



Alison Monahan: Welcome, to The Law School Toolbox podcast. Today, we're talking with ex-big law recruiter Sadie Jones, about how to make sure you're getting the information you need to do a good job on any work assignment. Your Law School Toolbox host is, Alison Monahan, and normally I'm here with Lee Burgess, that's my co-host, we're here to demystify the law school, and early legal career experience, so you'll be the best law student, and lawyer you can be. We're the co-creators of the [Law School Toolbox](#), the [Bar Exam toolbox](#), and the career 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 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 ex-big law recruiter, Sadie Jones, about how to be sure you're getting the information you need to do a good job on a work assignment, whatever type of assignment or job it is, because this is something that you've seen a lot in your days as a recruiter, right? I would guess one of the main reasons someone doesn't get an offer is they screw up an assignment.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely, and I think a lot of this stuff is preventable.

Alison Monahan: Well, I hope almost all of it is preventable.

Sadie Jones: True.

Alison Monahan: So, I've gotten my dream job, I'm ready for my first assignment, woo-hoo! I've got a meeting set up with my boss in an hour, in their office, what's the number one thing I need to do to be sure that I'm successful with this assignment?

Sadie Jones: Bring a notepad, and a pen.

Alison Monahan: Oh my gosh, totally. Yeah, this is the advice ...

Sadie Jones: It's simple but it is key ...

Alison Monahan: I think almost everything else really comes down to this, and this was the advice I got when I started my first job, I think a partner said, if you ever show up to my office without having a notepad, and something to write with, I will fire you on the spot.

Sadie Jones: Wow.

Alison Monahan: Maybe it wasn't quite that harsh, he might have been joking, but I did remember it, and this is a huge, huge, huge pet peeve for lawyers because your



time is really valuable. You're making a ton ... People are paying a lot of money for your time, literally hundreds or sometimes over a thousand dollars an hour, and you're giving an assignment to someone, and there is this moment of are you paying attention?

Sadie Jones: Yeah, I think really, it doesn't matter that much what you write on that piece of paper ...

Alison Monahan: Exactly.

Sadie Jones: It's really just a symbol that you're walking in ready to listen, ready to start this, and interested, prepared, all of those things. Especially if you're new, and they don't know you, yeah.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it looks really bad if you show up without something to write with, and write on, and sometimes people say well, it's fine I'll just get out my phone, I have my phone with me, I can take notes on my phone, ha-ha, don't do that.

Sadie Jones: Don't do that, don't ever even take out your phone, please.

Alison Monahan: No, this is not a situation to have your phone out, and I know it might seem unfair because you might say, look I'm not texting, I'm not emailing, I'm not on Tinder, or whatever, I'm taking notes, that's just how I take notes, but that's not the way it's going to be perceived, particularly, for the older generation of attorneys, they're gonna think who is this kid in my office texting while I'm trying to give him an assignment.

Sadie Jones: Exactly. You may not write things most of the time, but this is a situation where you really need to, also, for your sake it is hard to sometimes focus 'cause you probably will have things pop up on your phone, what if they see it? It's not worth the risk for you either.

Alison Monahan: No, it just makes you look distracted, even if you're really not distracted.

Sadie Jones: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: I think the reality is, you can't really touch type on your phone, and make eye contact, so if I'm writing with a pen, I can be looking up occasionally, looking down, looking up, making eye contact, if I'm on my phone I have to constantly be looking at the keyboard, or I'm not gonna get anything coherent, so that's another issue is, you're not as engaged in the meeting because you're really focused on this phone, that as you say can be popping up all kinds of crazy things. You're like oh my gosh, did you hear, whatever ... New York Times News Alert, not the time or place for it.



