



Alison Monahan: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today is a very special episode because it is number 200. Who could believe it? So we're going to be talking about the most surprising thing that we've learned during these 200 episodes, and also in our previous time since we started The Law School Toolbox. Your Law School Toolbox hosts today are Alison Monahan, that's me, and 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](#). If you enjoy the show, please leave a review or rating on your favorite listening app, and if you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to us. You can always reach us via the [contact form](#) on LawSchoolToolBox.com, and we would love to hear from you. With that, let's get started.

Lee Burgess: Welcome to the special 200th anniversary episode of the Law School Toolbox. Today, we're talking about the most surprising things we've learned after doing 200 episodes, and in the previous years since we started the Law School Toolbox. So Alison, before we jump in, can you believe we have done 200 of these episodes?

Alison Monahan: Wow! I really cannot. I'm pretty sure that we would not have ever envisioned doing this many when we started a few years ago.

Lee Burgess: I guarantee you. I thought we were going to do like five.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. No, I don't even know how this has happened. In fact, we have just had over 800,000 downloads.

Lee Burgess: 800,000.

Alison Monahan: ...which is amazing. So thank you everyone for listening!

Lee Burgess: Thanks guys!

Alison Monahan: We really appreciate it.

Lee Burgess: I know. I really thought there were going to be like...

Alison Monahan: Five people?

Lee Burgess: Yeah. My mom, my aunt maybe.

Alison Monahan: I think your aunt did leave one of our first reviews.



- Lee Burgess: I think she did, yeah. I don't think my husband listens to it, so he's not even counted in that bundle.
- Alison Monahan: I'm pretty sure my mother doesn't know it exists. But we do appreciate all of our loyal listeners who do listen, and it's all because of you that we've made it all the way to 200.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. So thanks! I think it's funny because as you and I were having lunch the other day, we started talking about what we've talked about in 200 episodes, and we've covered a lot of topics.
- Alison Monahan: Right.
- Lee Burgess: Some of the most popular shows are actually on this exact topic that we decided we wanted to talk about today – the importance of all of the soft skills that seem like they wouldn't matter much in law school, and in life, but they turn out to be really critical. So, the things that we started talking about were mindset, grit and resilience, time management, executive functioning, learning to play well with others, emotional regulation, and stress management. It's funny, this is a lot of this stuff I talk to my kids about.
- Alison Monahan: I was actually just thinking, "Wow, I think Lee has conversations with her four-year-old probably about most of these topics."
- Lee Burgess: I do. I do. But, I guess that that's the whole thing about working with children, is we're trying to help them develop skills to create success and happiness later in life. And, as we become adults, I think we still have to work on these skills.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think ironically even more than sort of inherent academic ability, or in a lot of cases even hard work, depending on what you're spending time on, I think a lot of these things really do go to the success and happiness component. And I think often times people who are high powered students think, "Oh, I can just work harder and I'll be okay." But, I don't know if you saw that really sad story of the Olympian who was a grad student at Stanford who recently killed herself.
- Lee Burgess: Oh my gosh. I think I missed that one.
- Alison Monahan: Good for you.
- Lee Burgess: ...in my list of sad stories that I read every day.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. It's a really, really awful story. In a way it's a more extreme version of these viewpoints that impact a lot of law students – things about perfectionism, focusing primarily on external results, not your intrinsic motivation, really extreme overwork, fragility in the face of obstacles that are pretty normal.



Things like social isolation, not wanting to be seen as vulnerable, not asking for help because you think it seems weak, and just really overall undervaluing mental health.

Lee Burgess: And we've seen these extreme stories of mental health struggles with law students. There've been a lot of news stories that have come out in the last few years about law students struggling, even some suicides. I think especially back East there were a number of those. And it is heartbreaking. I also just saw a headline that sent that, I think it was the suicide rate or something since 2007 has just gone up exponentially. And people are trying to figure out why. A lot of people are blaming social media and various other things. But I think even in our circle of these kind of higher achievers, it does seem to be a struggle. We've read really tragic articles about lawyers who have been struggling with mental health. And so, being this whole person is something that doesn't just seem to be about kind of happiness and success, but also just...

