

Alison Monahan: I literally remember the first time someone bought something from us. It wasn't looking pretty at that point and even objectively speaking that really shouldn't have made that much difference because it wasn't that big of a deal, but there was something like I'll never forget, the moment of sitting in this coffee shop and actually having a conversation about like, "Well, should I just like pull the plug on this completely? Nobody's buying this thing that we made. It's so awesome." And really having that conversation, in the middle of the conversation I get this e-mail. Somebody signed up for like one thing and it was like, "Oh my gosh."

Liz Stone: Yeah. It's such a high. I think one thing lawyers don't understand is that that one high will really keep ... Especially for stand-up, all I need is one really amazing show every once in a while, and it will get me through all the awful ones because there's kind of nothing that matches that, and you don't get that

without having some lows. It's just not possible. If you're scared of lows you're not going to be able to do anything and every lawyer has gone through those lows and had to overcome things. I think it's just that for people that are coming from a more academic background those lows, they feel less public. Maybe you didn't get a grade you wanted on a test and you really had to learn how to do better next time, but it just kind of feels less public than calling someone and having them say no, but also keeping in mind like you might call someone and they might say no now, but they might say yes in six months and you kind of never know and so looking at it as establishing a relationship with someone, even if it's not an immediate yes can be really helpful and if you're really, really uncomfortable putting yourself out there, which I think a lot of people are, do something else unrelated to work that is very scary to you.

Because if you can wrap your head around being scared of something, doing it anyway, even failing and realizing that you're still fine, getting through that, it's almost like training a muscle and you'll be able to apply it and I realize I do that because I do very outward facing things. I'm always calling people. I'm pitching business. I'm looking for candidates and then I'm going out and trying new material on stage and performing in front of different audiences and traveling. It can be really rough, but I think back to high school, I was a diver and I was very successful, but you never learn a new diet without completely injuring yourself first. I used to smack on my back. I had bruises on my shoulders and cuts on my arms and you just do that until you learn how to do the dive right and then you can start winning meets and it's kind of that same concept.

So, anything you can draw on or you've gotten through something difficult is going to help you at work. If you're not ready to start by like pitching clients right away and you're just too paralyzed by it, make a list of everything you're scared of, maybe you're scared of singing and you go take a private singing class or something. It sounds kind of cheesy, but it just makes you learn how to deal with those feelings and still keep going, which is really 90% of sales or putting yourself out there.

Alison Monahan: No, I agree, and I typically have had some sort of skill that I was working on that I sucked at initially. I'd been snowboarding for many years and then suddenly I decided I was going to switch to skiing, which is really humbling and you have to start at the beginning and you have to take lessons, you have to obviously fall down and you probably get hurt and you're like, "God, why don't I just go back to this thing I already know how to do?" And I basically just wouldn't let myself do it for an entire season until I learned to ski, or I took boxing classes and things like that because it's like, "Well, this is kind of weird and frustrating and scary, why don't I just do it when there's actually no real downside?"

Liz Stone: Yeah, and then you just getting used to those feelings is a lot of it. Someone gave me advice when I was thinking about starting my own firm. She was like, "The only reason people don't go out on their own is they're scared of putting

themselves out there, but if you do stand-up comedy you're already doing that every single night."

Alison Monahan: You're pretty well qualified.

Liz Stone: She's like, "It is crazy to me that you would ever not run your own business because you are already doing what everyone else is scared of." And it was such a helpful way of thinking about it because it's true on the side I do something that is much more kind of like terrifying or stressful. Starting my own business was really not a big deal, but it's because I had done something else on the side. I really encourage people to carve out some kind of space or time to do something that makes them uncomfortable and kind of learn how to deal with it so it's less of a big deal when you start doing something at work that's a little bit frightening.

Alison Monahan: I think that's a great point. Unfortunately, with that we are out of time. So, Liz, speaking of your business, if people want to get in touch with you, how can they do that?

Liz Stone: My website is StoneLegalSearch.com. All my contact information is on there and like I said, also check out the ABA Legal Career Central website, that one is great too. Thanks so much Alison.

Alison Monahan: Well, thanks so much for joining us. We really appreciate it.

Liz Stone: All right. Take care.

Alison Monahan: You too. If you enjoyed this episode of The Law School Toolbox Podcast, please take a second to [leave a review and rating](#) on your favorite listening app because we would really appreciate it and be sure to subscribe so you don't miss anything. Typically, our episodes are out 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](#). And if you're looking for career help check out our career subsite, [CareerDicta](#). Thanks for listening and we'll talk soon.

Resources:

- [Liz Stone, "Reframing Failure to Succeed in Business Development," Law Practice Today, Dec. 14, 2017.](#)