



Lee Burgess: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today we are talking about legal jobs with special guest Rachel Gezerseh. 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 this 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'd love to hear from you. And with that, let's get started.

Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today we're talking with Rachel Gezerseh about how to find a legal job you'll actually like, and how to break into BigLaw if that's what you're looking for. Rachel is a California-based lawyer, professor, and author of the recent book [The Law Career Playbook: A Guerrilla Guide to Getting a Legal Job You Actually Like](#). She spent 10 years in BigLaw and is now a partner at a boutique law firm, [Liang Ly](#). Welcome, Rachel, and thanks for joining us.

Rachel Gezerseh: Hi, it's my pleasure.

Lee Burgess: So, first of all, can you give our listeners an idea of a bit more about your background and how you ended up in the legal profession in the first place?

Rachel Gezerseh: Sure. That's an interesting story, because I'm not one of those people that always knew that I wanted to go to law school. I actually come from a theater and artsy background. I was a documentary filmmaker for a while.

Lee Burgess: Oh, wow.

Rachel Gezerseh: Yeah, so I had that career prior. But in that career, I didn't really like being unemployed, and I was unemployed a lot of the times in between gigs. One of my crap jobs, as I used to call them, when you'd be on unemployment and you're just trying to make ends meet, was I worked actually at TestMasters, an LSAT operation company that we're all familiar with even to this day. I was not an LSAT instructor, which is part of my story, is I never did well on the LSAT, but I was the phone answering girl at TestMasters.

Lee Burgess: Nice.

Rachel Gezerseh: But, they treated me really well and they actually let me take their prep classes with Robin Singh – you know, Mr. 180, Mr. Many 180s on the LSAT, and I got to sort of experience the thought of maybe if I do well on this thing I could go to



law school, and it sort of sparked the idea of law school in my mind. I didn't do well, and I wound up actually only getting into one law school, which was Southwestern. But by that point I was all in, and I was ready to sort of transition into this idea of becoming a lawyer and harnessing that power and what that meant to me, having been an artist and just feeling like I was taking the next step in my life. So that's actually how I came to law school. It was a very backwards way of doing it.

Lee Burgess: Well, you know, we all have our own journeys. I was a theater person myself, so we're kindred spirits.

Rachel Gezerseh: Yeah. Good, good. Good, yeah. And it's funny, I always tell this story – people ask me, "Okay, how did you go from being artsy, UCLA film undergrad girl to now going to Southwestern and suddenly wanting to work in BigLaw? That seems like a leap." And it was. I talk with my students now about this all the time. There's something that happens when you get to law school, and it doesn't matter where you go to law school, but you start to hear about these jobs where you can make a ton of money and get to service really interesting clients, as an entry-level lawyer. And suddenly everyone wants BigLaw, right? It doesn't matter what your aspirations were coming in, and that definitely happened to me. All of a sudden I was like, "Oh, this is the best of both worlds. I can do community work. I can do pro-bono work. I can also make, at the time, \$125,000 entry level. Amazing!" So that was my journey to this concept of BigLaw.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think mine was a bit similar. I had a career before law school and then when I was in law school, I wasn't sure what I wanted to do, but it was one of those things where I was doing really well, I had gotten on the Law Review, I had won some awards. And then you sign up for OCI and then all of a sudden, they're dangling these checks in front of you and you're like, "That sounds like it's not so bad." Then, when I got there, I decided it wasn't a great fit for me, but it is interesting how you can kind of be lured in that direction because there are attractive things about it, beyond the paychecks. But I think for a lot of folks, the paycheck is a way to soften the blow of loans and things like that, that a lot of us were saddled with when we left law school.

Rachel Gezerseh: Right, right. Absolutely, yeah. That's how I found my initial way into BigLaw.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. So, we have a lot of law students that listen to this podcast, and so what do you think that law students should be thinking about, even from the beginning of law school about the post-law job market?

Rachel Gezerseh: Right. I've since had a lot of time to reverse engineer my journey in thinking about this and all the things I wish I had done. And now having had hundreds of students, I see what works and what doesn't work. And I really think it's



important to do the self-analysis. And I know a lot of law students don't know. I don't know what I want to be. I've never had exposure to lawyers or maybe I have and I don't want to be that kind of lawyer, but I don't know what I want to be. But it really is important. There are things. I think every student knows what they like, what's interesting to them. And so, starting that journey early of... And this is the tenet of my book and my class, is this concept of the informational interview. Getting out and plugging in early to the profession to figure out what it really is and what the possibilities are, because there are vast possibilities of what you can do. And so, as a law student and even a pre-law student, it's really important to start plugging in and taking charge of this yourself, setting up these interviews and getting out there and be... I always tell my students, "Be a sponge. Soak this stuff up, because it actually will inform your journey."

