



Lee Burgess: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today we're talking about mindfulness and how it can help you handle stress and be successful in law school. 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 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.

Alison Monahan: Welcome back. Well, today we were talking about mindfulness in law school because if there is one word that seems to go with law school, it is stress. I mean, perhaps anxiety too, but most people would agree that law school is stressful. And over our years of working with students, we have become more and more passionate about the idea that mindfulness exercises can actually help you perform your best, whatever you're trying to perform. So, mindfulness is a pretty common buzz word these days, but the reason it's popular is that for a lot of people it actually works. Lee, you, if I remember correctly, did an actual course in mindfulness, specifically for lawyers. What was that like?

Lee Burgess: I did. I did this about, I guess, five years ago. A friend of ours named Judi Cohen runs a business called [Warrior One](#), and she does a course called Essential Mindfulness for Lawyers. It's great too, because you get CLEs, which everybody's hunting for once you become licensed.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, that seems like a pretty cushy CLE.

Lee Burgess: It is a pretty cushy CLE. But it was a series of classes, and what she did was not only introduce mindfulness and some of the philosophies around it, but it was really connecting it to the things that lawyers struggle with and how you can implement it in your daily job. So it's not just about sitting down and doing a meditation practice, although she does recommend that, but she used a lot of examples about how to diffuse situations using mindfulness, how to take some deep breaths before picking up the phone when you know it's going to be an aggressive phone call, how you can use techniques like sending love and kindness to kind of change the energy of a legal situation.

And she was a litigator in her previous life, so I think she sees how not only you can implement this stuff into a conflict situation, but also how the nature of the profession has changed and how everything is so much more amped up, because we respond immediately. We get all these text messages, we get



emails, and you really don't have a moment to be thoughtful about what you do. Everyone's just amped all the time.

Alison Monahan: Right. And I think there are a lot of studies showing that students, when they come into law school, are pretty psychologically normal, and within a few months, a huge number of them are suddenly suffering from things they've never really had experience with before, like stress and anxiety and depression, all sorts of drinking problems, drug problems, eating disorders, all these things. And that continues into the profession. So, even if this sounds really woo-woo to you, I think it's something we're thinking about, if nothing else, to kind of try to inoculate yourself against this scenario that we know happens, where people come in and they're basically fine, and then four months later they're a total mess.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think that that's a really good point. And I think that the legal profession is adopting some of this stuff. Of course, lawyers are slow to have change.

Alison Monahan: Right.

Lee Burgess: But other professions, I think, are much more open to this idea of mindfulness and how it can help you deal with stress I think is really being implemented in different areas of life. For me, I did mindfulness training when I was getting ready to have my first baby, and there were guided meditations that I listened to and I met with someone who did this sort of training for a living, and it was talking about how you get in the right mindset. I was trying to do a natural childbirth or a non-medicated childbirth, so it became this other training, where you're harnessing the power of your body and handling anxiety. And I was kind of amazed at that. At that point, I had already done this mindfulness in law training, but I was like, "What if people talked about doing this before a trial?" And I know that you had a similar experience when you had surgery.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. So, when I accidentally cut my finger with a butter knife and severed my tendon – oops! careful with knives – I had been pretty healthy up to that point. I'd never had surgery. I think I'd been in a hospital once for an IV fluid when I passed out. So, I had no conception of this and I was pretty freaked out about the idea that they were going to cut my body open and there was going to be some anesthetic things going on, and I didn't really understand the whole thing anyway. A friend of mine who was a cancer survivor sent me some guided meditations, and it basically walks you through this whole process of going into the operating room. The first time I listened to it, I totally freaked out. But then I listened to it again and again and again, because it was very calming after that first time.

And I feel like it really helped me process a lot of that fear and anxiety, so that when the time came for me to do the actual surgery, I actually took a nap in the



room beforehand. And I remember the nurse coming to me and saying, "This is not normal. You seem really relaxed. Are you sure you haven't taken anything?" I was like, "No, I've got this amazing meditation I've been listening to." And she was like, "You should give that to us, because most people are not napping before their surgery."

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think that that's very true. I think that when you start to see this stuff implemented in the world, you kind of wonder why, as a profession, we aren't trying to give these tools to attorneys. Although there are some folks that are trying to give these tools to attorneys, but...

Alison Monahan: Or even earlier.

Lee Burgess: Or even earlier, when you're in law school, because I think it can make a really huge difference. I have extreme anxiety in medical situations and my blood pressure skyrockets. That's super fun when you're having babies, because it's very dangerous if you have high blood pressure. So any time you're in a medical building and you have high blood pressure, they all think you're going to pass out.

Alison Monahan: Have preeclampsia or whatever.

Lee Burgess: Have preeclampsia or whatever. Anyway, but I practice a lot of using breathing exercises to control my blood pressure. And I can't make it perfect, but I can definitely knock it down quite a bit by just using some visualizations and breathing techniques. I've watched it shift, and it's hilarious because I'll get some crazy reading and then the nurse comes back like half hour later and they're like, "We'll try it again." And they're like, "Oh good, we're not going to lose you." And I'm like, "Well, you weren't going to lose me anyway."