- Sadie Jones: Well, and I think actually in this kind of situation it may be better to leave your phone completely in your office somewhere else because I find that you can even be distracted with thinking about your phone in your pocket.
- Alison Monahan: Right. Like it buzzes.
- Sadie Jones: So my advice would be, yeah ... Maybe don't bring it, you can manage to live a few minutes without your phone.
- Alison Monahan: And it sounds crazy, but you can actually survive a twenty minute meeting without your phone on your person.
- Sadie Jones: Yep, so I think these are key to getting any assignment.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, because I think a key thing here to understand is that you're walking into this situation, where you're probably gonna be nervous. As you probably should be nervous, it's a new situation. You've got to try to stay focused, and make sure you're getting the information that you're gonna need to do this assignment well, and a lot of the times you're coming into the middle of something. This is probably not the first day that the person giving you this assignment has worked on this case, or this deal, or whatever it is, so they might have been working on this, literally in some cases for years, so here you are, you're coming into this situation, they have some very specific thing they want you to do, they're probably not giving you all the context, you probably don't really have practical experience to actually understand what you're being asked to do, so this can be really tricky, and I think having that notepad that you're writing on ... trying to stay focused is step one, but there's a lot of other stuff to talk about too, right?
- Sadie Jones: Yes, and I would also say with the same focus, what you should remember is, this is like a really important time for you because you don't know how much you're gonna be able to ask follow-up questions, and go back to them, and so you probably will, and there will be things, but you have to consider this really important that you get whatever you can out of this meeting, especially if it's a senior partner. This is important for you to really get the information you need.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely because this meeting, even if it's ten minutes, is really gonna set you up for succeeding on this assignment, or having a complete and total disaster on your hands.
- Sadie Jones: Yes.
- Alison Monahan: And having a disaster on your hands, is not a good way to get the job offer later.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah, and I think you also have to remember that anyone you work with on an assignment is gonna have an opportunity to review you in writing.



- Alison Monahan: Mm-hmm.
- Sadie Jones: So, I mean at most firms, anywhere I've ever worked.
- Alison Monahan: Well, I think this is not just firms, imagine that you're working in a public interest organization, these people might not have a job to offer you at the end, but they're gonna be absolutely critical references for you, and if somebody is not willing to do a good reference letter, or be a good reference in person for you, that's gonna be a really serious problem.
- Sadie Jones: So really I think I just mean that anyone that you even have a little contact with has a say in all of this, so you should treat everyone on the assignment like they're reviewing you.
- Alison Monahan: Oh, yeah, for sure, and if things go badly wrong, and somebody is deconstructing the situation, well, how did this happen, and they go and talk to the person who gave you the assignment, well, I don't know, didn't even seem to be listening to me, they were just sitting there on their phone the whole time, doesn't make you look good.
- Sadie Jones: Yep, and I have actually had partners call me after a meeting with somebody, and tell me that they, for example had their phone out, and they were really concerned.
- Alison Monahan: Interesting.
- Sadie Jones: Yep.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, so I think some of this is probably generational, but you do need to realize that the people you're working with, and the people who are paying you, and the people who are evaluating you, are in a different sort of cohort than you are, and they have different expectations, particularly around things like technology.
- Sadie Jones: Yep, absolutely.
- Alison Monahan: Alright, so let's go back to our meeting. I've walked in, I'm a little nervous, okay, so like we said gotta take notes, not just because it makes you look engaged, but 'cause you actually are probably gonna need to reference these later, so ...
- Sadie Jones: Yes.
- Alison Monahan: You're not just doing this because it makes you look like a good employee, you're actually trying to write down things, particularly key terms, or key legal terms, even if you're not exactly sure what they mean, so say you have not



taken evidence, and someone asks you to write, or draft a motion in limine, you may not exactly remember what that is, or you might not exactly know what that is, but you probably should know that, that's a legal term of art that you need to write down, and I think it's tricky whether you want to ask directly if you're not sure what something is, do you have any thoughts on that?

Sadie Jones: Well, I think sometimes you have to sort of see who your audience is.

Alison Monahan: Mm-hmm.

Sadie Jones: So, some of this is sort of common sense, like do you think this person really wants to answer these questions for you, do they seem like they're gonna be open to that, I think you know ... And some of it might depend on their level too, you may not feel as comfortable with the senior partner doing it.

Alison Monahan: Right.

Sadie Jones: Or for example, let's say that you're getting your first assignment from your mentor, or something like that, like in that situation I could imagine maybe you could do that, but I think as long as you picked up what it was, I think it's totally fine to look it up later.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think it's a fine line, if it's something you feel you probably ought to know what they're talking about ...

Sadie Jones: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Then you just write it down, and go look it up in Black's Law Dictionary to get started, if it's something that you get the sense you shouldn't really be expected to know what it is, I think it's fine to ask a few clarifying questions, but it's a fine line because this person obviously has a lot more information, and they may not be thinking, oh, this person who has never worked in a legal job before doesn't really know what discovery responses look like. Okay, fine, but you can figure that out.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, and I think figure out is it really specific to this assignment.

