



Alison Monahan: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today we're continuing our series of, "What not to do" episodes, with ex-BigLaw recruiter, Sadie Jones, and today we're gonna be talking about Callback Interviews.

Your Law School Toolbox host today is Alison Monahan and typically I'm 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. Together 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](#).

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With that, let's get started.

Welcome back. Today we're continuing our series of, "What not to do" episodes, with ex-BigLaw recruiter, Sadie Jones, and we're talking about Callback Interviews. So welcome Sadie.

Sadie Jones: Thanks for having me back.

Alison Monahan: Oh, definitely our pleasure. So first off, for our listeners who maybe aren't so familiar with this, what is a callback interview?

Sadie Jones: So it's really the second round in the on-campus interviewing process and it's where you're invited back to the office of the law firm after you've done the initial interview on campus.

Alison Monahan: Okay, and this is part of the [summer associate process for larger law firms](#), is that right?

Sadie Jones: Correct. And even probably some mid-size, but yeah, usually it would be a larger established firm.

Alison Monahan: Okay, so you're interviewing for the next summer and you have done the on-campus interview and they liked you, obviously, and so now they've invited you back, typically, I'm trying to remember how many interviews you typically would do, six or so?

Sadie Jones: Yeah, I would say anywhere between four and six, and some of it would depend whether you come in the morning, you come in the afternoon, things change



last minute but I would prepare for a whole round of interviews with different people.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think that's right, in my recall when I was doing these it was usually a mix of partners, associates, you'd probably talk to the recruiting person, you know it was gonna be like a mix of stuff.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, as a recruiter a perfect schedule, I would say, would be a mix of genders and practice groups and levels and you wanna give them an idea of different people at the firm. So hopefully that's what you're gonna get when you come back, to see a snapshot of who works there.

Alison Monahan: Right and you're gonna be visiting the actual office too, so you can see what that might feel like.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, so they're gonna move you around to their different offices, and so you get a feel of just what everyday life is there.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it's kinda fun actually, sort of like anthropologically, you go in and like, "oh, I don't know, these people all have their doors closed." I think you can learn a lot actually in these callbacks.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, just people's messy offices, their papers everywhere, you know, what's the vibe, are people loud, all that sort of stuff.

Alison Monahan: Right, or if it's like fancy artwork and are you comfortable with that or would you prefer like a more informal setting. So you can really pick up a lot about the feel of the firm by doing these callbacks.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely.

Alison Monahan: So I think it's something not to be afraid of, it can be intimidating, but it's also an opportunity really for people to figure out, okay, is this a place I would be comfortable working.

Sadie Jones: And I would remind everybody that after you've made it through the initial screen interview on campus, they've decided that you're qualified. In theory. So I think you should feel like you're going in with a step-up from where you started and that they're not looking at you for your grades or just the basic stuff, they're trying to get to know you and see if you'll be a fit. So I think you should go in with confidence.

Alison Monahan: Do you have any sense of what percentage of these callback interviews end up in an offer situation? Does that vary a lot by firm, or is there kind of a typical-



- Sadie Jones: It varies a lot by firm, and some firms wanna do more callbacks, so I would say it could be 10-40%-
- Alison Monahan: Oh, okay.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah, there's a bit range.
- Alison Monahan: So it's still not a guarantee.
- Sadie Jones: No, it's not, so I would say the thing to remember is, you've hit the threshold, for they think you're qualified to work there, but I really think the callback interview is a lot more based on personality and some of those more intangible things. And how you act.
- Alison Monahan: Right, well, we'll get into that in a minute. But before we do, [what are firms looking for in these callbacks](#), is it something that's different from the initial interview?
- Sadie Jones: I think they are looking for a consensus, because there's multiple people meeting you, so I think it is interesting to see how different people react to the same person. So I think just that's helpful. I think they're looking for someone who can carry a conversation for 30 minutes, potentially handle an interview with someone who's more difficult or doesn't talk as much, I think you do think it's interesting how people handle maybe a more difficult partner in an interview.
- I think they wanna see that you're polished, that you're put together, that you show up on time, that you show up wearing the right clothes, that kind of thing, just the real surface level stuff. And everywhere I've worked has always had a different name for it, but just that "it" quality, that's hard to explain, but they feel like makes you special and makes you a fit for that firm, because I think every firm thinks they're special.
- Alison Monahan: Right, they do all think that, although to be honest, I think most of them are pretty similar.
- Sadie Jones: I agree, so I think this is a lot about knowing how to play the game and making them feel like you really like them, you know, and you're interested.
- Alison Monahan: Right, that's a great point, definitely don't tell them that they seem like every other firm that you're interviewing with.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah. Try to find something that makes them unique whether or not it's really something that makes them very unique.