Alison Monahan: Survival.

Lee Burgess: Survival and mental health. I think sometimes we forget that there's this kind of baseline we want to get to, and then we want to also be happy and successful on top of that.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think that's one of the interesting parts about the positive psychology movement, is they're partly reacting to this idea of psychologists where it's like, "Oh well, we're just going to focus on the bad stuff and try to keep people from going there." And of course, you do need to think about depression and mental illness and that kind of thing. But their point was, why don't we try to figure out what makes people actually happier too, and more positive? So, I think some lawyers have gotten into that; some law schools are kind of starting to do that. We know a lawyer who did go to the positive psychology program. I think it's in Penn. And, it was really interesting stuff. I didn't understand any of this when I started law school. I had no real idea what motivated me, I literally didn't know how I felt about anything. Just was completely disconnected. I just figured that I'd work hard and I'd do well – just kind of what I'd always done in school, and everything would be great. Get the firm job, I'd be happy, whatever. Well, I mean, I did do those things, but I also totally fell apart and ended up having to deal with a lot of things that I'd always kind of brushed aside as distractions and not taken seriously because I thought, "Who has time to worry about their feelings?" or, "What difference does it make what I want to do? I just have this thing I need to do." And this was a process that really continued into my career, but it started definitely in law school.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. It was interesting. I was doing a guest podcast yesterday for people studying for the LSAT, and one of the things I ended up talking a lot about was, before you start law school, forcing yourself to do things that make you



uncomfortable. So, taking a class in something that you're bad at, or doing something that's going to cause you to fail, or trying to read difficult material, and then talk to a friend or a significant other about it to see if you can recollect it. And just doing all of these things to kind of get used to this feeling that you're doing something hard, that you are kind of getting knocked down, that you are failing. We just don't talk about that. It's something we have to practice, because I think you have to practice being okay with being bad at things.

Alison Monahan:

Right. For me, that was something that I was actually pretty good at. I'm pretty good at being bad at things. I'm always taking up new things, like, "I'm getting bored with snowboarding, now I'll learn to ski." That kind of thing. My first graduate degree I basically went to specifically to learn how to fail. So, I guess I had that part covered, but not a lot of this other stuff. And for everyone, I think it's going to be a different combination of potential risk factors, depending on your personal background, your family situation, how you were raised, the culture you were raised in. A lot of international students are going to law school these days. A lot of first generation students who may be the first people in their family to go to college or certainly to go to law school. So there're just a lot of different types of people who may have different areas of stress. I think about it as almost like a stress fracture. Once you have that little fracture, if you don't deal with it, it's probably going to get worse.

Lee Burgess:

Yeah. And it's also interesting when we continue to talk about things that make you an excellent lawyer in practice. One of the things we talked about on the podcast is we went to this [Wisdom 2.0 Conference](#), and one of the lectures, or I guess it was a panel that we attended there, was victims of the Parkland shooting down in Florida. And after that, you and I were debriefing, after we'd stopped crying. It was a very, very intense... I'm very thankful for them that they were able to make themselves vulnerable enough to share their story with us. But, after we'd stopped crying, coming back about what we had learned, one of the things that we talked about was, how do you learn to listen to difficult stories as a lawyer? How do you learn to hold space for someone without it being destructive to you? I think therapists talk about this. Other professions struggle with this. Veterinarians have a really high incidence of suicide, because they hold so many people's pain. So, there's kind of a culture around that about dealing with this. But it was interesting, as we were sitting... I guess, fortunately, you and I have not sat through many torturous conversations together. Of course we've both lived through hard things together, but I think it was interesting to listen to this information being shared with us, be emotionally affected, but then have to process it afterwards. And so how, as law students especially, if you're considering going into the practice of law where people are sharing tough stories, maybe there are some representations that are always happy, but most people are coming to a lawyer because they're in crisis and they have something heavy to share and they want to share it with you and they



need to share it with you. And how can you respectfully listen, be present for them, but also maintain your own mental health? I think it's a big challenge.

