



Lee Burgess: Welcome to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today we're talking about what to read and what not to read before your 1L year. Your Law School Toolbox hosts are Alison Monahan and Lee Burgess, that's me. 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 related website [CareerDicta](#). Alison also runs [The Girl's Guide to Law School](#). If you enjoy the show, please leave a review 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'd love to hear from you. And with that, let's get started.

Alison Monahan: Welcome back to the [Law School Toolbox podcast](#). Today we're talking about what to read and what not to read the summer before law school. So I think sometimes students think, "Oh, I should be reading casebooks and getting ready that way." What do you think about that, Lee?

Lee Burgess: Oh, I think that's a terrible waste of time.

Alison Monahan: I agree.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. You don't need to read casebooks until you go to law school. I think that's pretty safe.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think people should think about reading things that are interesting and inspirational. I mean, of course it's great if you learned some things you can later apply to your legal career, your legal education, but by reading books around the legal experience or the legal system you're typically going to learn things and actually increase your interest in these legal issues that you might interact with in law school. And also the reality is not everyone grew up like you with parents who were lawyers.

Lee Burgess: That's true.

Alison Monahan: Most people really have no idea what goes on in a courtroom. And having been a clerk for a judge, I can tell you it's pretty interesting and I certainly had no idea what went on and that was even after three years of law school. So, some of the books we're going to talk about give you, in an interesting way, some of that background just so that you're a little bit more situated, I think, in the legal world and have a better understanding of the basics of how these things work without talking about, "Do you know tort law?"

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think that that's true. And I'm a big fan of nonfiction and so I think that nonfiction can be a great place to start when you want to read books to get in



this zone for law school. So I think some great places to start are stories about famous lawyers and judges.

Alison Monahan: Right, you love your bios.

Lee Burgess: I do love my bios. So some of the bios that I think are great to read that were more recent was [My Beloved World](#), which is Sonia Sotomayor.

Alison Monahan: Oh, that's a great book.

Lee Burgess: That is a great book. You and I both read that a few years back.

Alison Monahan: We did.

Lee Burgess: Actually maybe four years ago now. It's been a while.

Alison Monahan: We did. Maybe we should do a podcast on it.

Lee Burgess: Maybe.

Alison Monahan: No, I think that is a really interesting book because obviously her background is not standard for a Supreme Court justice. So it's super interesting to hear about her childhood. I mean, I feel like it's almost in the vein of [Becoming](#), the Michelle Obama biography, in that it goes into her childhood, and her childhood is really not what you would expect. She grew up fairly not particularly well off in New York City.

Lee Burgess: In the Projects, I believe it was in her childhood.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, literally in the Projects with a family that wasn't the type of family that you expect a Supreme Court justice at that point to come out of. And so it's really fascinating and the same experience that Michelle had where she goes into... I think she also went to Princeton, actually. Goes into that rarefied world of the Ivy League and suddenly realizes that she's very, very out of place. And I think that's an experience a number of law students have is just feeling out of place. And then you can read this and see like, "Hey, worked pretty well for her."

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that's true. So I just like reading these stories because I think that when you hit your own stumbling blocks and when you bring your own individual story to your legal experience, that it can be really helpful to remember these hyper successful individuals who maybe in these writings have been very honest about what their struggles have been and their failures. And I think that one of the things I appreciated about that book, I think especially around her personal life, she talked a lot about her divorce and was very honest about the part she



played in that. And I really appreciated this kind of openness around struggles and failure and pitfalls that were personal and professional. And I think that the more we can talk about that stuff, the healthier we are as we move through our own trials and tribulations and struggles.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. One of the things I remember in one of the stories in that book, and it has been several years, is when she was buying the jacket. Do you remember when she went shopping with her mother and they were so happy to buy this fancy jacket that she really wanted to wear to school? And she got there and realized like, "Oh, this really does not fit in." And so it is, I think, about playing a role and being authentic but also wanting to fit in. And I just thought that was a really interesting discussion in the book.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. So, worth checking out, easy read. Good, fun reading. Fun reading and clearly memorable because we're talking about it and I think it was about four years ago.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, we literally haven't looked at it since, so yeah. Actually there are a number of stories I remember from that book. And some of them were more legal related, like some of the early work she was doing about copyright and trademark infringement.