Lee Burgess:

I think that that's really true. And one of the things Alison and I often talk about is a lot of times folks don't know what a day in the life a lawyer is like. And I think that when we watch TV shows... Like I was just watching that – it's fairly silly, "The Good Fight," which is based on "The Good Wife" – I was watching that last night. And it's super-dramatic, and not really based on reality, but so often I think a lot of folks, the only way they've really interacted with the legal profession before entering law school is through shows or books or dramas. And the reality is, life as an associate is very different than that. Life as a partner is very different than that. And I think, really, if you can have these meetings and you can chat with people and really focus in on not only what's their overall legal experience, but what is their day-to-day life – it's very important to know. A lot of lawyers are sitting at a desk, not moving, typing all day. Some people really thrive in that environment. Some people are in meetings all day or interacting with people. Some people are in court. Some people are working virtually. Some people are working in an office. There are so many different options, but you don't even know what the options are, until you start talking to people.

Rachel Gezerseh:

Yeah, that's right, and that's why it's such a huge... And I always tell my students, there's so many benefits to doing this, because a natural network starts to form in your life, when you start reaching out, having these appointments, consistently following up with people. You actually build a network of mentors who are cluing you into what's going on in the profession, helping you speak the lingo and letting you know what the opportunities are out there. The ideal situation is, yeah, you have OCI, you have career services, you have all these great resources at your school, but wouldn't it be amazing if, on top of that, you've built this organic network of advocates out there working to ensure that you get the best job for you, too? So that's the idea, and as soon as you can start building that out, I recommend doing it. That's why I speak to the pre-law crowd all the time, too, because they actually have more time. Once you're in law school, it's difficult to build in this time, although I advocate that



everyone should build in at least a half an hour a day to just work on this stuff and building out and getting to know people.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I have to give my one plug, is that never stand anybody up, because this is one of the things that I think does happen, especially with maybe the less experienced or the less professional students as they're coming in. Sometimes they don't treat all of these informational interviews as part of your legal career and take them very seriously. But I love meeting with law students, talking about job stuff, talking about whatever they want to talk about. It's why I do what I do. I love networking with people. I'll pretty much have coffee with just about anyone until you stand me up, and I will remember that. You can never really ask me a favor again, unless something extreme happened. And so, I do think that one of the things that people have to remember is that this is a great exercise, but you need to be professional and serious about it.

Rachel Gezerseh: I feel like the people who buy my book and the people who take my classes are serious about it. And I always tell people when I do these speaking engagements and it's Friday night, 8:00 p.m. and they all show up in suits – that would have been me. And so, I really try to awaken that spark in people. Yes, of course you have to take it serious because this is your life. I tell my students, "You have to be the CEO of yourself. No one else is going to care about this as much as you are. And if you don't take it serious and you think that somehow law school is going to take care of it for you at the end, you are sorely mistaken. It just doesn't work that way anymore. I don't care where you go to school. You have to take charge of this stuff yourself."

Lee Burgess: So true. So, are there certain skills that law students should be developing while they're in law school to prepare them for the job market that they just won't learn in school, outside of talking to people, like doing informational interviews, but really skills?

Rachel Gezerseh: Right. I think that all of this comes down to communication. And I think that if students think about in the bigger picture, what these law school relationships that they're going to develop, how that could actually play out to their benefit beyond law school. If they think about strengthening those relationships now while they're there, that can actually become a huge life skill. And just learning how to connect and communicate with your peers while you're in school, how to communicate to them what your goals are as you're going through this process. I always tell my students, "Go onto LinkedIn and start doing research about potential areas. If you don't know what you want to do, start just looking at the universe." And this is before info interviews or anything. Just look at the potential roles that are out there and then start to talk to your peers about those. Start to develop an elevator pitch to your contemporaries and work on that, because in the end, if you forge those alliances and those like-minded relationships in law schools, those could actually wind up as you grow in your



career, becoming your clients. Friends that you meet in law school could one day... And this just happened to me, actually. I actually have real-life experience with those relationships that I built at those early stages, and how I went about them and how I stayed in touch actually wound up being huge enhancers in my career later on. So, when we're talking about building practical skills, just look to the person to your left and to your right as you're sitting in that law school class and start to develop those relationships then.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that's a really good point. And what do you think is kind of the top advice for law students wanting to find a job that would be the best fit for them? I think you and I both already talked about how attractive BigLaw can be for various reasons, but BigLaw is not the best fit for everybody. So how do people maybe outside of just the informational interview... Do you think it's doing these kind of web searches and learning about things? How do you know what's going to be a good fit for you?