Alison Monahan: Yeah, and hopefully at this point if you're bothering to callback, you have some actual interest in working for this firm.

Sadie Jones: I agree, 'cause I think that's probably the top thing not to do, is not seem like you don't care. Even if you go in, it's not your top choice, for whatever reason, they should feel like you are.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think there's no reason not to basically sell them on you. It's better to get the offer and turn it down than to screw things up and be arrogant or be whatever, and have them be like, "I don't think this person is a great fit," because if that happens in too many places you're not gonna have an offer anywhere.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely, and the truth is that when it comes down to it, if you do have multiple offers, you're probably gonna let the firms know. I've never had anyone be dishonest about something like that, so that is gonna work in your favor, and the more the better. The more choices you have the better, and you're in the position of power really, after the callback interview, if you get an offer.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think you can't just rely on, "oh, this firm is not my top choice, I'm only gonna focus on my top choice," because what if you're super-nervous and you screw up when interviewing your top choice, because you're so nervous, and then you need something to fall back on. So, my approach to this was always, if I'm gonna do this, I may as well try my best to get the offer.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely and I also think no matter what your class rank is, or where you think you fall, you also should not assume you're getting an offer from everyone and anyone, and you should go in wanting it and making sure that they know that, because I can tell you that I've been at places that did not give an offer to the number one student at a school.

Alison Monahan: Oh, I think some places actually take pleasure in turning down people, to be honest.

Sadie Jones: But this is, was a place that was particularly snobby and I felt like really took pride in having the top students and it was just like, we cannot do this, this person just bombed it. So be careful.

Alison Monahan: All right, well let's move into the entertaining section of our broadcast today, what are some common problem areas that you've seen in the callback process and we'll just talk about these briefly to start and then we'll go through them one by one.

Sadie Jones: Okay, so I would say, how you dress is definitely a top issue. You know, not dressing in business attire, looking too flashy, even weird things like carrying



around an awkward bag the whole time, things like that. I think you'd be surprised at how much people remember that and kind of notice it, like it seemed like this was just [inaudible 00:09:12] days.

Alison Monahan: Right, I've seen people carry like enormous briefcases and things, it's sort of like, you're not going to court. What are you doing?

Sadie Jones: Or, for a woman, wearing shoes that you're not comfortable walking in. You know, because you're probably gonna be walking around the office so I'd be careful with that.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, maybe if you're in a city you're probably gonna be walking to lunch as well. So that may be several blocks, so you don't wanna be that person who has to change into their flip-flops just to get to the restaurant.

Sadie Jones: Yes, I also think if we're talking about a law firm, it needs to be business attire for the callback interview, I really feel like there's not any room on this one.

Alison Monahan: I agree, I mean I worked at a firm which prided themselves on not being very formal, and people there sometimes showed up to do callback interviews and they weren't particularly formal, but I would think always erring on the side of caution. I certainly remember when I interviewed there, I definitely wore a business suit. I mean, that's just what I wore.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely, I don't think anyone's gonna ding you for that.

Alison Monahan: No exactly, I was just more like, you know what, it's just easier if I put on the same suit that I've put on other places, I know it's appropriate, and I have the matching shoes and I have the matching jewelry and I have a bag that works with this outfit. I don't think there's a place to get creative.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, and no-one's gonna say, "oh, she was so overdressed."

Alison Monahan: Right, they're not gonna think you're overdressed for doing an interview. They might go, "oh wow, you didn't have to wear that," but they're never gonna be, "oh, you shouldn't have worn a suit." You can always get away with a suit. The reverse is not true.

Sadie Jones: Yeah. I think just generally law firms are places where they expect it to be respectful, and I think that's how you should go in thinking about it. That that's the kind of place that it is, and you're looking to have them hire you.

Something else I would say is not being prepared for what's on your resume-

Alison Monahan: Yeah, that's a great one.



Sadie Jones: ... or not being prepared for certain questions. So obviously this has probably already come up in the initial interview, but now you're dealing with a whole day with multiple people and so they'll all have a different take on your resume, and there are some people who really focus on the work, they wanna talk to you about substantive stuff, or something they're working on and that kind of thing. There are other people who might talk to you about nothing about law school and just other things.

Alison Monahan: That was just me, I was the chit-chatter like, "oh, I see you've been to India, tell me about that." "Oh, you're interested in yoga, oh, tell me about chi." Which honestly, I thought at the time would be softball questions, like you put these things on the interest section of your resume, presumably because you want to talk about them, but that was not always the case.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, I think sometimes law students get really caught up in thinking that it all should be substantive, and so they get tripped up by random questions or, they might ask you about the thing you don't want them to ask you about your resume.