Lee Burgess: She worked with fashion designers, didn't she?

Alison Monahan: Yeah, they'd go down on Canal Street and I remember she said in her office, she had all these knockoffs that they bought on Canal Street.

Lee Burgess: And that experience of going from that Ivy League environment into these fancy New York law firms was also very interesting.

Alison Monahan: Well, and she did not get hired as a summer associate because she felt like she did not fit in on the happy hour test, which we recently talked about with Sadie Jones on a different podcast. But yeah, that feeling of she didn't feel like she was being hired because she didn't fit what they were looking for in terms of background and that kind of thing.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: But it worked out okay for her in the end.

Lee Burgess: She also was very honest about her diabetes and her whole struggles around that, which I think for a lot of folks who have chronic health conditions, it can be very inspirational to hear somebody's story, someone who's able to be at the top of their craft. I think most Supreme Court justices would be considered to be



at the top of their craft. We might disagree about a few of them. But that she's been able to manage that and still reach excellence, I think that's pretty cool.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it's a great book. Read it.

Lee Burgess: It's a great book. Read it. Well, staying on the Supreme Court topic, I love me some Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Well, who doesn't?

Alison Monahan: Who doesn't?

Lee Burgess: She has a few interesting books out. I know her biography has recently come out. I haven't had a chance to read it yet.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I haven't read that either.

Lee Burgess: But I think it goes along with the movie, which I also haven't gotten to see because when you have small children you don't get to see as many movies as you used to.

Alison Monahan: Well, you saw a different Ruth Bader-

Lee Burgess: I did. The documentary was very good. But one of the books that I really enjoyed was [My Own Words](#), which is a book on her writing and lectures, and it's just a compilation. So it's something that you can pick up and put down because there's no real story to it. But as an introduction to legal writing, discussing legal issues, I think it's pretty fascinating because you are actually reading some legal writings as well. I think it even has some of her opinions in it and some lectures where she talks about those opinions. So, especially around women in the workplace and affirmative action, a lot of the areas that she's very passionate about, and I think that you can learn a lot. Especially if you are new to this legal genre, it can be a nice introduction. It'd be like getting to sit and listen to this very famous person give a lot of lectures. And I know you've seen her speak. I haven't seen her speak in person.

Alison Monahan: I have, yeah. She's a great speaker. So yeah, I think anything of hers is great. Really you could pick up probably any book by or about any Supreme Court justice and it would probably be interesting and you'd learn something.

Lee Burgess: That's true. Although Scalia wrote one that we went to hear Scalia speak and it was on legal analysis. I think that one might be a little dense for pre-law students.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, yeah, I was thinking of that one as well. That probably is not your best choice, but you know something about their biography, their background, that kind of thing. They're all going to be interesting. You can even pick a classic one.