Rachel Gezerseh: I think, and a big component of my book and the program that I teach is doing the internal work. And I'll send this to anyone who's interested; it's actually in the book as well. I have these worksheets for people to fill out, which is doing the internal getting clear. Getting clear on those things that drive me that I'm interested in. Drilling down, connecting that to the realities of the profession. What is it, these things that I'm good at? These things that I get excited about in the morning that I'm going to be doing it that day? What in the profession, how can I find that? How can I find doing that and actually making money from that? Because you're right. You mentioned before, a lot of times a lot of lawyers sit... It's a very solitary experience. You spend a lot of time at your computer writing, researching. For someone like me, former documentary filmmaker girl, I actually love that. I love the research and writing and sort of advocacy storytelling aspect of the law.

Other people, not so much. They actually want to get out there and be in meetings, be on their feet speaking with clients, be out there in court, perhaps being a D.A., having trial after trial after trial in court, where you're on your feet, having to come up with decisions on the... And so you need to figure out for yourself, "What are the things at the basic level that interest me?" And then you explore it. Then you go out and you connect it to what's actually going on in the profession. So, it's a lot about the internal work and getting in touch with what's driving you.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm. And I think there has to be an openness to even work on yourself. So, I have a good friend who is a family law litigator. She is a partner now, she is very successful. And speaking in front of people used to make her want to throw up. But she really wanted to be a litigator; that was what she wanted to do. Every time I talk to her about how often she's in court now, I still chuckle, 10 years later. I think that she just knew that that goal required her to do some



heavy lifting for herself to get to be that person who wanted to do that. So, if you've got these kind of pain points or these areas where you can work on yourself to reach these goals, I think that's totally fine. People go to Toastmasters if they're not good at talking in front of people. People take acting classes or do improv comedy, or lots of different things if they find that they don't have the skills necessary, but their calling is to be a trial lawyer, meet with clients, work with people who are in crisis, and things like that.

Rachel Gezerseh: It's a volume game too. It's about exposing yourself to those experiences as well, which is another reason why I think the whole info interview and sort of putting yourself out there strategy works really well for people. Just taking my story – I was a really shy person, and still am, and I'm not comfortable... I was really, really good at doing the research and creating opportunities, creating the interview opportunity for myself, and then really bad when I actually would get to the interview of making a good impression. The only way I got better was by doing so many of these interviews and getting more comfortable in my own skin, learning what it really means to make eye contact – not shifty eye contact, but real, authentic eye contact. That took me 20 interviews to get there. So, I tell my students, "Let's be realistic. Let's expose ourselves to these uncomfortable experiences, get through them because it only will make you better."

Lee Burgess: That's true. And you're right, practicing is critical for that. The eye contact is interesting. I'm on this mailing list for The Gottman Institute. Have you heard of that?

Rachel Gezerseh: Yes.

Lee Burgess: Anyway, they've got a great mailing list; it's called "The Marriage Minutes" or something like that. You don't need to be married to be a part of this mailing list. But it's fascinating because they send out a tidbit about relationships like once a week. And today's email was on eye contact.

Rachel Gezerseh: Oh, wow!

Lee Burgess: Believe it or not. And it was actually the importance of eye contact and how when you are talking with someone, the eye contact actually creates stimulation in the other person's brain, so then it's so important to make that eye contact with someone. So, I think it's a really great point that if you are engaging someone in a serious conversation, if you're not comfortable with that eye contact, you can practice. You can practice with your friends, with your loved ones, with your family, but you just have to practice. We can all get better at this.



Rachel Gezerseh: Yeah, and there's so much that goes into it. The reason why I, speaking from experience, had trouble making eye contact is because I felt like an imposter. I felt like I wasn't supposed to be there. I didn't do well on the LSAT. I was an artist. I was not supposed to be in the BigLaw, the vaulted interview. And so, because of that, I was actually unable to sit up in my chair and feel like an equal in the situation. This was a lot of sort thinking back on it, but I think a lot of students experience that. They don't feel on equal footing with the professionals that they're meeting with, and so it's hard for them to act authentic and act with confidence. The only way you get there is by just doing it a lot.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, so true. When I had my first job, I was a consultant at a national consulting firm. I was 22. I'm from a very small town, and I live in San Francisco. I was standing in one of the towers in downtown San Francisco, overlooking the Bay Bridge and I remember thinking, "Do they know that I, like four years ago, was in high school in the Central Valley? Do they know that?" And it's like, "Of course they know that. They read my resume. They interviewed me. They hired me." But I think almost everyone has those moments where they're just like, "Do they really know who I am? I'm not sure they do."