Alison Monahan: Yeah.

Sadie Jones: Is it something that isn't just a general term, but is something you need to know for this, maybe, it's okay, but yeah, I think it's kind of a common sense thing at this point.

Alison Monahan: Right. Well, common sense is the least common thing, right?



- Sadie Jones: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: And so it's likely, assuming this person isn't totally out of touch with how people work, it's likely that they're gonna be giving you some background or context of the actual situation itself. Okay, so they tell you to write your motion in limine, but they're not just gonna leave you there, you're probably gonna get some background on the case, I mean this case it could be a case, could be a deal, and here sometimes people just give you the background sort of FYI, so you have some context, sometimes they do it because it's really important, so I think in this case it's actually totally fair to ask how important the background information is ...
- Sadie Jones: Mm-hmm.
- Alison Monahan: For example, is this background just for my information, or is it something I should be writing down in detail, and most likely they'll go, oh, no you don't need to know the details, this is really just so you understand the basic context. I mean if they don't give you any sort of context, I think it's fair to ask too, hey, could you give me like a couple minute recap of the situation, so I understand where we're at, and or is there a document maybe from the beginning of the case or the beginning of the deal, a document I can look at for some context, I think most people at that point will say, oh, yeah of course, you probably do need to know that, right?
- Sadie Jones: Or I would imagine maybe if the partner who says, oh, you can talk to this associate whose been on the ... To give you more background, or something like that. You know, know who else is involved.
- Alison Monahan: Exactly. I mean is this something that firms sort of coach partners particularly on at all, or are they just kind of left to their own devices?
- Sadie Jones: I mean we try. I will say ... I would talk to partners about things like that, also especially with summer associates, remind them that this person may have never done anything like this before, so, think about that going into it because I think some partners come into it like everyone has the same experience, and knows what they're talking about, and that sort of thing.
- Alison Monahan: Right. Everyone has worked on this case. Everyone has worked on this case for two years, and has twenty years of experience litigating, it's like no, that's not really the case.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah, so I wouldn't ... I also wouldn't take most of it too personally because I doubt however they do things is really specific to you, you know?
- Alison Monahan: Oh, for sure.



Sadie Jones: Or that sort of thing, or their tone.

Alison Monahan: No, the reality is some people are much better at this than other people, and if you happen to get that person who really sucks at it, I think the key thing is really trying to get information on who else you can go to when you realize you have no idea what you're actually being ask to do.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, and I think usually there is somebody else.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and so that's something we'll talk about in a few minutes, but ... Alright, so basically we've got our notes, we're looking at some background, one of the really key things that I always liked when someone did when I was giving them assignments, is to repeat back to me their understanding of what I'm asking them to do, so something like ... Okay, just to be sure I'm clear, you're asking me to draft discovery responses on behalf of our client, including interrogatory responses, and requests for admission, and at that point either I'm like, yes, you understand it perfectly, or no, no, you're not doing the interrogatory responses, you're only doing the requests for admissions, how did you miss that, but you want to clarify that in the office.

Sadie Jones: Well, and I think making a mistake in that situation ... No, you missed the whole point of what I was saying, is a lot better than doing all the work, and coming out with the total wrong thing.

Alison Monahan: Oh yeah. For sure.

Sadie Jones: And I also just think repeating things back makes them know that you heard them.

Alison Monahan: Right. Right. Exactly.

Sadie Jones: It's like when you meet someone, and you're told to repeat their name ...

Alison Monahan: Mm-hmm.

Sadie Jones: I think it helps to actually to do it, and then make sure ... It also just gives you a check on you were listening ...

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly, and sometimes people are really unclear about what they're asking you to do. They might give you a bunch of background, and say, oh, you know we need write to this memo ... Okay, so are you asking me to write the memo, are you asking me to do research for the memo, or are you asking me to do a portion of the memo, what am I doing here ...

Sadie Jones: Yeah.