- Lee Burgess: That's true.
- Alison Monahan: One of the famous people of the past, read up on them. Can't hurt.
- Lee Burgess: Can't hurt. Alright, so moving into other legal books that are still in our nonfiction realm. [Civil Action](#), which most people have seen the movie with John Travolta, but the book is also really good. It's by Jonathan Harr. And that story I think is really compelling about what litigation can do to try and help people, but what is challenging about these types of toxic tort litigations.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think there are several books in the genre we're going to talk about, of that kind of courtroom drama. And I think all these, if you think you want to be a litigator, are super interesting and they're designed to be readable for the lay person. So I think it's something you should probably be able to pick up and get through without a real problem. If you find yourself bored out of your mind, maybe law school might not be the best choice for you.
- Lee Burgess: That's true.
- Alison Monahan: Or at least not litigation, might want to think about that. But yeah, I think Civil Action is great. There's another one we read in my professional responsibility class, which I really enjoyed, called [The Buffalo Creek Disaster](#), and that is also a toxic tort type thing. There was a coal mining disaster and the town people basically brought suit against the coal company. So that one is very... It goes into a lot of the procedure and the nuts and bolts of litigation and it's super interesting.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. I haven't read that one, but now I kind of want to.
- Alison Monahan: It's really good. Very readable.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. The problem with doing this podcast is we created this list and now you and I have a more lengthy reading list.
- Alison Monahan: Exactly.
- Lee Burgess: We're behind on the stuff that we've already promised each other that we were going to read.
- Alison Monahan: Exactly. The list always just keeps growing.
- Lee Burgess: It's so true. Alright, something else that would be a book about a case that you would likely read in law school is called [Gideon's Trumpet](#), which is by Anthony Lewis, and it describes the story behind Gideon versus Wainwright, which is a Supreme Court decision that ruled criminal defendants have a right to attorney



even if they cannot afford one. The book is from 1965 but this is a case that is still taught in every law school. I read Gideon, didn't you?

Alison Monahan: Probably.

Lee Burgess: Probably.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I didn't really know the backstory of it until we were looking at this book yesterday. It's pretty fascinating. It was a pro bono person who actually filed a writ with the Supreme Court in pencil on prison letterhead. And you can imagine how unusual it is that they would even take that case. And then he won and established this right that if you can't afford a lawyer, one will be provided for you. That's straight up Miranda. Every criminal defendant hears that.

Lee Burgess: Yep.

Alison Monahan: So it was an incredible story. I definitely want to read this one. We haven't read it, but it looks fascinating.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. So also on the list. Maybe we can do a future podcast on it.

Alison Monahan: Yeah.

Lee Burgess: One that I didn't put on this list but we should probably mention, is [Terminal Ambition](#), which was written by a friend of ours.

Alison Monahan: Oh yeah, that's a good one. It's a novel.

Lee Burgess: It's a novel but about-

Alison Monahan: Kate McGuinness. Former lawyer and now coach. She wears many hats.

Lee Burgess: She wears many hats. Very nice person.

Alison Monahan: Amazing woman.

Lee Burgess: Amazing woman. But that is about law firm life and issues around sexual harassment. I thought it was very good.

Alison Monahan: Very good, and also very on-point for today.

Lee Burgess: In the Me Too Movement.

Alison Monahan: Exactly. This was pre Me Too when she wrote it.



- Lee Burgess: This was pre Me Too. Other legal fiction, maybe in the same realm, like John Grisham, which a lot of people consider maybe airplane books and things like that.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah.
- Lee Burgess: But some people really enjoy reading things like [The Firm](#), which is about a rookie tax lawyer in his Memphis law firm. And again, an easy page turner, but it can make you start to think about what it's like to be a young lawyer in some of these types of law firms. So you can pick up even legal thrillers; they might make you feel a bit better. Did I ever tell you that I kind of did this my summer before law school? I'm just remembering I did this. I tried to read all these different books.
- Alison Monahan: You're such a nerd.
- Lee Burgess: I'm such a nerd. So I read the classics on the law school experience, like [One L](#) and [The Paper Chase](#). One L is by Scott Turow and it's pretty dated at this point.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think it is dated in a lot of ways, but at the same time a lot of it still rings true for people, I think.
- Lee Burgess: Pretty sure I had nightmares after reading 1L though. It's a little intense.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. I definitely had to turn off The Paper Chase movie when my roommate and I, for some unfathomable reason, decided we were going to watch this as a study break during finals.
- Lee Burgess: During finals? That's a terrible idea.
- Alison Monahan: We literally got about five minutes into it because I think it opens with a very intense scene, and we were like, "Wow, we should not watch this."
- Lee Burgess: So my Contracts professor wrote The Paper Chase.
- Alison Monahan: Wow. I never read it. I never looked at it.
- Lee Burgess: Because you were scarred.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. We were just like, "Uh, this is not mentally healthy."
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. So, you can learn things from a lot of these different books, but if they're starting to increase your anxiety, feel free to take a step back.



Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think that's a good point. Overall, sometimes people think they have to read every single book. The incoming 1L experience and they'll get Law School Confidential and they'll go to Amazon and they'll get 1L and The Paper Chase, and they'll buy 10 other books and try to read them all. Frankly, all of them probably have some gems in them, but you don't really need to do that.

Lee Burgess: No. What I think would be a better use of your time, even though I didn't do this when I was getting ready for law school, is spending a little bit of my energy reading things to teach me how to keep my own head on straight and manage my work flow, kind of how I wanted to be as a person and professional. And so I think there are books in this genre, and you don't have to read these right before 1L year, but I think that they can help you frame this experience. So the one that we'll have a future podcast on, but that I'm almost done reading and you're behind on, I believe...

Alison Monahan: I'm very behind.

Lee Burgess: It's called [Mindsight](#) which is by Dan Siegel, who's a psychiatrist down out of Southern California. And it's a lot about the power of the mind, about harnessing the power of the mind to be able to deal with stress and anxiety and change how your brain works to make you a happier, mentally healthier person. And I think there are a lot of really important things in there, and there was even stories about a 94-year-old lawyer that's pretty fascinating. So I think it's worth it to explore some of these ideas about how you can manage your brain and your anxieties. And he's got something called the Wheel of Awareness and you can change your thoughts if you use a practice that's linked to meditation to be able to, say, acknowledge your feeling and change how your thought process is and that's going to create a physical response in your body. All of this stuff can be used for things like testing anxiety and generalized anxiety around school, or what do you do when you get bad feedback.

Alison Monahan: Right. Stress, not sleeping, all of these things.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. And just maybe make you a happier person.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I completely agree. I think reading up on that, there are tons of books and things. I think Mindsight is great. There are plenty of other ones. You can pick up any book on meditation or anything like that. It's probably going to be beneficial if you knew nothing about it. There's always the classic [Mindset](#), which we did I think one of our very first podcast on.

Lee Burgess: Yep.

Alison Monahan: By Carol Dweck, who is a Stanford professor, or was at the time, not sure now. And I think Mindset is a great one because that also, if you're going into this



intense educational experience and often people start feeling like, "Oh, I'm not smart enough to be here if I get some negative feedback." And this book is really about how you can turn that around.

Lee Burgess: And the power you have to change your mindset and that you can change these outcomes.

Alison Monahan: Right. And then that you can actively, I don't want to say fight with your own mind, but basically that's really... You end up almost negotiating with yourself and saying, "Well, maybe this one piece of negative feedback", which probably isn't really all negative because we all obviously remember the negative more than the positive. So maybe there were five good things that your professor said and one bad thing. And you think, A) is that really the case? Is everything terrible? And even if it is, this doesn't mean I'm going to be a failure, it doesn't mean I'm a terrible person, it doesn't mean I'm stupid. It just means that I haven't learned this skill yet.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: And I think turning that around into, "What resources do I need to learn these skills," is much more beneficial than just saying, "Oh, I'm stupid and I'm giving up."

Lee Burgess: Right. I think that's very true.

Alison Monahan: So go get Mindset if you talk to yourself like that.

Lee Burgess: That's true. And even if you don't, I think that law school creates a lot of opportunities to start.

Alison Monahan: Oh, absolutely. So even if you think that you're good, you might, if you remember midway through the semester...

Lee Burgess: Right, that you're struggling a little bit.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Maybe pick up Mindset.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Read it over coffee, and skim it. Or listen to our podcast.

Lee Burgess: That's right. So we're fans of Cal Newport who's written a bunch of books.