Rachel Gezerseh: Right. "They're going to find out who I really am."

Lee Burgess: Right. "Do they know that I'm really out of my league?" But eventually, I was quite good at what I did, so there was a reason why they hired me. I think that you have to find ways to cope with those feelings, and imposter syndrome is really real for a lot of people. I think most of us have it, maybe except over-confident men. Sorry for the men listening to the podcast, but they don't tend to have as much imposter syndrome. But I think for a lot of folks, you have to make peace with that and have coping mechanisms for that and recognize it and look for it.

Rachel Gezerseh: Right, right, and build the muscle membrane. Build those experiences where you actually do connect and feel authentic and feel like you are supposed to be there. That actually creates a memory in your body so that you carry that with you to the next experience. And that's the only way I got better. That's why it was so great that my Jones Day interview was my last interview, and also it makes sense why I got that job – because I went through all these other experiences, some of which were just not great, but helped still, were very, very useful for me to get to that point where I felt like I could nail a BigLaw job.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. It's very funny – it wasn't my only job offer, but the BigLaw job I took was my last interview.

Rachel Gezerseh: Right.



- Lee Burgess: And what was interesting about that interview was it had been OCI since it was for summer associate positions. I think I had done not as many as a lot of people, but I had done like 15 or 17 or something like that. And this was the last one, I was really tired. I had two offers, and so I was maybe a little bit confident. And they had rescheduled it, so I had been in my suit all day, which I was really cranky about. And so by the time I got there, it's like 4:00 in the afternoon. I've been in my suit all day at school, and the partner is sitting in there. And I was just like, "I'm just going to check the box for this one." I didn't want to get in trouble for not showing up, so I show up. I remember we were talking and he's asking me all these questions and at one point he's like, "What is the thing you are self-conscious about or what's your weakness?" And I'm like, "Well, I'm kind of a terrible speller. I've never been very good at it and it's kind of one of my things I really try and watch." And his response was, "I hate it when people say things that aren't true just to make themselves look good."
- Rachel Gezerseh: Wow.
- Lee Burgess: And I looked at him and I was like, "No, I'm being serious. That's like a real thing for me." And then I told him a story from my childhood where I wrote something and misspelled it on this little art project, and then a family member made fun of me for it and I was kind of torn up about it. And he just looked at me, but I didn't care at this point. I was like, "There's no way I'm getting this job. This guy clearly doesn't like me. He thinks I'm just making stuff up." I felt like I was kind of blowing off the rest of the interview. And then not only did I get the offer, he told the recruiter I was his favorite interview.
- Rachel Gezerseh: Wow, wow. But talk about authenticity though – the currency that that creates for people, I think cannot be underestimated. I felt the same. I just had moments in that Jones Day, in my final callback interview where I knew I had the job even before I walked out of there, because just these shared moments of connecting with people on that level. And I had gone through enough pain to be able to recognize those moments.
- Lee Burgess: Right, yeah. So there is that moment of finding that... I think it is authenticity, it's that authentic professional version of yourself.
- Rachel Gezerseh: Right.
- Lee Burgess: That you're willing to share. And I think putting on a suit is a big part of that. You and I are both kind of theater arts people. For me, being on stage and getting into costume, all of that was all part of this production of this persona that I could get up in front of thousands of people and not be nervous and things like that. And I feel like dressing up to be a lawyer, even when I would teach in a law school, I'd get dressed. I didn't show up in my yoga pants. This is shocking – I'm



doing a podcast not in my yoga pants. I didn't get dressed up for you, though, I will say.

Rachel Gezerseh: Okay.

Lee Burgess: But there is that – you put on your gear, or you've got this persona, and then you're comfortable in that. And if you can find that authentic version of that, I think that's where you can really make those connections with the eye contact, because eye contact shows confidence.