Alison Monahan: Oh absolutely, I agree. I know for example that a lot of public interest people think about this a lot. And they really do have strategies. My law school roommate became a public defender in New Orleans. She did some death penalty work, and she would literally go to conferences that were basically a weekend away to take care of yourself and figure out how you were actually going to hear these stories and be able to do your work, and then also go home and have your life. But I think you make a great point. Almost anyone in the legal profession, it doesn't matter what type of work you're doing, you're probably dealing with people who are in some type of crisis or potential crisis. Maybe not. Even in a happy area of the law – say you do adoption work or something. There are still probably bumps along the road, where this is someone's total life and you're dealing with that. And they're coming to you, and they're saying, "What if this doesn't happen? What am I going to do?"

Lee Burgess: "What if it falls through?"

Alison Monahan: Right. "What if it falls through?" These are really difficult things to take in and handle in a professional way, and also, be able to be a person about. I think a lot of times law students think they have to set their emotions aside, and that's kind of what we're taught in law school. But I think most of the most effective attorneys are also probably some of the most emotionally aware ones.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. We've become, or I specifically, and I'm dragging you into it, have become obsessed with the work of Dan Siegel, who's written a number books. We're going to do a future podcast where we talk about one of his books, once Alison finishes it.

Alison Monahan: I'm working on it. I'm trying really hard.

Lee Burgess: But he is a medical doctor who's become very interested in the brain and how the brain... Well, he's a psychiatrist. And the power we have to change the brain, change ourselves to be happier, better functioning people. And one of the things that he talks about is mental health as a river – he calls it the "river of integration". He believes that mental health means that both sides of your brain are working together, that you're able to kind of control emotions. You're not squashing them and crushing them. You're processing them and helping your mind control them and deal with them. But on this river you have two banks. You have a bank that is chaos, and you have a bank that is rigidity, and that mental health is to be in the canoe in the middle of the river. When you are feeling out of control, many people go to one bank or the other. And then, if you are totally flipping out, then you are probably ping ponging back and forth. And I'm sure that we've all been crying one moment and then been like, "Oh, I



have to go do these things." You just kind of get into this space where you become emotionless. And I think law school, the way we talk about horrifying things, really moves us to rigidity.

Alison Monahan: Right. Or sometimes chaos. But typically rigidity.

Lee Burgess: I think it at least starts with rigidity. But we're basically just taught not to feel, and I think this starts in your law school classes. I mean, think about taking a class like Criminal Law, where you're reading about homicides. Some of these stories are horrific. I remember the guy who had cut up his wife and put her in a bowl of acid or something. It's horrifying if you think about it, but the way that we talk about it in the narrative law school is not necessarily even like these are real people that have done these horrifying things. It's just that these are stories and we look at it in a very clinical sense.

Alison Monahan: Right. And sometimes you even see people making fun of things like that, like, "Oh yeah, that was the guy in the acid bath. Ha, ha, ha." That's obviously a defense mechanism in a lot of ways, but that sort of thing is completely tolerated in those law school classrooms. It's a rare professor who's going to stand up and say, "You know what? This is really not an acceptable way to be speaking about this. These are real people, these are real lives. And you need to have some empathy."

Lee Burgess: There's a law professor who teaches at the law school I went to, named Rhonda Magee, who's very well known in the mindfulness space. And she used to start some of her classes with a meditation, because she really felt that was what was necessary to be present, and I think to also process what you were doing in these classes. I think that's very progressive of her to acknowledge that, because I think we do get into these strange defense mechanisms, and we hear this in almost every profession, any profession that deals with that. Cops are notorious...

Alison Monahan: EMTs.

Lee Burgess: EMTs. I grew up around prosecutors and FBI agents. I mean, if you could record the stuff they talk about to cope with things that they've seen. I don't know that they're in the canoe. But one of the things that struck me when we started learning more about Dan Siegel's work, and I think this is part of the book that you have read, is he talks about his disillusionment with joining the medical profession. I think it's getting better, but they really used to focus on telling people that they weren't supposed to be affected, and that that's problematic. Now, I think in the medical profession, there's a bit more acknowledgement that they will likely be effected.