Alison Monahan: He has.



Lee Burgess: I can't even imagine how many books Cal Newport has written at this point.

Alison Monahan: I think he started writing them in high school or something. I've met Carl, he's a great guy, but I'm like, "Wow, you are really very productive."

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Well maybe that's why he's written books on productivity.

Alison Monahan: True.

Lee Burgess: So one of them that you're a big fan of is [Deep Work](#).

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think Deep Work is a great book. He has a new one out called Digital Minimalism that I'm just starting, which is what I'm currently reading instead of Mindsight. Sorry. But yeah, Deep Work I think is a really great book. He has another one called [So Good They Can't Ignore You](#). I think either one of these is really valuable for law students because what they're really about is, there's this idea currently of, "Oh, follow your passion and everything will be fine. And you build your social media presence and build your brand." And his argument is like, "Look, that's actually not that valuable, and maybe you shouldn't really follow your passion. Maybe you should find something you're good at that people are willing to pay you well for, and do that." And so that's really what So Good They Can't Ignore You is about. And then Deep Work is really about how you basically block out all of the distractions of the modern world and create a space where you can actually do real thinking. And I think that is incredibly valuable for anyone who's going into law school and the legal profession, because what you're really going to get paid for is to think.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: And that's hard these days.

Lee Burgess: It really is. And we're coming up on another election year.

Alison Monahan: Oh, God.

Lee Burgess: I know.

Alison Monahan: Already.

Lee Burgess: Already. It's never ending. And I think that's just going to make digital distractions even exponential, as far as news notifications and all this stuff, a lot of which is very... Some of it's inflammatory. I personally almost always am continuing to try and noodle with different ways to manage technology in my life because I find myself getting into really bad habits. It's so easy...



- Alison Monahan: Yeah. Well, these are literally designed to be addictive.
- Lee Burgess: Right. And so we have to actively work against that. So my new thing is I just turn off the email notifications on my phone, so I have to affirmatively check my email, which I still do plenty. Not like you are waiting to hear from me very often, but I've left our chat.
- Alison Monahan: Right.
- Lee Burgess: I still get notifications for that. But I was like, "Wow, when I don't know that I'm getting emails, it's really freeing."
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, and you might think, "Oh, everyone forgot to send me an email. Awesome."
- Lee Burgess: Exactly. And you know what? The world keeps on moving if I check my email not the minute it goes into my inbox.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think this is something people really need to think about ahead of time when they're going into law school, because it is going to be tempting. You're meeting all these new people, you have all these exciting opportunities, and how do you balance that with the need to actually basically cloister yourself in the library and do three or four hours of deep reading and thinking every single day?
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: You have to find a way to find that balance or you're not really going to be able to engage with the material and you're just not going to learn anything.
- Lee Burgess: One of the biggest complaints we hear from law students when they come to us for help and for tutoring is, "I don't know how to manage my time."
- Alison Monahan: Right.
- Lee Burgess: And one of the best ways to manage your time is make the most out of the time that you're spending studying. And that does mean putting away your phone or turning off your Internet or whatever you need to do. There are all these programs you can have on your computer to stop you from searching certain websites so you're not checking Facebook. Whatever accountability and structure you have to put into place, I do think that thinking through that over the summer and making some strategic plans is just going to make your time more valuable.