Alison Monahan: Well, almost certainly somebody's going to ask you about the thing you don't want them to ask you about, that's just-

Sadie Jones: If there's something that stands out, right.

Alison Monahan: Anything weird, someone's gonna ask you about it.

Sadie Jones: So I would say, just be really prepared that people can ask you all sort of questions, and you really should have an answer for everything on your resume, for every time of your academic and career life, and be prepared for the questions of like, where do you see yourself in five years, that sound kind of, to me like silly questions, that I think they are less about what the actual answer is, than that you have an answer. And it sounds like you know what you're talking about.

So all of that stuff I think is just important, you don't know who these people are gonna be and you don't know how it's gonna switch from one to the other.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, that's exactly right, like you're dealing with a lot of different personalities, you're dealing with a lot of different levels. One thing that got me one time I think in a clerkship interview, when someone started asking me really detailed questions about my undergraduate honors thesis. Which I'm like, wow, I have not thought about this one for a while. But, in the moment I basically just realized, they know absolutely nothing about this, they're not gonna go look it up, I can tell them basically whatever I want that seems reasonable, and they're really just doing this to see if I get flustered.



- Sadie Jones: Yep. I was gonna say if you started stammering about it, it would be like, how do you not know anything about your-
- Alison Monahan: Well, they're asking me questions like, "which statistical analysis program did you use," and that's one of those things that "you know, to be perfectly honest, I know we used one of the big two or three, I don't know if it was SAP or whatever the other one is, I can't remember right now, it's been a while."
- Sadie Jones: And then just move on.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, "do you wanna ask some more questions about this, 'cause I'll talk to you about it." And yeah, they really ... this was actually at a clerkship interview and it was one of the clerks who was generally being kind of obnoxious, but ... I mean you know, it's fair enough, if it's on there you need to be able to talk about it.
- Sadie Jones: So I think, just being prepared with your own background is really important-
- Alison Monahan: And particularly I would say, I think a more fair question, that's probably much likely to come up is if you list some sort of writing sample or you listed Note for example, as like the title of your journal note, people are definitely gonna dig into that because they wanna see how you talk about the law.
- Sadie Jones: Well and that's also a case where your resume is actually your chance to put out what you want to talk about and highlight things-
- Alison Monahan: Right exactly, if you don't wanna talk about it, don't put it on there.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah. So I would say, I never believe in lying or saying anything dishonest on a resume, but a resume is a story you're telling and you can push it in one direction or another.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, although one thing never to push, do not put languages that you're not actually comfortable talking in, 'cause I have seen people walk into interviews in that language, and if you're not totally confident, don't put it on there.
- Sadie Jones: I also feel strongly even if you put it on there, and you say, you know, intro or conversational, just don't do it. I don't think it's a good idea.
- Alison Monahan: I think unless you're fluent, or basically fluent.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah exactly. I think it just looks like pretentious or like you're trying to fudge something.
- Alison Monahan: Right, I mean if you grew up speaking a different language in your house, and that was your primary language, or if you studied abroad and you really have



learned the language, and you feel like you're basically fluent, that's one thing. If you're like, oh, I did three months in Barcelona, don't put Spanish on your-

- Sadie Jones: Exactly. No one wants to know something where you know a couple of sentences. That doesn't help.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, you need to be able to speak Hindi, basically, if you put it on there.
- Sadie Jones: Exactly. So yeah, even if you're familiar. And I actually think that about hobbies. You don't have to put something on that you're super great at, but you should be able to talk about it for real. So whether or not it's playing it up, you need to be able to.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, don't be the person that I had to interview who put "baking" on his resume, and I asked him, "Oh, what do you like to bake," and he kinda looked at me blankly, and I'm like, "It's on your resume." And he's like, "oh, well, I guess it's more accurate to say I like to watch cooking shows."
- Sadie Jones: And it's just like, well why didn't you write that on your resume?
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, I was just like, okay, you're not giving me a lot to work with here, sorry. Like this is a softball, come on, make something up. And honestly, I think a lot of these issues really come down to confidence. I don't wanna say bullshitting, but basically, you're doing an interview to be a firm lawyer, this is a lot of what people do actually, is maintaining confidence when maybe they don't actually know what they're talking about. This is what you do with clients, it might be what you do with a judge, they're kind of testing you to see, can you do this?
- Sadie Jones: Yeah, I think a lot of it's like judgment issues.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, alright, so what are some other things that you see frequently, just briefly?
- Sadie Jones: So, problems with the lunch interview.
- Alison Monahan: Oh yes, always meals, those are always fun. All right, we're gonna table that for a minute.
- Sadie Jones: Okay. Another thing is maybe being too informal, or coming in a little bit too confident. Like you already have the offer or you expect the offer. That's just a turn-off. No-one likes that.
- Alison Monahan: I think too that can come down to, people make the mistake, particularly at lunch, like the associates are more friendly and they let their guard down, but let's table that one, all right, what else?