Alison Monahan: Maybe it does impact you to see someone die in front of you on a regular basis.



- Lee Burgess: Right.
- Alison Monahan: Huh. Who knew?
- Lee Burgess: I had a friend who was studying to be a chaplain, and she is a very evolved person, but even she would talk about things that she saw that I won't even repeat them, because they're tough to listen to. She worked in the pediatrics unit. She worked in places that I think most of us wouldn't voluntarily go. But listening to her talk about them... I was pregnant, and she was talking to me about her time at the pediatric unit. And I was sitting there going, "I don't know if I can listen to this right now."
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. Well, that's kind of secondary trauma as well. The primary trauma is what happened to this person, but then someone telling you that story, you're in some ways experiencing that as well, because that's how we relate to people, is via stories and empathy and feeling like we're in their position. And that's important, because people want to feel heard and they need to feel heard. But it also means that you can take on all this other stuff, even if you maybe are second or third down the row of people it actually impacted.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. So when we look at the whole universe of law students and lawyers, I think pretty much everyone can acknowledge. And we've done podcast episodes on mental health before. We've had psychologists talk to us about why the mental health in the legal profession is hopefully at crossroads and we're moving in a good direction of the crossroads. But all of this stuff kind of comes together in law school. You're kind of introduced to this type of content and this way of thinking. I think you're introduced to this idea that rigidity is better than feeling.
- Alison Monahan: Right. It's better that you just... You've got to be rational.
- Lee Burgess: Right. That rational is the answer all the time.
- Alison Monahan: "We don't care what you feel about this. Tell us the rational answer." Which can't really be separated actually.
- Lee Burgess: Right. We push all those feelings down, and then we seem to be surprised when they bubble up in unique ways. Often times it can be manifesting as insomnia, anxiety, depression, testing anxiety. Some people suffer from panic attacks, even excessive anger.
- Alison Monahan: For men, that's a common one. Women, I think tend to go more of the depression, anxiety route a lot of the time. And then maybe eating disorders thrown in just for good measure. And then men tend to go anger, bar fights, that kind of thing. It's amazing how many people I knew in law school who got in



literally street brawls in New York City. I'm like, "You're at an Ivy League law school. Why does this keep happening?" One of them, at one point, I remember went home and smashed his own computer because he was so angry. Do you think maybe something's going on here? Because men can't admit that maybe they're sad or whatever, but they can be angry.

Lee Burgess: So, this stuff comes together in law school. It starts manifesting itself. And you have to think about all of the stressors and the things that these soft skills are really needed to process. So, the stress and pressure of the educational experience, you've got the curve, you've got a lot of pressure to be successful for jobs, for the law review, things like that. There's a ton of emphasis on a very limited range of career opportunities, especially those that can pay down the next concern, which is debt.

Alison Monahan: Right. These all kind of go together.

Lee Burgess: These kind of all go together. Where you are in your life. You may be trying to make decisions about who you're going to pick for your partner. Especially I think for women, are you going to have kids? People are now noodling, "Should I freeze my eggs and take that on while I'm in school? Is it a good time to have babies? Is it a bad time to have babies? When do I want to have babies? Do I want to have babies?"

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I mean, we literally get emails from people asking us if they should have a child in law school. And it's like, "Wow, that is a really big life decision to be outsourcing, at least in part, to a total stranger on the Internet."

Lee Burgess: Yeah. We're happy to give our thoughts, but we don't know you very well.

Alison Monahan: It could work. I mean, I don't know. We know some people who did it. Good luck.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. You've got a different set of challenges. A lot of people too enter law school thinking about one path, but then they might be being pushed into something else because they're excelling in certain areas, or they get certain job offers and not other job offers. So you might be feeling lost about your goals. And then once you get the job that you have busted your butt for, for all these years, you might find out that you don't actually like it.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, that seems to be pretty much the cycle for a lot of people. The people I knew who ended up being the happiest as lawyers, and certainly as law students, were the people who really came in with a fairly clear idea of what they wanted to do, which typically was not the kind of standard BigLaw pathway. And then, used school to position themselves to get that job. They had done their research and they tried it out and knew they would like it, and now



they have that job and they're pretty happy. But that's a fairly rare career path. Most people do not end up staying forever in the job that they get once they graduate, which suggests that there's some level of dissatisfaction once you get this supposed dream job or dream career.