- Alison Monahan: Yeah, and just being conscious that you need to be doing that deep work every single week. So check out Cal's books, they're good.
- Lee Burgess: And then one of our other prolific authors that I think you can pretty much throw them all on the floor and pick one up and it'll have value is Brené Brown.
- Alison Monahan: Got to love Brené.
- Lee Burgess: Got to love Brené. I just think that you can pretty much learn something from any of her TED Talks, any of her books. Vulnerability, shame, being authentic, leading people, what else does Brené talk about?
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think those are the big ones. And I think this is such a big issue for so many people who end up in law school and in the legal profession, is they don't want to be dealing with vulnerability. They don't like imperfections. And basically just pulling from the titles of her books, they're not necessarily...
- Lee Burgess: Daring greatly?
- Alison Monahan: They're not daring greatly. They're not necessarily inspirational leaders. So I think even spending reading one or two of these books and just getting a different perspective I think can actually open up a whole new world where you start to think like, "Oh, I am going to be managing people," and "Oh, I do need to pay attention to myself and maybe I don't have to be perfect all the time." I think [The Gifts of Imperfection](#) is the one that I've given to a lot of lawyer and law school friends, because we do feel we have to be perfect. And that whole book is basically about why that is not really realistic or a good idea.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. She's another person that I think is very authentic and talks about her own personal struggles.
- Alison Monahan: I remember I saw a talk by her shortly after The Gifts of Imperfection came out and she said, "Well I got a..." You might've been there. "I got a really nasty email from someone the other day who said to me like, 'Well I guess looking like you do, you would give that title.'"
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think that was the talk. We saw her and Hillary Clinton.
- Alison Monahan: Yes.
- Lee Burgess: That was a number of years ago.
- Alison Monahan: I was just like, "Wow. Wow, that's very rude."
- Lee Burgess: That's very rude. Yeah. Yeah, one more reason to stay off the Internet.



- Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly.
- Lee Burgess: Comments people make.
- Alison Monahan: Don't read the negative comments.
- Lee Burgess: That's right. Alright, there's another interesting book that we checked out when we were pulling this list called [The End of Lawyers: Rethinking the Nature of Legal Services](#).
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, and this was Richard Susskind, who if you have not heard his name and you're thinking of going to law school, you probably want to Google him. Because what he's really thinking about and writing about is – and it was mostly in the larger law firm models, but not always – it was really about how legal services are going to be changing and whether that means fewer lawyers or whether that means lawyers do different things. But he's a really smart guy and he's actually thought about this. So I feel like basically this should be probably required reading for anyone who thinks that they're going to go into private practice before they start law school.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, artificial intelligence, document review, how are we prep for trial, all that stuff is changing.
- Alison Monahan: Well, just how you deliver legal services. And we've had this bespoke model where it was like, "Oh, we just do your case individually and have a big team working on it." And that's not really realistic. And then there's also this huge unmet legal need that people are not being served. So he's a serious thinker about what do you do about that problem, both in terms of meeting the legal needs but also giving lawyers something to do, basically.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, yeah.
- Alison Monahan: So I would highly recommend anything he's written.
- Lee Burgess: So in the legal career space, some other interesting things that you could check out would be [24 Hours with 24 Lawyers](#), which is by Jasper Kim. And basically he talks to lawyers about what they do all day. We've actually done a lot of blog posts like this where we've asked lawyers what a day in the life is.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, and it's always interesting.
- Lee Burgess: So I think that this is something that many people don't have a good idea of is what lawyers do all day, because I think they get into their first internship or externship or their first timer job and they're like, "Really? And this is what we do?"



- Alison Monahan: Right. Well, it also varies a lot across practice areas. Even the difference between being a corporate lawyer and a litigator in private practice, those are very different.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: But then once you expand outside of that, being a public defender or something... I remember my law school roommate was describing her first day at work when they basically handed her a hundred case files and were like, "Oh, you're due in court in 20 minutes." Which is very different from my first day at a large law firm where they, I don't know, did training for a week.
- Lee Burgess: Exactly. Took you to nice lunches.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. It's just a different world. So I think finding out more about what different people do so you can start matching that to what you would like to do or what you think would be a good fit for you can only help you.
- Lee Burgess: That's true. So, another book that we think is worth a read is [Swimming Lessons for Baby Sharks](#), which is by Grover Cleveland, who's a friend of the Toolbox.
- Alison Monahan: He is a Toolbox friend.
- Lee Burgess: He's a Toolbox friend.
- Alison Monahan: In fact, we've done a podcast with him. It's great. He's a great guy. He's completely hysterical.
- Lee Burgess: He is.
- Alison Monahan: And he has basically written this book compiling tips from attorneys and his own advice. It's really designed to help new lawyers be successful and hit the ground running. So I think it's pretty firm-focused, but it's also very useful, really across the board.
- Lee Burgess: And you can even look for some information from us about bar prep in there, in the latest edition.
- Alison Monahan: Oh, I was not aware of that.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think maybe I did that without asking you.
- Alison Monahan: Well, I'm sure it's great. It's a good book.