- Alison Monahan: That's the question you need to answer before you leave the office, what am I being asked to do personally, what am I responsible for.
- Sadie Jones: Well, and I think that goes along with that is also how much time should it take ...
- Alison Monahan: Sure. Absolutely.
- Sadie Jones: It's a really key thing because I think that is something where you can get into trouble from the beginning, and it can kind of spin out.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. I think time has two aspects here, one is you wanna be sure you clarify any sort of due dates, so the final due date, intermediate due dates, those are absolutely critical, so for example, as I understand it we need to file these on June tenth, and I need to have a draft to you by June fifth, is that correct, so it's not just, oh, we're gonna file them on June tenth, presumably, there's some intermediate deadline you talked about, make sure you know what that is, but then also the question of how much time should I be spending on this, is this a three hour project, or is this a two week project.
- Sadie Jones: Right. Well, and also should I check back in when it gets to this ... You know, at some point ... I mean maybe it's not even necessarily a question, you probably should check back in if you feel like it's taking a really long time, or you have to go down a different path, and you're not really sure if you should, but I think all of that stuff is important, and then also with the due dates, I've seen a lot of, especially summer associates, get into trouble because they're told there is no due date ...
- Alison Monahan: Ha-ha-ha, that's a fun one.
- Sadie Jones: Or ... Yeah, and the person even says it to them, and it's like ... Or, oh well, just need it by the end of the summer. We found a lot of pro bono assignments actually fit into that 'cause a lot of times there are places that will give specific ... Work with different firms over the summer ...
- Alison Monahan: Mm-hmm.
- Sadie Jones: But they actually do want the answers to these questions on the real assignments, but it's sort of they just say it needs to be at the end. I think it's really dangerous, so if you're not given a due date, give yourself a due date, make sure that you have intermediate due dates for yourself ...
- Alison Monahan: Right.



Sadie Jones: Because I actually think that the assignments that people have the most trouble with are the big long ones, that seem sort of, oh, whenever ...

Alison Monahan: Right. Exactly, or, oh, we just need ... We're gonna write an article on this for the fall, for our client newsletter, we just need someone to do some research because it's really easy to push that aside, and that's another one of those dangerous ones. Where it's like ... Okay, how much time are you thinking I should spend on this ...

Sadie Jones: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: You probably, in that situation, if it's just research for an article, they're probably not thinking you're gonna work full-time on this, for like four weeks, you know? It's probably a much more limited scope.

Sadie Jones: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: And there are other things that you could probably be doing in that other time, but yeah, if you get this sort of amorphous assignment, that they're just kind of giving to you, you definitely want to try to add some more structure to it, and you know you might even wanna take that time to go back and think about it, sort of present a schedule, like, oh, you know, my goal is to do the initial research for this in the next two weeks, I'll send that to you, you can take a look at it, they can look at it, or not look at it, but at least they have it.

Sadie Jones: I think that's such a good idea because I know the other thing I noticed is that essentially the partners would say, oh, yeah, I didn't give them a due date, but obviously I expected it blahblahblah, you know?

Alison Monahan: Nice.

Sadie Jones: And it's like ... Well, one ... You know that's ridiculous 'cause how would they know to read your mind, but ... Then second of all, it's like ... It is understandable that it's ... They didn't want to get it this day before the person was leaving, and then not have any time to look at it or whatever, so I think all that stuff should be clarified, and maybe even talking to someone who is more junior, who has worked with them, like what are their expectations generally about these sort of things.

Alison Monahan: Right, because if someone says, oh, you know this is a slow burn project, that doesn't mean you can ignore it.

Sadie Jones: Right.

Alison Monahan: It means you need to be working on it ...



- Sadie Jones: It's a different thing for everybody, right? Some people think, oh, a lot of time is a week, and some people think a lot of time is a month, so ...
- Alison Monahan: Right. Or a lot of time is like two hours.
- Sadie Jones: Right. Good point.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, so I think you know trying to ... And the good thing about trying to set those initial deadlines, and make them clear, is that then the person can come back to you, and be like two weeks? No, I want this in like three days.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: And then at least you know. You know?
- Sadie Jones: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: You're not sitting there weeks from now with a person fuming in their office 'cause they aren't getting these notes that you need to write for a very important article.
- Sadie Jones: Well, and the other thing about the time is that you need an idea because you need to know what other assignments you're taking on, and it's on you to balance that kind of stuff a lot of the time, so you really need to know that you can handle what's on your plate.
- Alison Monahan: Right, and you may not have an idea until you start, particularly, if it's a research assignment, you're typically not really gonna have that much of an idea how long this is gonna take until you figure out how difficult it is, and you can't know that until you start the research, so sometimes you're like, oh, I can just look this up, but probably if they're writing an article, or drafting something for a client, that's probably not really the case that you can just go look it up, there's probably some ambiguity here, or otherwise they would have just copied off those pages in the book, and sent them off.
- Sadie Jones: Mm-hmm. Absolutely.
- Alison Monahan: On that point, I think another really critical question that people often don't think about because it's just not something you've had to think about is, what kind of legal research you're allowed to do ...
- Sadie Jones: Mm-hmm.
- Alison Monahan: Because the reality is you may not know this, if you have not worked outside of the school environment, but these databases are really, really expensive, or