Alison Monahan: That's a situational thing.

Lee Burgess: It was a situational thing. But I've also started to learn the power of the body to overcome. And as I think I get older and more of my friends and people in my life are starting to go through more challenging things, I've really started to see how your mental space and how you approach these things can really change. I was talking to a friend who was pregnant and was very, very worried about her pregnancy and things. And we had this conversation about the power of choosing joy, that you can choose worry and you can choose joy. It's possible I had a similar conversation with my midwife at many points in one of my pregnancies, but she was like, "What is the point of this worry? What is this worry going to do for you?" You have the power to choose your state of mind to a point, and you can choose to redirect that worry and become something else. I was like, "That's not possible." But it is.



- Alison Monahan: Yeah, that's actually a great point. That's something we talk about in our [Mindsight podcast](#), about the book by Dan Siegel, who is a psychiatrist? Psychologist?
- Lee Burgess: He's a psychiatrist. Psychiatrist. He's a medical doctor.
- Alison Monahan: Okay, he's a doctor.
- Lee Burgess: Yep.
- Alison Monahan: But one of the things he talks about there is deciding what to focus on. It's kind of the same thing of like, "Oh, this secret," but it doesn't necessarily mean that you're going to get whatever you focus on, but you actually can through your mind, control your focus. And so in law school, you can basically pay attention to feelings of like, "I'm terrible and I'm stressed out and this is not going well", or you can pay attention to, "Wow, it's such a beautiful day and I did something nice in that one class."
- Lee Burgess: Or even found my reading interesting.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, "This was interesting." Or, "Someone smiled at me on the street and that was pleasant." It doesn't have to be a huge thing. I mean, there are lots of different methods for mindfulness. I think sometimes people think we're just sitting on a cushion and trying to think about nothing. And certainly, that's a valid technique. There are plenty of people who can talk to you about that. If you want to be a Tibetan Buddhist monk, you're totally down with that. But there are all these other things you can do, more in your daily life – walking meditation, things like yoga, focus meditations, eating meditations. Whatever you want to try, somebody's probably already tried it.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. And I think what I have learned myself... I come from lawyers, so risk aversion is part of my personality structure. And I think that often times we use worry and pessimism as kind of our own armor. It's like, "Well, I'm not going to choose joy."
- Alison Monahan: Right. Because something bad might happen, and that would be taken away from me.
- Lee Burgess: Exactly. And I think that one of the lessons I learned in pregnancy with my midwife who I think is one of the wisest people I know – with certain things, she's like, "You're going to suffer no matter what." And she was like, "If there's suffering, suffering's coming."
- Alison Monahan: Right.



- Lee Burgess: "So why choose to anticipate and focus on suffering that may not come?" She's like, "Because you're suffering no matter what." But you could choose joy and you might be right, and then you won't have suffered. Or you will suffer, and that's coming either way. I don't know why that was so profound to me, but it was this idea of, if bad things are going to happen, you cannot protect yourself from that.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. I mean, bad things happen in the world.
- Lee Burgess: Bad things happen in the world.
- Alison Monahan: And good things happened in the world.
- Lee Burgess: They do.
- Alison Monahan: It's really just a question of which of those you decide to pay attention to.
- Lee Burgess: Right. But if you continue to plan for the bad things, you miss the opportunity to be happy. I think that sometimes in law school we get so caught up in the stress, and I was definitely guilty of this at various times in law school, that I think you're like, "Oh, I'm just so worried about this test", or... We're recording this during bar season and everybody's like, "What if I fail? What if I fail? What if I fail?"
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, what if you fail? You take it again.
- Lee Burgess: What if you fail? Or, what if you decide that you're going to do everything you can to pass and you're only going to focus on the idea that you might pass this test. That's not to say you shouldn't study and work hard, but it's like, what good is focusing on the failure doing for you? It's not doing any good.
- Alison Monahan: No. You're doing the work either in law school or on the bar, you may as well just decide you're going to pass. That's how I approached the bar. To be fair, I did not necessarily do that in California, but in Massachusetts I was like, "There's a 90% pass rate. I figure 5% of the people probably don't show up for both days – that, basically, is a 95% pass rate. I think if I do a reasonable effort, I'm probably likely to pass." And I just decided I was going to pass.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: And people thought that was really weird. They're like, "But aren't you worried about failing?" I was like, "I've just decided I'm going to pass."
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.