- Lee Burgess: It's a great book. I think it's important to touch on before we finish up, some stuff not to read.
- Alison Monahan: Oh yeah, please.
- Lee Burgess: Just like don't watch The Paper Chase during finals. There are some things that you shouldn't be doing.
- Alison Monahan: Yes.
- Lee Burgess: So we already mentioned casebooks as maybe a terrible waste of time because-
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, I remember I think some big Supreme Court case came out right before I went to law school and I was, "Oh, I'm going to sit down and read this opinion." Yeah. It was like 80 pages long. I mean, I had no context. I think I did read it and it was sort of interesting, but it was definitely pretty over my head.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, and it's important to know that casebooks actually edit those opinions.
- Alison Monahan: Right, that's what I didn't know at the time.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: They would take out the 60 pages of irrelevant stuff that I was slogging through.
- Lee Burgess: That's historic.
- Alison Monahan: Right.
- Lee Burgess: So some that are popular that we think are worth skipping for now, especially one that I think is on a lot of lists of stuff to read is actually [Getting To Maybe](#).
- Alison Monahan: I think that book is too advanced if you haven't started law school. I read it at the end of my first semester and actually, to be honest, I didn't read the entire first part of it. It's kind of divided into two halves. I started trying to read it when I was preparing for exams, which was not a good time to be reading it, and even then I couldn't really understand it. It wasn't until years later when I was doing a literature review and I was going to start these websites and I picked it up and I read it and I'm like, "Oh, that's what they were saying." Even then, to be honest, I'm not sure I got through the whole book because it's just not the way that I think. And I think sometimes people pick up Getting To Maybe because it is on a lot of lists and then they get really intimidated and they feel like, "Oh, I'm not going to be able to do this." I think just skip it for now.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think you can revisit. But there's good stuff in there.



- Alison Monahan: Read it over winter break.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, there's good stuff in there but I think without a lot of context it can be too overwhelming, and you don't want to psych yourself out any more than you're already psyched out.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think that's right and it's totally fair. I think it's just one of those books that's so dense and they just go into so much detail. I just remember there being so much detail about this thing and this thing and this... Even now, I'm not sure I actually could understand everything they're saying. We've read a lot of books about this sort of thing.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. So I think another thing people talk about doing over the summer is reading hornbooks.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah.
- Lee Burgess: So Alison, what is a hornbook? If you're a pre-law, you may not know what it is.
- Alison Monahan: So a hornbook is basically like a CliffsNotes version of the law. It's kind of a summary.
- Lee Burgess: But it's not like CliffsNotes like 20 pages.
- Alison Monahan: No, it's like a thousand pages.
- Lee Burgess: Exactly.
- Alison Monahan: They're condensing down 10,000 pages to a thousand pages. And hornbooks are really mostly used by actual practicing attorneys, so that's who it's geared toward. It's not the sort of thing you can just pick up and read from cover to cover. You would never do that, even if you're practicing. You basically dive in, you find the topic you need to learn about, and you read ten pages and then you go do some research. It's just not the sort of thing that you sit down and read, and sometimes people think they should and that's kind of ridiculous. It's just going to be a waste of time. You have no idea. You probably don't even know what classes you're taking first semester at this point. You definitely don't know what your tort professor is going to cover. It just going to confuse you.
- Lee Burgess: I think that that is a point that a lot of pre-law or is OL students don't understand, is that even if you are taking a four-unit class on contracts, they are not going to cover everything on contracts.
- Alison Monahan: No, they're going to cover like 1% of the potential hornbook.