Rachel Gezerseh: Yeah, all of it, all of it. But I think for most people, it's a difficult journey to get there, which is why it is a volume game and why you can't just... I went to Southwestern. At lower ranked schools, you do not get the amounts through just OCI, through on-campus interviewing. You do not get the amount of volume that is necessary for this kind of exposure to becoming a better interviewer. You have to create it yourself, which is why, going back to the question of what should law students be doing now? Law students should now be trying to build out their network so they're not just relying, especially if they go to a lower ranked school, on what the opportunities are that that school is going to generate, because you go to a school like mine – I had, I think, three screeners on-campus interviewing. That was not going to get me anywhere.

Lee Burgess: Right. I also think that – and see if you agree with me – that if the legal space... Let's say you're new to the law school world and the legal space you find very intimidating. I think that you can start somewhere else in working on these skills. So, if you like to volunteer – at your volunteer opportunities, maybe you're meeting with the people who run the volunteer organization – really try and work on that professional persona there. Or, one of the things I did after law school is I was on a non-profit board. And it was interesting – I was starting my own business, and I will be honest, I was a really terrible salesperson. I hope people who have met with me on sales calls would not say that anymore, to the point that when my husband overheard my early sales calls, he would be like, "You know, that was really bad."

Rachel Gezerseh: You've got to love that.

Lee Burgess: And I was like, "It wasn't that..." And he was like, "I wouldn't have wanted to pay you for that. You were not confident. You didn't..." He was like, "Let me tell you what I think happened there." And I was like, "Oh, okay." It was interesting because I learned how to do sales pitches by actually... I ended up being the President of this board by doing fundraising pitches, because I really cared about this organization. It was about empowering adolescent girls, which is something I care a lot about, and leadership in adolescent girls. And I could go out, I spoke on panels and I could just tell everybody why this organization was going to change people's lives. And then after a while of doing that, I looked at



myself, I'm like, "Why am I not speaking with the same confidence about my own business and my own self?"

Rachel Gezerseh: Right.

Lee Burgess: But it got easier to do that once I got really comfortable kind of playing that role. and it's something that was completely disconnected from work.

Rachel Gezerseh: Right, right. No, I agree with that. People always ask me, "Okay, well, how did you really get the Jones Day job?" And frankly, the way that I got it was because that first summer of law school, I decided to take a completely... I worked at Public Council, which is a large pro-bono law firm here in Los Angeles. And I did it not to be strategic, not to get a BigLaw job, but I did it because I cared about homelessness prevention and I wanted some time to work on that while I was in law school. And actually, it was through that that I met my Jones Day contact.

Lee Burgess: Interesting.

Rachel Gezerseh: You never know. When you're following your passion, which I agree 100% you should do – carve the time out to do that, work on these skills – you may actually meet that contact too, who will bring you back in. You just never know. And it's also part of figuring out who you are, doing these things.

Lee Burgess: That's true.

Rachel Gezerseh: So I completely agree and recommend that students do that, to the extent they have time. It always comes down to time, so you've got to be strategic with your time.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I actually had an informational interview with Jones Day, who is the dad of one of the kids I was tutoring for the SAT in law school. So apparently Jones Day, you've got to backdoor that.

Rachel Gezerseh: You've got to backdoor it, but it's worth it, and just to plug my former firm, it's amazing place. I mean, I stayed there 10 years, so...

Lee Burgess: Yeah, which is very impressive.

Rachel Gezerseh: Obviously, they treated me extremely well. I had two kids while I was there.

Lee Burgess: Also very impressive. I mean, impressive that you're a mom. Yay, I am too. Go two kids, but I think BigLaw moms can have a special place in my heart. I think that's a juggle that is not an easy one to do.



Rachel Gezerseh: It's not, but the firm was very supportive and by the time I left, there were so many people... For people who are interested in the firm, and I know it's almost recruiting season now – that is a firm that supports women in a huge way. And I can say that from my 10 years in that that was one of the reasons why I didn't want to leave, because I didn't want to go. I knew there were lots of firms out there that don't necessarily have the same level of support and that's definitely a huge part for me. It's very, very important to have that balance.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, because it is... I actually have an eight-month-old.

Rachel Gezerseh: Oh, wow.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, so I'm tired. I have a four-and-a-half year-old too. But I was at a mom group and we were talking about a lot of people going back to work and we were talking about work-life balance. And I was like, "I don't even know that there is work-life balance. I just think there's a work-life juggle." Some days you drop balls, some days you don't.

Rachel Gezerseh: Dropping balls to the wayside always, and that's a thing. But if you don't have the support of the firm, meaning that they are aware, that they make accommodations for you and that they listen, because it comes back. It's the same thing, communication. They listen to your needs and they try to accommodate for them. If that doesn't exist, it's going to be almost impossible, I think, to be a mom in BigLaw.