Sadie Jones: Showing up late.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I've seen a lot of actual issues around travel, whether it's travel in the city, or travel setup, I mean, you've gotta think of this whole process really as part of the interview process. So I'm sure as a recruiter, you are the one interacting with people to ... 'cause oftentimes, if you're in school in New York and you're interviewing in New York it's pretty easy, you just get on the subway. But if you are in school in New York and you're interviewing in San Francisco, you're gonna have to fly there, you're gonna have to get a hotel, somebody's gonna cover this and that, all that can really be a minefield.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely, so my suggestion is, you should go to the NALP website, which is the organization that basically polices all of this and has all the [rules](#). 'Cause it's all really organized, and there are certain rules that all the firms agree to. And so there's a [form](#) that has all of that and has the exact way it's supposed to work, so it has how many days you're allowed to be there that they cover, and what they cover and things like that, and the last thing you wanna do is do things that are outside of that, or try to fudge things, or try to have them pay for things that they shouldn't, or you know, try to have them pay for meals with your friends when you're in the city and not give itemized receipts and things like that.

That's the kind of stuff that the recruiters actually look at and will come back to bite you.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I've heard all kinds of crazy stuff, about people trying at one end to go to some friend's wedding or something and scheduling one interview in a city outside of town that they'd already been to, people submitting crazy receipts for things like the minibar or porn, I mean these are just things you do not do.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely, or you see two separate receipts for the same night, where it should have been dinner but one thing was like drinks with all your friends and another thing was dinner. You know, you're gonna notice, why were there two receipts for the same night?

Alison Monahan: Oh yes, I remember one time I was doing an interview in San Francisco and I'd lived in San Francisco, so a friend of mine came over and we were gonna go out to a show or something. And without really thinking about it he poured a couple of drinks out of the minibar. And then the next day when I was getting my tallied up receipts I was like, oh wait, okay, I need this on a totally separate bill, that I'll pay for separately and then this is the one that I need to submit, because, you know, you don't want to mark through things with a marker and things like that, you want all the stuff to be clean, like it's clean as possible, as professional as possible, and for a lot of people who may not be used to staying in relatively nice hotels and flying around by yourself, and you don't get to fly business class, don't ask.



- Sadie Jones: Oh my Gosh, I know. And I think you just have to keep in mind is it worth giving up a job offer over a free meal or something, you know-
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, this is not a place to get cute. Don't go to Michael Mina for dinner, just order room service from the hotel or whatever, and order one thing.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah, and I would look, there's like a clear limit, you know, so just see what it is. And stick with it.
- So I think all this stuff can be the kind of thing that can really trip you up, but as long as you read it ahead of time and know what the rules are, it's the same for everyone, so it's actually pretty simple.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah and the firms will tell you how they're splitting stuff and things like that, so, people spend a lot of time and energy stressing out about the logistics of the travel and things, but as you're saying, this is not something you need to worry about, it's just something that you need to know what the rules are, be sure that you are strictly compliant with them, that nothing you're sending in sends out any red flags and you'll be fine.
- Sadie Jones: Because I will tell you that there is no way that the recruiter is not gonna tell somebody, like the hiring partner-
- Alison Monahan: Oh, of course.
- Sadie Jones: ... what happened, if there's an actual big issue, and no firm wants to take a risk on someone like that. If they're acting like that in the first callback interview, why would you possibly want to make an offer to this person, that's just ridiculous.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, if you're submitting many bar receipts when you're interviewing that is a huge red flag that maybe there's an issue here, that they do not wanna take on.
- Sadie Jones: Yes, I agree.
- Alison Monahan: All right, so basically the travel stuff, just do it, make sure you know what you're getting into. Let's talk about the meals and the associate situation, 'cause I think that's a place where people get tripped up a lot.
- Sadie Jones: Absolutely. Are you talking about the lunch interview?
- Alison Monahan: Yes.
- Sadie Jones: So, I will say as a recruiter I would always try to schedule people in the morning so that there was a lunch interview.



- Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think as a candidate you probably want to do that if possible.
- Sadie Jones: I agree, so I think it actually can benefit everybody, but I think it can also hurt you. So I would say really, the thing to just remember is yes, you're going out for lunch, you're leaving the office, you're probably going somewhere nice, and you're probably going with people that are around your age, you know, or fairly junior. Not always, but those are the people who usually wanna do it, have more time and kind of wanna be more casual with people.
- Alison Monahan: And I think that firms kinda want that too, 'cause they want this different perspective, so they want to send you out with a second year and see how it goes.
- Sadie Jones: Absolutely. So I would say a couple things can happen. One, I think the candidate can be too casual with the person and forget they're on an interview. And I think that that is a big danger, because the person doing it is probably taking it somewhat seriously, you know, they can get free lunches a lot at these kinda things, so I think people who really do them and take the time out, usually do care, so they're gonna write something up about how the lunch went and so you don't wanna be telling them things that you wouldn't have told someone in an office interview.
- You know, all sorts of things, like, people say they don't even wanna work there, like this isn't their top choice. I think they just have a tendency to say things outta turn. I did have a candidate try to order drinks or did order drinks, where just the candidate did. So it wasn't even like the associates were ordering them and they felt like they had to go along with it. It's just like they went around the lunch table, the other people ordered iced teas and this person ordered a margarita.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, don't do that.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah, it was, that's probably, I will never forget that.
- Alison Monahan: Well I think that's just one of those things, like bright-line rule here, don't order alcoholic drinks at a callback interview lunch. Even if everyone else at the table is having a beer, and they offer, just say, "No, hey, I'm totally cool with lemonade, thanks."
- Sadie Jones: Yeah, absolutely, I can't imagine anyone giving you a hard time. Now, I would be upset at an associate who did that, who ordered alcoholic drinks at an interview lunch-
- Alison Monahan: Right, I think that's a pretty bright-line rule for them too, but sometimes people don't pay attention, so.



- Sadie Jones: ... but they're not looking for the job offer in that case.
- Alison Monahan: Right, I think I've seen people, maybe not at callbacks, but I think I've seen people there order a glass of wine, like an associate, it's like okay fine, you're a senior associate, you're fifth year, whatever, have a glass of wine. But never, never, never, the candidate should.
- Sadie Jones: Absolutely. So you know that's an example. You know I think another way that it can be a little bit of a minefield is that sometimes the more junior people can actually be tougher on the people coming up, I've noticed. It can sort of go either way. Either they're easier because they don't have as much experience interviewing people, but I think there's other people, I know a partner once described as, "pulling up the ladder behind them."
- And so I think you should be prepared for, they might ask you tough questions at lunch. Or they might try to trip you up.
- Alison Monahan: I remember a lunch where the two people that were interviewing me started talking amongst themselves about how many hours they were billing and then turned to me to be like, "well would you be comfortable doing this?" You know, and I think you'd have to be like, well, that's the job, you know.
- Another thing is, this is not the time to get into an actual discussion about work-life balance. Save that for later.
- Sadie Jones: Absolutely, and that goes for any callback interview. You are still looking for the job, you have plenty of time to ask those questions. And there'll be opportunities to go back and call up with people, but at this point, you're looking for the job offer.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, at this point you're eager beaver, oh, billing 3,000 hours a year, sounds great, can't wait, sign me up!
- Sadie Jones: Absolutely, and I think you can ask questions to find out that information without it being about, that you don't wanna work that much. You can just ask them what they're working on, or you know-
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, what you're working on is always a safe area, I don't think how much you're working is a particularly safe area, I wouldn't go there in a callback.
- Sadie Jones: But it could come out-
- Alison Monahan: It could come out, sure.
- Sadie Jones: ... if you know how you could find out that information.



- Alison Monahan: If they say they're at trial, then okay you can assume they're working hard, they're probably not taking you to lunch if they're at trial, so-
- Sadie Jones: Absolutely.
- Alison Monahan: What about people who are not comfortable necessarily at this point, in a more fancy eating environment?
- Sadie Jones: Good question. I would say, keep it really simple in terms of what you're ordering, and you know I think you can walk into that and just act nervous because you're not that comfortable in it. I would say, just don't overthink it. You know, sit down and do what you would do at any restaurant.
- Alison Monahan: Well, you know, sometimes people, a lot of people in law school obviously have grown up going to fancy restaurants or any restaurants, but there are people who haven't, and I think in that case you probably wanna do some preparation with YouTube videos or whatever online beforehand, maybe take yourself out to dinner after watching a few videos, go with a friend who did grow up in a different environment so they can kind of help you, like, oh-
- Sadie Jones: Yeah, see what the cutlery is-
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, what the cutlery is, this is your bread plate, this is where your water glass is, this is where your other glasses are, this is your salad fork, this is your main fork. I mean basically just go from the outside in, but if you're not comfortable with that I think you need to practice.
- Sadie Jones: No I think that's an excellent point. I also think you can take your cues from the other people at the table.
- Alison Monahan: Exactly.
- Sadie Jones: So, kind of see what they're ordering, see which courses they're ordering, that sort of thing. Order something that seems simple, you know-
- Alison Monahan: Even which water glass are they picking up 'cause I'll be honest, sometimes the associates at those lunches will actually use the wrong bread plate, or the wrong water plate, and at that point, you just switch.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah, good point.
- Alison Monahan: If they don't know what they're doing, go like, "oh, I think this one's mine, right. Okay great, I'm just gonna take that water glass." Just roll with it.