- Lee Burgess: And the professors get to pick and choose with that is. So is everybody going to talk about offer and acceptance? Sure.
- Alison Monahan: I would hope so.
- Lee Burgess: One would hope so. Damages, yes. But there are a lot of tiny nuances that professors are going to leave out, because they do have to do so for the sake of time. That's also why they're not going to assign you typically cover to cover of the casebook. Because...
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, never. They have to edit.
- Lee Burgess: They have to edit. And so if you do this kind of deep dive into these subject areas and try to immerse yourself into law, it's also possible that you're going to be studying things that are not going to be applicable for your class. And trust me, your professor's not going to be impressed if you talk about stuff that wasn't covered in class in the exam. They're actually going to be like, "We didn't talk about it. Don't include it."
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think you can just confuse yourself. You can think you learned something in class, but really you learned it over the summer. I feel kind of the same way about commercial outlines. In terms of the "don't read", first don't read hornbooks. Second, probably don't read commercial outlines, which are shorter than hornbooks and designed for law students. And then the third probably don't read, but if you really have to do it, here's where I would probably go, are the Examples & Explanations series. All three of these things are about substantive law, but they're in a decreasing order of easiness. So if you insist that you must try to learn something about tort law, which we don't think you need to...
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: ...Pick up the E&E on torts. If nothing else, you'll probably need it for your Torts class anyway so you may as well buy it, but there is literally no reason for you to be reading this over the summer.
- Lee Burgess: No, there's plenty of time to read this stuff during the school year. You do not need to read it over the summer.
- Alison Monahan: If you want to read a case, you can do our Start Law School Right course and we will walk you through how to read an actual case.
- Lee Burgess: Yes.



Alison Monahan: In fact, it will probably show up in your Torts class. And we'll also help you with all the other aspects of law school. So do that instead.

Lee Burgess: Yep. Alright, well I think we're out of time, but that's a lot to read.

Alison Monahan: You've got definitely a pretty long reading list at this point.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. But before we finish up, I know you just mentioned our Start Law School Right course and I wanted to let people know where they can check that out, which is shockingly enough on our website, at lawschooltoolbox.com/start-law-school-right. This on-demand course, which includes feedback from one of our amazing Law School Toolbox tutors, will help you understand how to excel in law school from day one. So check it out and feel free to contact us if you have any questions. The nice thing about this course is it can be done at your convenience, so it's a great option for those of you who are working but also wanted to do a little prep for law school. Alright, now, 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. We'd really appreciate it. And be sure to subscribe so you don't miss anything. If you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to reach out to myself or Alison at lee@lawschooltoolbox.com or alison@lawschooltoolbox.com, or you can always contact us via our website [contact form](https://lawschooltoolbox.com/contact-form) at LawSchoolToolBox.com. Thanks for listening and we'll talk soon.

RESOURCES:

[My Beloved World, by Sonia Sotomayor](#)

[Becoming, by Michelle Obama](#)

[My Own Words, by Ruth Bader Ginsburg](#)

[A Civil Action, by Jonathan Harr](#)

[The Buffalo Creek Disaster, by Gerald Stern](#)

[Gideon's Trumpet, by Anthony Lewis](#)

[Terminal Ambition, by Kate McGuinness](#)

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[Mindsight, by Dan Siegel](#)

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[Deep Work, by Cal Newport](#)

[So Good They Can't Ignore You, by Cal Newport](#)

[The Gifts of Imperfection, by Brené Brown](#)

[The End of Lawyers?, by Richard Susskind](#)

[24 Hours with 24 Lawyers, by Jasper Kim](#)

[Swimming Lessons for Baby Sharks, by Grover Cleveland](#)

[Getting to Maybe, by Richard Michael Fischl](#)