they can be. And there's always that person who accidentally spends like twenty thousand dollars on Westlaw, or Lexis, or something for a pro bono case because they don't understand how to do legal research effectively, do not be that person.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, you don't want to stand out for something like that.

Alison Monahan: No, I mean, because somebody is gonna get a call being like, did you assign this person this task, they just spent thirty thousand dollars in two hours, it's awkward.

Sadie Jones: And I think you'd be in a situation, right, in both ways if it was a client assignment, and you spent way too much on it, there'd be an issue billing a client, if it's a pro bono assignment, it's the firm paying for it, and they're upset too, you really need to have a handle on all of this because this is real money.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly, and I think that's the thing if you've only done this in the academic setting, you don't realize like someone is actually paying for this.

Sadie Jones: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: You probably had some intro class at the beginning of your time at this job, where you probably sat half a sleep through the rep lecturing you about how to use cost effective research tools, you need to pay attention to that, and if you don't understand it, or you're not sure what type of queries you can be running, or how to save the query, and run stuff within it, that's the time to get on the phone with the actual company because they have people who can help you, they can you tell you, okay, don't rerun this query, this is very expensive, there are other things we can do.

Sadie Jones: Yep. I think you need to know where to go for help, and use resources to make sure that you're doing things efficiently.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely, and I think that's the next key thing I want to talk about, any type of assignment, you have to be careful about who you're getting help from, and almost certainly you're gonna need some help, even if it's just a sanity check, to make sure that A, you understand what you're being asked to do, B, that you have the resources you need, and C, you're not totally screwing it up ...

Sadie Jones: Mm-hmm.

Alison Monahan: But the person who gave you the assignment, often times will not be the person that you immediately go back to with questions.

Sadie Jones: Correct.



- Alison Monahan: If it's the managing partner of the firm, took ten minutes out of their day to give you this assignment, you don't call them up to be like, well, I found this case, but I'm not really sure it applies, can you give me an idea for a different query, they're gonna be like, why are you wasting my time with this?
- Sadie Jones: And I think this is a case where there's all these people that you need to be on your side, and help you with these things, and a lot of junior associates, summer associates, don't realize who those people are, and why they can be really helpful.
- Alison Monahan: Oh, for sure, so who would some of those people be?
- Sadie Jones: The paralegals.
- Alison Monahan: Mm-hmm. Massively underused resource.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah, and I think ... I know lots of junior associates would say they know way more than I do, they've been here for years, they know how to do all of this.
- Alison Monahan: They know everything, they typically are the people who carry a lot of the background of the case, if you have a question about who someone is, or how they relate, they're gonna know that because they are the closest to a lot of those documents.
- Sadie Jones: Right, and obviously you can go to other associates who are maybe closer to your level in this situation, but even that I think it depends on the person about how much time they're gonna spend with you ...
- Alison Monahan: Right, how many other things they have to do.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah, so make sure when you go really to anyone, you know what you're asking, you've put it all together into one meeting. I know that people get really annoyed, especially let's say with emails, if you're sending ten separate emails of all these questions, put it together ...
- Alison Monahan: Of like the same ... The one that always killed me is when they didn't change the subject line, and you would just get a huge chain, and it'd be a question, and then someone would respond to the question, and then they would ask another question that had nothing to do with the subject line, and so then when you're going back trying to answer this question, you're like, what, how was this even sent to me, that is not good email practice.
- Sadie Jones: I think people don't ... Some people don't even realize you can change the subject line ...



Alison Monahan: True. You can.

Sadie Jones: But you can go in and delete it, even if it was a chain with a different subject line before, so it should be specific, but I would say really think about it, think about all your questions, obviously, some other ones might come up, but you should try to reduce that as much as possible, people don't like you wasting their time for things that aren't really necessary, so also know the questions that you can go to your secretary for, versus you need to go to the associate for.