Lee Burgess: I think that's true. I think more firms need to take that advice, because it is still very hard in some firms.

Rachel Gezerseh: We have far to go.

Lee Burgess: We have a long, long way to go and you know that by the attrition rates in big firm life.

Rachel Gezerseh: That's right.

Lee Burgess: Okay, we get to talk about mommy lawyering, but maybe that's a whole other podcast. So, you talk about the importance of personal branding and marketing and how you learned this early on. So, if you're a new law student that doesn't really know what this means – maybe you haven't been part of the business world or taken or read anything about personal marketing branding – what are some key points that people need to think about when creating a personal brand or this idea of a personal brand?

Rachel Gezerseh: Right. I think it's even harder for law students because of what we talked about before, that a lot of law students are like, "Well, I don't know what I want to do,



so how can I possibly come up with a way to brand myself in what I don't know?" It's actually why I wrote the book, was to provide a step-by-step guide to do this. So start with the internal work. Start with learning just how to research and see what the possibilities are. And then start to play with this idea of, "Okay, if I do get stuck in an elevator for two minutes with somebody, how would I tell them in two minutes where I'm coming from, what my experience is and what I'm interested in?" And start to play with that, even as a law student, like, "Okay, I have two minutes. What's my spiel? What's my narrative? What is my paragraph on LinkedIn?" I always tell my students, "Are you on LinkedIn?" And most people are, but do you have a narrative statement on LinkedIn? Most people don't.

Lee Burgess: I don't think I do.

Rachel Gezerseh: Most people don't, and it's a missed opportunity, especially for students to start to play – this is my creative side coming out – to really start to play with this idea of, "How am I going to put my outward-facing self out to the world?" And even students can do this. Even students who've only interned or worked in their dad's company or worked in a restaurant can do this. There are skills that you have picked up along the way that you can tell people about, that translate to a legal career. And playing with that and learning how to do that – that is branding, to me. And students can do that now.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Oh, yeah, when I was coming right out of college, I used the fact that I ran my collegiate acapella group as a major selling point in all of my cover letters.

Rachel Gezerseh: Yes. And it's interesting. People love that stuff because it's unique and it's you. Then you have those authentic conversations with people, because even if they don't have experience doing that, they're interested.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that's so true. Well, on LinkedIn, what's your opinion of the LinkedIn headshot? Because I feel like we are seeing more and more photos at parties, photos from weddings.

Rachel Gezerseh: It's terrible. The boyfriend's cut out in the photo.

Lee Burgess: I know, yeah.

Rachel Gezerseh: No, no, no. Look, there's so many resources. I don't care what city you're in. You can go take a \$50 headshot. You can go to your school. The school often will have events where they'll have a photographer come.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.



Rachel Gezerseh: I'm teaching the LOMs right now at USC, and a lot of them come from other countries and they come in and just the whole concept of an outward-facing resume is new to them. And I tell them all, first thing, "Go get your photo done." And it should be a nice photo and it should be a professional photo, because, trust me, even if you're doing just an info interview, even if you're just meeting someone for coffee, they will look you up on LinkedIn before.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that's true.

Rachel Gezerseh: That is a given. And you want to put that impression out there. Even if it's not a job interview, it's still a potential connection that could result in a job for you. And so it needs to be treated seriously and your LinkedIn profile needs to be treated seriously. And it's really not that hard to do. It's just your resume. It's just expanding out on your resume and having a nice photo.

Lee Burgess: I'll be honest – anyone who I meet with for a job interview who wants to work for me, I always look at LinkedIn, just to see what's on there.

Rachel Gezerseh: Oh, yeah.

Lee Burgess: And the photo, sometimes I'll be like, "Not so professional."

Rachel Gezerseh: Nope, nope, yeah, no. I call people out all the time and I help them fix it.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. So with the headshot, I'm a big believer that everyone needs to be in a jacket. What do you think? If you're in law school?

Rachel Gezerseh: Sure. A jacket or a nice dress that is professional and buttoned up. It's like, why play around with this stuff? Everyone's going to have some sort of a suit jacket – Banana Republic, whatever it is.

Lee Burgess: Right, H&M. I mean, they've got...