- Sadie Jones: Yeah, I think the biggest thing is to take your cue from a person that already works there.
- Alison Monahan: Right and ordering too, like, are you ordering appetizers, are you ordering dessert, are you just getting one thing. You don't wanna be that person who orders a salad, plus a soup, plus an entrée, plus a dessert, when they're like, "we have an hour and we're just getting sandwiches."
- Sadie Jones: Yeah, and I feel really strongly about this. So I would never order a different amount of courses than them. And so I think that means even if you wouldn't have ordered three courses, but they are, you do anyway. You don't have to eat it all.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, often times they'll talk about this, they'll say, you know, what are you thinking of getting? Oh, you know, are you guys getting a salad to start? Okay, I'll get that too. Just go with the crowd here.
- Sadie Jones: I also think, please don't order anything messy, or you have to eat with your hands, or...
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, sometimes even things like a hamburger can trip you up, 'cause you not really thinking you're gonna have stuff falling all over the place and it's gonna be all over your fingers. Probably knife and fork is best, small bites.
- Sadie Jones: And a salad always works pretty well.
- Alison Monahan: And then I guess you can always go buy food later if you're hungry.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah, I think you have to remember this isn't really about the free lunch.
- Alison Monahan: Exactly. It's like just something simple and then if you're hungry later, have a Clif bar. Or take yourself out to lunch and eat whatever you want, you can be as messy as you want, fine.
- Sadie Jones: But I do think it's a situation where it can trip you up but I think that if you don't overthink it too much, and you remember that you're on an interview, you will be fine.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly, it's basically just go in, nice, polite, nod, smile, try not to spill anything on yourself, I mean what if you do have a disaster, like you spill water or your tea all over the table, or something?
- Sadie Jones: You know, I would make a joke about it probably. I would have a sense of humor, crying or running out probably isn't gonna help.



Alison Monahan: That's one of those where you've just gotta be like, oh my gosh, I can't believe what just happened, how embarrassing! Argh, where's the waiter, we need a towel.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, this can go on your all-time interview stories or something.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, another thing, this involves the waiting staff in the restaurant but also everyone else, you have to not be rude.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely. I have heard a lot of stories where an associate will remember that a candidate was rude or snappy, or had some kind of issue, and-

Alison Monahan: Or like sent food back.

Sadie Jones: Yes.

Alison Monahan: It's just like, don't do that, just pick at it.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, and that's where, again, remember this is not about the free lunch.

Alison Monahan: Right.

Sadie Jones: This is about you wanna job.

Alison Monahan: It's like, your steak's slightly overcooked, okay, deal with it.

Sadie Jones: Exactly.

Alison Monahan: What about dietary restrictions?

Sadie Jones: So, as a recruiter I would always ask as I was scheduling the callback, if you have dietary restrictions. This is an area where also, I would really only say it if it's something that really would affect a restaurant that they were choosing. So I think being a vegetarian or a vegan, that counts. I don't think if you're allergic to some random thing, you need to tell them on the phone. It just makes it seem like you're, I don't know, anal about that kind of stuff, I feel like you probably get through life going to restaurants and figuring it out.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, probably no one needs to know that you're like paleo, just like, okay, you can probably find something that you can eat.

Sadie Jones: Exactly, so, you know or you're kosher, is something to tell them. You know, something that really would affect the restaurant that they're choosing. Other than that, I think it's fine and just, you know, you've gotta make it work at the restaurant that they choose.



Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think that's all right, I think defining what you need upfront and you just roll with it. If I tell them I'm a pescetarian and they take me to a steakhouse, I'm probably not gonna bring that up again, I'm also not gonna order a steak, I might be like, oh, I'll just have a salad and a side, totally fine. Don't need to make a big deal.

Sadie Jones: It's rare that you go to a restaurant where there's no options for someone, even who has specific dietary restrictions.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think there'll be something. So just eat something else if you're hungry later.

All right, well let's talk a little bit about the interviews themselves, 'cause I think sometimes people get tripped up here because they feel like they need to have radically different interviews, or radically different questions that they're asking. I mean, I think you do obviously need to have some questions prepared, but like we were talking about earlier, something as simple as, "what kind of work are you doing, what are you working on right now?" That can be a great question for everyone.

Sadie Jones: I would say you should always have sort of a running list, that you can refer back to without too much trouble. It's pretty rare that someone's gonna talk to someone else about the question that they asked, it might come up when they're writing a review, but I would say also you really should have a bunch of questions you think you could use but you should be in the moment. So, use it where appropriate, and with the right person.