Alison Monahan: Right, your secretary for example, can answer a question on how to E-file something.

Sadie Jones: Yep.

Alison Monahan: You don't need to ask the more senior associate, or the person above you, or your boss, so how do we attach a document if we're E-filing in the Southern District. It's just okay, ask your secretary, this is a person who deals with this every day, and half the time the person will be, I don't even know, I don't deal with this.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, because they're just doing the same thing...

Alison Monahan: Yeah.

Sadie Jones: ...as the secretary...

Alison Monahan: I mean god forbid, you had to actually physically file something yourself, and be like, whoa, I don't know how to, what are we uploading here, which boxes do we check, I don't know.

Sadie Jones: The thing that you really need to ask the associate, or the partner, and really you should from the beginning is, what is the client matter number.

Alison Monahan: Oh god, yes, please.

Sadie Jones: That can be a disaster if you've been working on this for a while, or really at all because you need it for everything, you need it to save documents, you probably need it if you're making photo copies, all sorts of things.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, this is one of those things ...

Sadie Jones: You need to know where your time goes, yeah ...

Alison Monahan: This is definitely one of those things that you ask about in the initial meeting, and you write down on your piece of paper, and then you put it on a Post-it



note, and you put it beside of your computer because you're going to need it eighteen times a day.

Sadie Jones: And if they say they don't know, or there hasn't been one assigned at the beginning, it is your responsibility to follow-up, and make sure that you get it. It's your responsibility.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think sometimes people who are new to practice, don't realize the importance of these type of details, but this is the way that you keep everything together on this case, so in your document management system, there's gonna be a number at the bottom of the document, and it's probably gonna incorporate that client matter number, this is how you bill your time, this is how you access a bunch of different stuff, and if you don't have that, or if you god forbid get it wrong, things are going to be ugly.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, I mean if you get it wrong it could, the wrong people could open the document, it could completely get lost, and no one knows where it is, all sorts of nightmare scenarios.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, particularly, if you're working there for the summer, you don't want to get a call in October being like, we really need this thing you worked on, and no one can find it, and it turns out that you've filed it under the wrong matter number, and no one can ever find it, it's not good.

Sadie Jones: Well, and I think something to keep in mind, especially for summer associates is, I think sometimes they sort of view some of these assignments like they view their schoolwork, which is just it's something for me to do, but pretty much all of your work is gonna be a real thing, that somebody is really gonna use, and need for a case, and so this isn't just theoretical.

Alison Monahan: Right, exactly. That was impressed upon me one of the first assignments I got after my 1L summer. Where somebody called me into their office, and they were like, I'm on a deadline, I have this contracts question, I really need an answer to it, have you ever heard of Corbin on Contracts, and I'm like, ah, not really, and he's like, okay, I'm taking you to the library. Went to the library, found the book, he's like, look in this book, find the answer, and so he's like, so you have an hour, I'm on a hard deadline, so I have an hour, I do the research, I send him the answer, and he calls me back a few minutes later, and he says, okay, how sure are you that this is right, and I'm like, well, I'm basically a 1L, but given that I'm pretty sure, and why, he says, because I don't have time to review the answer, and I'm getting ready to file it.

Sadie Jones: My gosh.



- Alison Monahan: It turned out in the end he did actually take a step back, and realize this was pretty stupid, and he did review it, and it was correct, but I didn't know that.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: If I just dialed it in, he actually could have filed whatever he was filing with incorrect information because I just was like, oh, well, you know, I don't know, it seems kind of right to me.
- Sadie Jones: Well, I know that we did have a situation where a summer associate was writing a really small section of something, and no one did check it, and there was a mistake, or a typo, or something like that, and they saw it later, and the person's response was like, oh, well, I didn't think that I was gonna be the final say in this ...
- Alison Monahan: That cannot. That cannot be your mindset, you have to assume you are the last person who is gonna see this before it goes to the court, or to whoever it's going to. You cannot think like that.
- Sadie Jones: It was bad.
- Alison Monahan: That's also a terrible reason.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah, I know, but I think it's an example of they didn't understand the real world what they're doing, which is also ... Clients' are actually paying for your time, they might not be paying for all of your time, but they are actually paying probably hundreds of dollars an hour for you to do this stuff, so ...
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean I wrote ... As a summer, I wrote an amicus brief to the Second Circuit, basically by myself ...
- Sadie Jones: Wow.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. You start to realize pretty quickly like, oh, oh, this is real.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah, but you shouldn't be turning anything in, don't even say draft or whatever, that just ... I feel that makes them think you didn't take it seriously.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, any work product that you submit to anyone should always be as absolutely perfect as you can make it, and it may be at that time there are questions that need to be answered, or something like that, and that's fine, but it shouldn't look like a draft, it should look like something that basically could be sent off with just a few changes, or pieces of input.
- Sadie Jones: And there's another example of you should know what the formatting is ...