Rachel Gezerseh: Yeah, it's not hard. It's really not hard to do this, and it makes all the difference.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, it really does. And I think it is part of the game, how you present yourself, because somebody's looking at you and saying, "How would they present themselves on my firm website? How would they present themselves to a client?" I think a lot of people find that they run up against, "Well, I don't have enough money to do this or this." It's like, borrow clothes from a friend. Maybe you can pool resources, campaign your student council at your law school to bring in a photographer. Or if you're part of the Women's Law Association, maybe you guys could sponsor a photographer coming on campus. I think most students can utilize their resources to make this happen, but it's just an important thing to have in your back pocket.



Rachel Gezerseh: Yeah, I agree.

Lee Burgess: Okay. Alright, so we have listeners who know that BigLaw is their dream job, or they think that BigLaw is their dream job. So, what is the best way to break into BigLaw? I know that you talk about the fact that you used kind of a back door to get into Jones Day. There is, of course, the traditional OCI trajectory. But how do you think is the best way to break into BigLaw? You said you were pretty happy for 10 years in BigLaw. Do you think most people can be happy in BigLaw?

Rachel Gezerseh: Right. This truly is the core tenet of my program. When I was still at Jones Day I started a blog for this purpose, called BreakIntoBigLaw.com. It's still alive. And I started it because I was kind of upset that I was at Jones Day, this 3,500-person law firm and I was the only graduate of my law school who worked there. And so I started this blog to sort of reverse engineer my journey and try to help people. And that's how this whole thing started. It was why I wrote the book, why I teach the class. And it comes down to this: If you want to break into BigLaw and you don't go to one of the top schools or if you go to a top school, but your grades are not meeting the threshold, you have to network the heck out it.

People will hire you for these jobs if they know you and they know that you can bring value to the firm. So, in order to do that, you have to build up a network of people who know you, who behind the scenes are advocating for why you should get an interview, even though you don't go to that school or you don't meet that threshold, but there's a reason, right? And the way you do that is by building up a network, doing these informational interviews, finding firms that you're interested in and targeting people who work at those firms, meeting them, taking them out, going to their events, starting to volunteer at organizations where that firm has a presence – that's another backdoor way of doing it. You have to be really strategic. And I can tell you, because this was the thrust of my program for so long, I have literally helped hundreds of people do this – to break in, who don't necessarily go to the top schools.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Rachel Gezerseh: And it takes time; it's never a quick and easy thing. But I'll just give an example. The first class that I taught at Southwestern, they were all the recent graduates of Southwestern. They had all taken the bar and they were all unemployed. It was a very depressing-

Lee Burgess: I was like, that's a heavy room.

Rachel Gezerseh: It was the heavy room. A lot of monkeys on the back in the room, and about half the room wanted BigLaw or wanted entertainment, another very difficult thing to break into. And it took a year, but by the end, I had 100% employment in jobs



that they actually wanted, whether it was a BigLaw firm or an entertainment firm or a firm that actually met their needs somehow. And it was because of this networking building. And for those students, because they had the time... This was hours a day of building this out and hundreds and hundreds of meetings that resulted in this. So that's my advice. It's hard to hear, but it's a consistent strategic approach to plugging yourself into those firms.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think that's a really great story. I think a lot of people feel lost if they graduate, maybe they get their bar license and then they think if they don't have a job, their chances are slim they're going to be happy.

Rachel Gezerseh: Right. And this is a lot of people. I get emails every day because of my platform now from this, and I have seen success. I wouldn't keep doing it if it was depressing and didn't work. It works. It's just a consistency factor, which is why I wrote the book the way I did, as a step-by-step daily guide, because that's actually what works, is to get the consistent daily practice and the follow-up.

Lee Burgess: Right. So, what do you think it takes if you think that BigLaw is what you want, to be a happy BigLaw lawyer?

Rachel Gezerseh: So, it's related in that you have to come in eyes wide open, to the firms that you're targeting, to the firms that you're interested in. You need to know how that firm works internally. You need to understand what your role is going to be at that firm, what kind of work you're going to get, how they're going to support whatever your various needs are. So, part of it is an understanding of yourself and the other part of it is connecting in and doing these interviews and figuring out what really goes on behind the scenes at those firms, because you're certainly not going to learn it from a quick networking event. You're not going to learn it from a brochure or a website. You're only going to learn it by connecting and getting to know the people who work there, and hearing from them what it's really like. And so, that's another benefit to doing these informational interviews from the beginning, is that you will have a better sense of what really goes on behind the curtain at these places. And if you go in eyes wide open, you're much more apt to be happy, because you knew what you were getting into.

Lee Burgess: That's true.