See you don't wanna try to steer it to like, "oh no, I needed to ask this question," to try to get the conversation back there, that is awkward.

Alison Monahan: No, I think you need to be prepared to carry the conversation for the entire interview if you have to, because occasionally you will encounter someone who is not a great interviewer, maybe they're distracted, they're tired whatever, like you may end up having to basically talk or ask questions for the entire 20-30 minutes and you need to be ready for that, you can't just go in with two questions.

You shouldn't be asking about things that are really obvious, from the website, you need to be prepared, it's the callback, you should be pretty serious about this. Sometimes you'll get the interview list and you can ask people beforehand, I think there also there's a little bit of a line, because you don't wanna seem like a stalker. I don't think you should be asking people personal questions, like, "oh I saw online that you have three kids and one of them just won the Little League Championship." Like, okay that's creepy.



Sadie Jones: I totally agree and I could think of a candidate that did something similar, and knew some really obscure things about this person. And it was really awkward.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean I suppose you will think that's impressive, it's like, "oh I've done all this work." It's like, you need to keep that to yourself.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, all you need to really know is what practice group are they in, do they have any recent big cases, I think is fine. If it was something well-known ... and it's always good to know what law school they went to, like if there's something that you have in common, because a lot of times you will, that's how they match it up. Because-

Alison Monahan: Right, oftentimes-

Sadie Jones: ... they're trying to come up with some things that you can have good conversations.

Alison Monahan: Right, the recruiter probably hooked you up with this person for a reason and things shift all the time at the last minute, just because you're not talking to the right person doesn't mean that the firm hates you, it just means that somebody got called in to do something immediately they had to do. And sometimes the person you've been passed off to might have seen your resume five minutes before, they might not have ever seen your resume so you need to bring copies, I would sometimes get calls like, "hey, we've just had a cancellation, can you do this interview in five minutes?" I was like, "Okay, fine, who am I talking to? What information do I have here to work with?"

So you need to be prepared to help people in those scenarios, it doesn't mean that the firm doesn't like you or doesn't take you seriously, it's just the way that things roll, in a law firm things come up.

Sadie Jones: Yeah and I think that's actually a good quality to show them, that you're okay with that and that you could roll with it, because it's gonna happen all the time.

Alison Monahan: And again, you can kind of make a joke out of it, obviously it's like kind of a weird awkward situation, like, "Oh, you're not who I'm supposed to be talking to. Well, not a problem, let's get the awkwardness out of the way and then we'll sit down and have our conversation."

Sadie Jones: Well and treat that as an opportunity to ask them, you can ask them honest questions that you don't know about what they do, or whatnot. So yeah, I think anyone can really come up with enough for 20 or 30 minutes, yeah it could drag on, but you should have enough in mind.



Another thing is, if there's like five minutes at the end, that the person always leaves for questions, do not say, "No I don't have any."

Alison Monahan: Right, you need to be ready to talk.

Sadie Jones: I'm surprised at how many people do that. It doesn't make you look good.

Alison Monahan: Well it's also like, well what are we supposed to do now, like now it's my problem to keep asking you questions? Thanks, you're a helpful person.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, it's like you're interested in my firm, but you have zero questions, you know everything about it now? So it's really about you just being prepared and having something to ask.

Alison Monahan: Well, yeah, and because people are looking at you as a candidate and saying would this person be helpful to me if I was staffed on a case with them, and part of that is holding up your end of the conversation. If you can't do that, what do you think this is about?

Sadie Jones: Yeah, and I think that actually is what these interviews come down to. It's not really as much about the substantive answers and the things that I think make people nervous, than it is about, do I wanna work with this person. If I were here at the office late, do they seem like someone I could count on. 'Cause they're gonna be below me, so I'm gonna be giving them assignments.

Alison Monahan: And you might literally be hiring someone that you end up supervising.

Sadie Jones: Yep, absolutely, so I think that's what the candidate should keep in mind going into it, that that's what the person is really thinking about.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly, I think a lot of this really is just don't get flustered, go with whatever happens, try to have a sense of humor, try to be a person that somebody might wanna be around at three in the morning which you might end up being in a very stressful situation, you're at trial, you're doing a deal, whatever, everybody's tired. Are you that person that's gonna drive everyone nuts by being like, "well I don't have anything to do." Well figure something out, we're at trial, there's plenty for you to do.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely and I think what it comes down to a lot of times, is do I like this person? You know that's kind of what they're writing the review of.

Alison Monahan: Yeah and sometimes that can get weird if like the person interviewing you is being weird, or sexist or racist or whatever you wanna pick, stuff happens, it does.