- Alison Monahan: Mm-hmm.
- Sadie Jones: Or if anything, it should look like whatever document it's supposed to look like.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah.
- Sadie Jones: And so if you're not sure, you ask the right person.
- Alison Monahan: And almost always there's gonna be templates, or some type of samples at the firm, or at whatever your organization is, it is highly likely that you are not the first person who has ever filed discovery responses for example, so ask for these, ask for them either in the initial meeting, or in the follow-up where you're talking to the person that you've been told you can talk with, do we have a template that we do use for these, can I see it, that's a good place to start, because again, a lot of it is about time, you don't want to be wasting time figuring out the formatting of a discovery response, that's just silly.
- Sadie Jones: Well, and I think a lot of people get into trouble because they're not sure about something, and they sort of spin out on worrying about it.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah.
- Sadie Jones: Not trying to do it, and trying to figure it out, and it's like if you just put it into a question for somebody, or kind of ask somebody to point you in the right direction of who to ask even, you just save yourself a lot of trouble, and anxiety.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely, and I think also asking for resources for legal research can be helpful, is there a hornbook that you think I should start with, I might not think to tell someone that if I'm giving them an assignment about patent law because I know that you always use Chisum on Patents, but they don't know that, so if they ask me that, of course I'm gonna think, oh, yeah, of course this is the one you should use, but somebody has to tell you that, and that's a completely fair point in that case, a reasonable person who is giving the assignment would think, oh gosh, I really should have mentioned this, sorry.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah, I don't think anyone would be annoyed at you for asking a good question, or asking you know ...
- Alison Monahan: No, the worst they're going to say is, oh, I don't really know, talk to so-and-so about that ...
- Sadie Jones: Yeah, exactly.
- Alison Monahan: Alright, so, let's talk briefly about a few places where things commonly go wrong.



- Sadie Jones: Okay.
- Alison Monahan: I mean I think the number one, we've covered this a lot is just not listening, or recording the relevant information, so something might seem obvious to the person who is giving you the assignment, you don't realize the importance of it, this is why it's so important to really parrot back to them in the meeting, and or in a followup email clarifying, okay, so that was ... Really enjoyed meeting with you, here's my understanding of what I'm being asked to do, here's my understanding of the deadlines, let me know if any of that doesn't seem right to you.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah, I think that's a great idea. Write it down, make sure that you're clear, make sure that you know where you're starting.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, and also that creates a paper trail, so that then if in the end they're like, that's not what I asked you to do, you have the email where you're like, well, I did ask you if this is what you asked for, and you said, yes, so, not really my fault.
- Sadie Jones: Good point.
- Alison Monahan: You know, C Y A.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: Oh, this is very litigation specific, but it is a huge pet peeve, and it also happened absolutely all the time with people who are just starting out, make sure you understand which type of cases you are researching, so for example, if your case is in Federal court, on a Federal question, you're probably not researching State law cases, this may not always be true, remember your Erie from CivPro, but basically if I give you an assignment, that's like we need a case that says this, and we're in Federal Court in Delaware, and you come back with a State case in Delaware, that you spent six hours finding, and you're really proud of yourself, my response is not gonna be a good one, you need to keep this in mind, and if you're not sure, again, ask.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah, and you should keep that in mind going into it ... That ... that's something you need to clarify.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, something you need to be thinking about, always, always, always, I know it's easy to think maybe you didn't cover it in CivPro, or it just like that was an area you didn't like, but you have to be thinking about these things because they actually matter, because if you find a useless case, it's like, okay, great, you just wasted everyone's time, and now we're a day behind, thank you.