Lee Burgess: I feel like this episode has taken a pretty dark turn.

Alison Monahan: I know. I'm like, "Wow, we are really not going down a happy path for number 200."

Lee Burgess: I know. Sorry guys. But I think that the good news out of all of this bad news – because I feel like we've basically been talking about bad news – is that I think with some thoughtfulness, you can work on these skills before law school. You can work on these skills during law school, and then you can access these skills during your practice. I think one of the things that we've seen, and we've gone to speakers and been exposed to, is it's not too late to continue working on yourself. In that book I was just talking about by Dan Siegel, which is called *Mindsight*, and we'll talk about it more in a little bit, he has a 94-year-old lawyer as one of his case studies.

Alison Monahan: I did read that one. It was fascinating. This guy, 94 years old and a lawyer, comes to him and actually manages to sort of fundamentally change his life and the way that he thinks.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, he is able to access different feelings. He's willing to have a different mind / body connection. His relationship with his spouse changes, his spouse of decades and decades and decades. I mean it's pretty incredible stuff. And that, I think was such a powerful story, because I do think a lot of folks in their 20s and their 30s are like, "Oh, I'm not happy. I don't..."

Alison Monahan: "Too late."

Lee Burgess: "It's too late. This is who I am."

Alison Monahan: And that's what's so sad when you hear about the stories of people in college or graduate school who do decide to end their lives. You're like, "You don't know anything. You're 22. Really? Things are going to actually get a lot better. Trust us on this one."

Lee Burgess: Yeah. It's a difficult part of life. And I do think that the way that we present our lives now in social media and things like that, it does seem like everybody has it figured out. And most people do not have it figured out.

Alison Monahan: No, definitely not. Certainly not in their 20s, usually. Or 30s, or 40s.



- Lee Burgess: So, I think one of the things is, if you are really struggling or have someone in your life that's really struggling, you need to make sure that they get help. No questions asked. If you are really contemplating doing extreme things, you need to go get help. You should stop listening to this podcast and call somebody right now. But, if you are just feeling like you are maybe – going back to our canoe – you're in the canoe in the middle, but now you're feeling like law school is sending you to one of the sides.
- Alison Monahan: You're getting caught in the rapids.
- Lee Burgess: You're getting caught in the rapids – then I think it's time to explore some different stuff. Now, you can do this during school. You can do this on your breaks. Or if you're going to enter law school, I think that you can start this stuff now, because these are the soft skills that I think are really going to help you manage. So, you and I are both big fans of therapy.
- Alison Monahan: Right. Which I started going to in my second semester of law school, because I was clinically depressed. And that's something that had happened a couple of times previously in my life, so I can kind of recognize what this is, and I also know that it seems to be happening every few years. So maybe this time I actually need to do something about it. That was one of the better experiences of my life actually. I presented myself at the student health center and said, "Look, I'm in law school. I'm not getting out of bed. I think I might be depressed. Can you help me?" And they gave me someone who was amazing and really made me realize all this stuff I'd never realized before, and actually did set me on that path to being a healthier, happier person.
- Lee Burgess: And I think a lot of law students don't realize that you can often go to therapy for free as a law student at a university.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. There's really no reason not to.
- Lee Burgess: So, you don't also have to wait until you're in crisis to go to therapy.
- Alison Monahan: I would not recommend that you wait until you're literally not going to classes. Really makes those exams not so great at the end of that semester when you haven't attended class for the first few weeks.
- Lee Burgess: So let's say you are reflecting on your undergrad experience, and you feel that the anxiety or the struggles are kind of starting to get to you. When you go to law school, maybe it's good to just try and meet with a therapist to kind of check in. I think that one of the functions of therapy that can just be really amazing is it's somebody outside of you that can hold you accountable to help you on your river of integration. And to call you out.