- Sadie Jones: And that can be up to you, you know what I mean, you can take that as a reflection on whether or not you want this job later, how this person is.
- Alison Monahan: I mean the reality is a ... nobody who's doing these interviews really has a whole lot of training, so people sometimes do obviously ask questions that are inappropriate and/or illegal, and that's something you can consider in advance, how are you gonna respond if someone starts asking you about things that they're not allowed to ask you about, legally.
- And I think it depends a lot on their intent and the scenario-
- Sadie Jones: I was gonna say a lot of times they really don't even mean it the way it sounds. I know just as an example, something that will always come up is that you're not actually supposed to ask where someone's from. Because there can be a lot of implications in that. I do think that most of the time the people really don't know, and they really are, maybe they see that it looks like you had a connection with the mid-West, and they do, and that's really all they're saying.
- So I think just keep that in mind, what do they really mean by this and, yeah exactly, how am I gonna respond in a way that I'm comfortable with and isn't gonna make this awkward if it doesn't need to be.
- Alison Monahan: Right, obviously, depending on who you are and what your background is, this may or may not come up more often, it's just the reality of life, so I think if this is something that you think is likely to come up, you need to be more prepared to handle it.
- Sadie Jones: Absolutely.
- Alison Monahan: All right, well we are unfortunately out of time. Any final thoughts on this?
- Sadie Jones: My final thoughts are really as I think we've said, during this conversation, you are going in trying to get a job offer. So I would keep all of the questions that you have more about life at the law firm, to later. I just think that's an area where people just over and over again get into trouble. So I understand how important pro bono is, and all of that kind of stuff, but I personally don't think that it's great to emphasize it too much in this kind of interview. These places are for-profit organizations and they wanna know that you wanna work hard and I don't think that they wanna go in feeling like you're asking them about public interest type stuff.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, I asked someone once at a firm in New York which will remain nameless, about their pro bono, just because literally I was trying to kill time, because he had nothing to say to me, and I was just like, "Oh, I heard you guys do pro bono work here, what kind of stuff do you do work on?" And he's like, "To be



perfectly honest, if that's something you're interested in, I think you should go somewhere else." And I was just like, okay, well, all right then. That was not a great question.

Sadie Jones: And I think there are people where it's totally okay, you know, and you see they're the head of the pro bono committee and that kind of thing and you're trying to connect with them, but I think generally, you probably don't wanna go into those areas of work-life balance, and all of those types of things and what the billable hours, all of that, in this situation.

I think you wanna go in, you know you're selling yourself.

Alison Monahan: Right and you're selling yourself for a particular role, and if that role is not something that you're actually that eager to do, then that's something that you need to probably have some conversations with the career coach about, rather than venting all of that in an interview. The point of the interview is to get the job, then you can decide if you want the job.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely, and I think the other final thought about that, is law firms are very hierarchical and you're coming in at the bottom. And I think you don't want anyone to feel like you don't know where you're gonna be and where you're gonna start and that you're gonna be working for them and you don't know that much right now.

So I don't think you wanna over talk yourself up.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think a lot of what particularly partners or more senior associates too, are looking for is, do you actually understand what this job entails. So you need to educate yourself about the realities of working in a law firm so that you don't come off as this incredibly naïve person who has literally no idea what they are getting into, and it's a very specific type of job. It may or may not be the right fit for you, but you need to understand at least, what is this job? What would I be doing? What are the pressures of the job, could I handle those?

You don't wanna come in and just be like la-la-la, it's gonna be so fun and educational. It's like, that's not what we're paying you for.

Sadie Jones: Right, or yeah, it's gonna be all fancy lunches and all of that kind of stuff.

Alison Monahan: I think they're looking for somebody who understands this position and can make a solid case that they're a person who is able to succeed in that position.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, absolutely.



Alison Monahan: All right, well unfortunately with that, we are out of time. Sadie, thank you so much for joining us.

Sadie Jones: Thanks for having me back.

Alison Monahan: Our pleasure.

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If you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to reach out to Lee or Alison at [lee@lawschooltoolbox.com](mailto:lee@lawschooltoolbox.com) or [alison@lawschooltoolbox.com](mailto:alison@lawschooltoolbox.com). Or, you can always contact us via our website [contact form](#) at [lawschooltoolbox.com](https://www.lawschooltoolbox.com). Thanks for listening. We'll talk soon, and good luck with those callbacks.

#### **RESOURCES:**

- [Ahead of the Curve: What are Big Law Recruiters Really Looking for?](#)
- [Podcast Episode 4: Callback Tips for BigLaw Summer Associate Positions](#)
- [NALP Principles and Standards for Law Placement and Recruitment Activities](#)
- [NALP Printable Travel Expense Form](#)