Rachel Gezerseh: And, once you're in, you know how to navigate the system, because at these firms, a lot of times that's what makes the difference between a happy experience and a not-so-happy experience, is knowing how to connect mentors who will help your career, who will get you the plum assignments, who will make sure that you're supported and not just coming in lost and not having that. Most people who leave, the attrition, is because they felt like they got the shaft when they came in. They were just given some massive doc review and no



direction and they never got to get those trial skills or do a deposition or anything. They're just churning. And it's mentors and senior people above you who will pull you up out of that, because that work exists; that's a reality of BigLaw. There are better opportunities, but you need that person to signal you out and get you into those opportunities and make sure that you get them. And building out these networks beforehand will more ensure that you find those people.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that's really good advice. So, before we finish up, you left BigLaw to transition to a boutique firm. So, can you share a little bit what's been the difference being a boutique firm, and is this something you planned or did you just kind of look to opportunities as they knocked on your door?

Rachel Gezerseh: It's an interesting question. I did not plan it. I was very comfortable in my position at Jones Day and doing quite well there, but then I've always been a bit of an entrepreneur. I started the blog and I've just had these side projects. And my two friends who were also at Jones Day, they had left years before me and they went and started their own firm. I was watching their progress and seeing how busy and happy and how much fun they were having. I would check in with them and we'd have lunch, and then finally it got the point where they got so busy, they made me an offer I couldn't refuse, which was basically, "Come on board with us as a partner. Let's expand this thing. Let's grow this thing. You can continue doing all this stuff, your side projects. Let's make them part of your practice here." The opportunity was just too huge to refuse, and I made the leap.

But, I will say, the leap is a difficult one. There are a lot of things I thought I knew about the practice of law, that I had to learn. It's almost two years now where I finally feel like a real lawyer, but that first year, the learning curve for me of running my own cases with no partner above me, was just brutal. And talk about imposter syndrome. Talk about not knowing if I was completely just going to ruin the life of my client or not, by a decision, and going with the decision and then seeing it play out in a good way and winning and all of it. Owning that has been an incredible sort of rollercoaster experience for me, and I'm glad I did it, but it was very tough. It's why it took me two years to finish my book, actually, because that year of the transition was incredibly difficult and I felt like a baby lawyer again.

Lee Burgess: Well, and I think that's a really good career and life lesson, that every time you pivot and change, there's going to be a learning curve and you just have to come at it with the right mindset to get through it and to know that you can gain those skills. If there are going to be holes in your knowledge or there are going to be different things you have to educate yourself on, and you can. Alison and I talk about this, starting our own business. We got together, started our own business and then we were like, "Oh, well, we don't know anything about



content marketing. I guess we better go and read a book on content marketing." And then it became time to do accounting and I was like, "Well, I don't know anything about accounting. I guess I better go learn how to keep some books." And you kind of go step-by-step. One of the things that I think is great about a legal education and why I think it can be so valuable is, we're taught to be really great students, we're taught to really be good at learning stuff. So you can pivot and change and learn, but you have to come at it knowing that you're ready for that, because it's not always easy.

Rachel Gezerseh: Yeah, and just keeping an open mind and don't be too hard on yourself. I'm very hard on myself, so I constantly have to just remind myself, "It worked out last time; it'll probably work out this time. Just have faith."

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think that's a lawyer personality trait, is being hard on yourself.

Rachel Gezerseh: Right.

Lee Burgess: Alright, well, unfortunately we're out of time, but Rachel, this was really great. Thanks for joining us today on the podcast.

Rachel Gezerseh: Yeah, it was my pleasure. I loved talking with you.

Lee Burgess: Great. We'll link your book in the show notes so people can check it out. I know it's available both in hard copy and on Kindle.

So, 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](#) at LawSchoolToolbox.com. We'll include all of Rachel's contact information and her book information in the show notes, so feel free to check that out. Thanks for listening, and we'll talk soon!

RESOURCES:

[The Law Career Playbook: A Guerrilla Guide to Getting a Legal Job You Actually Like, by Rachel Gezerseh Liang Ly LLP](#)

[BreakIntoBigLaw.com](#)

[Podcast Episode 82: The Happy Lawyer Project \(with Okeoma Moronu\)](#)

[Podcast Episode 131: Thinking Ahead About the Future](#)

[Podcast Episode 132: What's BigLaw Really Like \(w/Sadie Jones\)?](#)

[Podcast Episode 142: Owning Your Career \(w/Whitney Beard\)](#)