Alison Monahan: And also I think it's helpful to have somebody who understands your storyline and can help you kind of reformulate a story, but also to recognize patterns. You almost need someone else who's like, "Hmm, the story you're telling me about this person sounds awfully similar to this thing that happened when you were six in your childhood. Do you remember telling me about that? Because you're kind of talking about that in the same way." And you're like, "Huh, that is interesting. I wonder if those are related, or I wonder if that's just a pathway that I'm thinking about in a way that's not productive." And so, it really can cause you to have curiosity, I guess, about your own experiences, in a way that can be very helpful.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think coaches can do this too. I had a coach that I worked with a number of years ago back in the early days of Alison and Lee, and we were talking about business goals and this and that. I was in my early-ish 30s. And she was like, "Are you going to have kids?" And I was like, "I don't know." And she's like, "Don't you think you should figure that out?" And I was like, "No. You're my career coach. You're going to talk to me about my career." She's like, "Newsflash – you can't talk about your career without talking about whether or not you're going to have children. Do you want children?" I was like, "I don't know." She's like, "Do you and your husband want to have children?" I was like, "I don't know." She goes, "Okay, I think we should pause everything else until you sit down and start working." And so, she came up with these exercises to start helping me to do it. But that was really a decision that I had kind of buried down because it was anxiety-inducing for me. And she was like, "Hate to break it to you. There's a time clock on this. You've got to figure this out because you're probably not going to get pregnant tomorrow." And, had she not really nudged me along, I don't know if we would have had such thoughtful conversations to lead to deciding to have kids. I would have totally been okay if we decided not to have kids too, but one way or the other, we had to make a decision.

Alison Monahan: Right, exactly. In fact, there are even counselors now who can help you with this exact decision. So, if you are struggling with it, there are people that will help you, there are books. Friends of mine have read these books. They said they're good. Whole process for figuring this out. I think career counseling in general can be really helpful too, trying to help people figure out, "What is the right fit for me in this profession?" Recognizing you're not just some typical law student who maybe can slot into a role, but you do have preferences. How do you want to work? How many hours do you want to work? What kind of things do you want to work on? It's funny, because I have a friend from my litigation days who was also a litigator and she got out of it, and wrote a [series](#) on The Girl's Guide to Law School website about how she did that. But one of the things she said is, "No one ever asked me if I liked conflict." She went to Yale. She's a smart person. She's like, "I never thought about this, and no one ever asked me if I want to deal with ongoing conflict." She's like, "I hate conflict. Why am I in



litigation?" And those sorts of things, I think an outside objective observer might be more likely to pinpoint for you, where you're like, "Oh, no, no. I would definitely not want to spend my whole day fighting." Then you probably shouldn't be a litigator.

Lee Burgess: Right. And there are lawyers who are coaches, who have moved into coaching that can, I think, really dig into the law school experience. I think sometimes there's value with people being outside of the legal profession sometimes.

Alison Monahan: Also, there are lawyer therapists.

Lee Burgess: Yes. There are also lawyer therapists.

Alison Monahan: Will Meyerhofer, among others, has a really interesting [blog](#). So, there are people out there who have thought about these things. So if you are thinking, "Oh, I don't feel like this is quite working for me" – you're probably not the first person who's ever had that thought.

Lee Burgess: Right. I think that you can also do a lot of challenging yourself through just reading interesting things. So, we're big [Brené Brown](#) fans. If you don't like reading books... Hopefully everybody listening to this podcast likes to read books, but if you don't have time to read books, she also has great TED talks on vulnerability and shame and authenticity, and her own journey. She is a sociologist out of Texas, and she's also great to follow on Instagram because she posts very thoughtful things on Instagram.

Alison Monahan: That's true. She does.

Lee Burgess: But I think one of the things I always like about Brené's books is that even if it's something you may have heard before – because I've read multiple of her books at this point – you always reread it and go, "Oh Brené, you're right."