- Sadie Jones: Mm-hmm.
- Alison Monahan: Finally, and I think you mentioned this, once you have whatever your assignment is, do not procrastinate.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: I mean.
- Sadie Jones: This is probably the number one issue where I saw someone really get sunk on something, was this issue about time, and especially for the longer assignments.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, and the reality is again, you're just not gonna really understand the assignment until you get into it, so, it's often times you get the assignment, and then you go to a nice lunch, and then maybe there's an event, and you're thinking, oh, I'll get started on that tomorrow, and then tomorrow comes, and then the next day comes, and suddenly the rest of the summer is gone, and you still haven't started. Whatever it takes to make you start something, whether it's finding another person who can be your accountability partner, or setting deadlines, or whatever. You're a professional, act like one.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah, and I think ... You know what no one wants to hear, let's say that it was something that was long term, and it's getting towards the end, and they ask you where it is, and it's like, oh, well I'm working on someone else's assignment that has a stricter deadline, no one wants to hear that you thought the other thing was more important, or you don't have time for their thing, even if their thing was longer term.
- Alison Monahan: Right.
- Sadie Jones: So you need to be able to manage these things as they go, so I agree getting started even with a longer assignment earlier, so you have an idea of what it's gonna take is a good idea, and always having these interim deadlines, so I know from the firm side, I think that people are encouraged to give, especially junior people, interim deadlines, but not everyone is gonna do that.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah.
- Sadie Jones: It doesn't occur to them.
- Alison Monahan: No, or they just ... Let's face it most lawyers are not great managers because they're not business people, they're lawyers.



- Sadie Jones: Yeah. And it's really on you, it's gonna come back to hurt you if you can't get it done, and the absolute worst thing to do, is to leave a summer associate job where you didn't finish something, especially that you could of.
- Alison Monahan: Right, and you can't expect that this person who gave you the assignment is going to be checking back in with you, that's not their responsibility, it's your responsibility to make sure you get your work done, and if you have that expectation that, oh, you know somebody is going to be hovering over you saying, oh, you know just wanted to check in, we got that deadline tomorrow, that's not going to happen.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah, definitely, and I think they're just gonna expect it.
- Alison Monahan: Well, why not ... It's like you gave the person the assignment, aren't they working on it.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: I mean that would be my expectation, I'm like, I don't have time to deal with this, I have seventeen other things to do, I'm going to trial, like, you know ... And it's not anything personal, it's not like I hate the person, or I don't care about this person, it's just like, people do not have time.
- Sadie Jones: Well, and even though ... Even though they may not give you a set deadline, they probably want it with enough time to make revisions, and things like that.
- Alison Monahan: Right.
- Sadie Jones: So you never want to be ... Somebody else might be last minute, the person you're giving it to, but that shouldn't be your approach, you know, because also you're giving it to them, you know, in the final format that you feel, and that's fine, but most likely you will have to do more work on it, so leave time for that.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, and they may sit on it, but that's their problem not yours.
- Sadie Jones: Exactly. Then they're like you did everything that you could do.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, and you could follow-up and say hey, just wanted to check in, and see if you had any thought on this, again, create a paper trail.
- Sadie Jones: Mm-hmm.
- Alison Monahan: Alright, well, we are out of time, speaking of time, but I think my final takeaway is, nobody expects you to be immediately perfect at a summer job, but you want to appear competent, you want it to seem like you're making an effort,



and you want to seem like a person who can manage their time, so if you do those things even if the outcome maybe isn't perfect, I think people will generally respect that, and think, oh, you know this person I liked them, they worked hard, but if you're not behaving like that, then you're not gonna get a lot of leeway.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, and my big takeaway would be, use the resources that you have there, talk to the paralegals, your legal secretary, other associates, and use that to help you do the best you can.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly, and those resources as you learn to use them will help you for everything, so that's great, once I found out there were books about contracts, it really opened my eyes to a lot of hornbooks, and law school got a lot easier, I was like, oh, you can just go look up the law, this is amazing, they never tell you this.

Sadie Jones: Good point, it can help you in other situations.

Alison Monahan: Absolutely, well, thank you so much for your time.

Sadie Jones: Thanks for having me.

Alison Monahan: My pleasure. 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'd really appreciate it, and be sure to subscribe, so you don't miss anything, if you have any questions or comments, 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'd like some career help, look at CareerDicta.com, our career related website, where we'll also help you one on one, thanks for listening, and we'll talk soon.

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