Alison Monahan: You are right about that. Yes, I did forget that part. Yeah. Okay, thanks, Brené. Thanks for that reminder.

Lee Burgess: Thanks for that reminder. She's also very honest about her own story in her own life and how she reflects on her own struggles. And I find that very powerful too. She has a very, in my opinion, healthy perspective with vulnerability and what that means, and how you can balance that with success and professionalism. And I think that's hard for most people to figure out.

Alison Monahan: Oh yeah, absolutely. Also, when I was in law school, I picked up a book by Pema Chodron. I think she's either American or Canadian, but she became a Buddhist monk. And she's writing about Tonglen Buddhist practice. She has books called [The Places That Scare You](#), I think is the one I was reading. She has a bunch of



them. Kind of like Brené, you can pick up any one of them. You're going to get something out of it really good. But I would literally read that for two years, just over and over every night before I fell asleep. And it helped me sleep, because I had terrible insomnia. But I think it kind of soaked in. So, all these sort of meditation traditions, yoga traditions – people have been thinking about and having experiences of how you deal with these problems for a very long time.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And, sometimes I think that it can make us uncomfortable to just explore these parts of life. I think one of the things that comes out of Buddhism that we hear over and over again is, horrible things are going to happen. So what makes you special, thinking that horrible things will not happen to you?

Alison Monahan: Right. Of course. It's life. Bad things will happen.

Lee Burgess: Bad things will happen. The first time I read something to that vein, I was just starting to kind of dive into Eastern philosophy, and I was 23, 24. I had graduated in the midst of the major crash of 2001. Nobody could get a job. September 11th had just happened. It was a very bizarre time to be young and trying to figure out what you wanted to do with your life.

Alison Monahan: Supposedly, you're supposed to be so optimistic and you're like, "Yeah, I'm not seeing that."

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And it was really interesting to kind of dive into a bit more reality with this idea that you just need to accept that there are going to be parts of life that are going to be really challenging, and it's your job to deal with them so you can be happy. And I was kind of like, "Wait, I'm supposed to deal with the awful stuff, or become comfortable with the fact that bad things will happen?" I have lived a very privileged life, and I have not had horrible things happen to me, and I'm very thankful for that. But every time you hit a speed bump, or hit a failure, I do remind myself that I am not a special snowflake, because we're all going to have hard things happen to us.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. And I think the question is, how are you going to be prepared to handle those things when they do happen? That's one of the things I like too about the Buddhist tradition, that they see themselves as really training as warriors. So, it's not that you wake up one day and something bad happens, and suddenly you're trying to figure out how to deal with it. You've developed the skillset, and then you just go there. You've practiced it enough. That's where you go in a crisis situation.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And I think it is very powerful. And there are lawyers – like I mentioned, Rhonda Magee; Judi Cohen has a business called [Warrior One](#). She does essential mindfulness for lawyers training. So, she's working with lawyers, trying to train them in mindfulness practice. I've taken her class. It is very interesting



to listen to lawyers talk about stuff like this, most of whom have not really engaged in some of these practices. And then I think, when we went to this Wisdom Conference and we got to hear other very impressive people speak, it's fascinating to me how everyone's working in these ideas of being present and struggle with their daily lives, even when they've done extraordinarily wonderful things or they've lived through extraordinarily awful things.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think the big question here that we just returned to is, you've got to figure out what it is that you really want, and then develop these skills that you need to make that happen and hopefully stay sane and happy. I can see people listening and thinking, it seems really woo-woo to think about all this non-academic stuff in law school, and how they're not going to be bothered. But the reality is, it's probably actually going to help you, and you're probably going to be ultimately a lot more successful if you do have the skills to handle these inevitable dark spots and dark places. And surprisingly, that is one of the things we've learned over doing this work, is that it's not just about learning how to outline.

Lee Burgess: No. And we realized when we were going through and looking at some of the most popular episodes that one of our very first episodes we did, which was on the book [Mindset](#) by Carol Dweck, which also just came up in my momma group when we were talking. Again, it's all about, training adults is the same as treating children. But going back to this idea of, how are you going to deal with stumbles, how are you going to deal with failure, which is inevitable, and how you're going to be able to train your mind so that the failure doesn't own you, is very powerful stuff. And then, if you're interested in the work that Dan Siegel's doing, which is kind of mindfulness-based, almost like neuroscience...

Alison Monahan: Yeah, he's very into the neuroscience of it.

Lee Burgess: Very into the neuroscience of it. But he really talks about how we can change our brains and rewire them to function differently. I was listening to one of his books – his book called *Mindsight*, which is about adults. I've read his book, *Whole Brain Child*, which is about children. We've listened to his talks about quantum physics. I mean this guy's doing some incredible...

Alison Monahan: He's pretty brilliant.

Lee Burgess: Brilliant stuff. But you can dive in and there's going to be something in there that resonates with you. I think for me, one of the things that I find transformational about his work is this idea that we have the power to change how our brains work, and in a respectful way. There was one case study he did in this book – I don't think you've gotten to this part – that was about this adolescent girl who had OCD. And he was using therapy to walk her through trying to handle this OCD without medication. He talked about this part of her



brain that triggered the OCD, and then he encouraged her to think about how she talked to that part of herself. She would always get very angry and hostile. And one of the comments he made was, "No one wins in an argument with yourself."

Alison Monahan: That's a great point.

Lee Burgess: Which was a really great point. He's like, "However, if you talk to yourself with love and compassion, you're likely going to be in a better place." And so, he encouraged her to name that part of herself, or part of her brain. She named it Sam. And when Sam got very anxious – because OCD is usually triggered by extreme fears – instead of saying, "Oh stop it. I can't believe..." Yada, yada, yada. Negative, negative, negative. She would say, "Sam, thank you so much for trying to keep me safe. I am safe and I don't need you to worry about me." And then, I just thought of all of the negative things I've said to myself over the years. I mean, we all have negative dialogues, and this idea is, we can change how we talk to ourselves, which is going to then make us less defensive, which is going to change how we feel. This stuff doesn't seem like rocket science, but it's kind of mind blowing when you really get into it.

Alison Monahan: It is. And one of the things I like about a lot of this stuff is that it really is practices. Even if you don't necessarily believe it's going to work, you can at least try it. And then, maybe you find the stuff that does work for you, and that's great.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Everything's very science-based for him. One of the things that I think law students, and even people studying for the bar exam, could really get into is, they found journaling is very powerful. And that's something very easy, and it's not making yourself very vulnerable, because you're just talking to yourself. But even if some of this stuff sounds very extreme, I think taking a little bit of time to try and write down what you're going through to kind of place your feelings somewhere, they've scientifically found that that helps you maintain mental health and integration too.

Alison Monahan: Another author I think is really interesting, particularly for her progression, is [Martha Beck](#). And she's brilliant; she was a PhD professor in her 20s. Extremely, extremely high achieving. Had a complete breakdown and started researching all of this and writing books. But her earlier work is very practical, kind of mainstream, and then gets progressively more woo-woo. So, they're all very interesting. But you can kind of see that progression even over her life. So, if some of this is starting to be like, "What?", you could look at some early Martha Beck, and then gradually work your way up to calling in things you want in your life, or whatever. Well, unfortunately I think we're out of time. Any final thoughts on this?



Lee Burgess: I really want people to be happier, because life is short. And every year I get older, I think I realize that there are going to be those challenging times. And when things are good and you are doing something, that really is a privilege. I think going to law school and becoming a lawyer is a privilege, and we should enjoy some of it. I think that it shouldn't be a slog, and the practice of law doesn't need to be a slog. I just hope that folks can explore either making different choices, or changing themselves, so that they can enjoy this choice that they've made and this career path that they've made more.

Alison Monahan: Well, I think that was a great place to end. Thank you so much for listening to all of our podcasts. If you enjoy this episode of the Law School Toolbox podcast, please take a second to leave a review or rating on your favorite listening app, and 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 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. Thanks for listening, and we'll talk soon!

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