- Alison Monahan: That was very difficult for a lot of my friends to get their head around because they were like, "But what have you don't?" I'm like, "Well, I think I'm going to." And there was something rational behind that as well. In California, I had a different approach. I was not entirely sure I was going to pass, but I still decided...
- Lee Burgess: You prepared poorly for that.
- Alison Monahan: Well, I prepared poorly for both.
- Lee Burgess: Yes.
- Alison Monahan: But actually, I saw a friend of mine, who had been in the Law Review with me and was also taking this random off bar, because he had moved or something after clerking. So, I wasn't feeling that confident, but I ran into this friend and he was like, "Oh thank God, I'm so happy to see someone I know is going to pass." And I'm like, "Really?" He's like, "You're going to pass." I was like, "Oh, okay. You're going to pass too." Looking at it rationally, I know he was going to pass. I know he didn't study that much. He's going to pass. Okay, maybe I will too.
- Lee Burgess: I think that there's no downside to just coming at it with as much optimism. Now, I will tell you...
- Alison Monahan: Well, unless you're overly well optimistic.
- Lee Burgess: Well, overly optimistic.
- Alison Monahan: And too lazy to do the work.
- Lee Burgess: You have to do the work. But I think that when those feelings of anxiety come up and those fear of failure moment of like, "I'm going to fail. This is going to go poorly", you can acknowledge it and say, "But I'm going to choose to prepare and assume I'm going to pass. I'm going to choose to make these good choices that are going to lead to this outcome", because really, the outcome is out of your hands.
- Alison Monahan: And the reality is, people who tend to be anxious also tend to prepare more objectively. So, if you are feeling anxious about your preparation for an exam or something like that, odds are you're pretty well prepared.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: So, spinning around in that anxiety is not really going to help you.



- Lee Burgess: Yeah. I was listening to a podcast, coming to pick you up to come do this podcast.
- Alison Monahan: Getting prepped.
- Lee Burgess: I know, getting prepped. But they were actors and they were talking about often times these scenes that you really kill it are the ones that you think are the worst. And I think that so often that's the case with exams too, because when you truly appreciate how difficult the test is and the process, you do not feel like you knocked it out of the park.
- Alison Monahan: One of our tutors was talking about that the other day, the student who was really seriously, seriously concerned that they had failed an exam and ended up getting an A+ on it.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, because I think that student really understood the depth of what the professor talked about.
- Alison Monahan: That was always my experience. If I walked out of an exam like, "Wow, that was really hard. I do not know how that went. I feel terrible about it" – I typically did better than the ones where I was like, "Oh, totally knocked that out of the park. I was awesome." And then you get your grades back and you're like, "Oh, I was actually middle of the road because apparently I missed some stuff."
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, oops! We're going to dive into different things that you can try if you're interested in incorporating some of this stuff in your life, but one of the things that they always talk about is that mindfulness is a practice, just like yoga is a practice and things like that. You're going to come to it with who you are on that given day. So, all this stuff is great. Do I still become a worrywart sometimes? Oh, for sure. Do I waste a ton of energy on anxious thoughts? No joke. But I think as we continue to acknowledge that these things are coming up for us and getting new tools, you can kind of meander your way out of these cycles. And what you don't necessarily do is spiral and have it control you, and I think that's what happens. Once we get into a super stressed state and your cortisol levels are very high, it's very hard to find your way out of that.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think of it sometimes as almost like you're on the Autobahn and you're just going full steam ahead as fast as possible, and things are spiraling and you're worrying and you're anxious and you're upset and you don't really know why. And you're kind of looking for that off ramp, where the off ramp is like, "Maybe I should take a few deep breaths" or, "Maybe I should recognize I'm feeling this way." And it doesn't have to be, "I'm going to sit for an hour on a cushion in my living room." I think the point for me, which I've often found helpful is you start by just sort of interrupting that pattern, and then that gives you a little bit of space to maybe go in a different direction.



- Lee Burgess: Yeah. Alright, so we've talked about at this point about what mindfulness has done for us, but let's take a second and talk about generally speaking why is this stuff good to explore? One thing I think that's important for people to appreciate is there are a lot of different methods. We talked about sitting meditations, where maybe you just sit in silence. There are walking meditations, where you can do exercises while you're walking around. We both do a lot of yoga. There are even meditations around eating. So, if this is kind of interesting to you or if some of our stories kind of resonate with you, you can find something that may strike a chord. So, if it's like, "I cannot sit on a cushion for 20 minutes and..."
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, which is me. I mean, I aspire to that. I have a meditation cushion in my living room. It's a great dec...
- Lee Burgess: It's beautiful.
- Alison Monahan: It's lovely a color. Yeah, it's really nice. I think I've used it maybe twice.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: But for me, I read a book in law school and I don't even know how I found it, but I just started reading it over and over and giving it to all my friends. And that was about tonglen Buddhist meditation by this woman named Pema Chodron. I think that particular version was called [The Places That Scare You](#), but she's written a bunch. I found it so soothing. I was having a lot of sleep problems and I would just read it over and over every night.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: And then I'd find myself kind of doing it during the day and I was like, "Wow, that was great." But I found it really helpful. It was probably my first real introduction to any sort of meditation, structured outside of a yoga class or something.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. So, there's a lot of science that shows that it increases focus, which is going to, of course, lead to better studying and better ability to perform on a test. We work with a lot of students who have ADHD or some form of attention deficit issues, and we have seen it be very effective for refocusing for those folks as well. It is proven to reduce anxiety. It can make it easier to just be content and happy, which is always a good thing. It can help you have more gratitude, which is also shown to make you more happy and content. And it does improve physical health. Like I said, I can lower my blood pressure in the doctor's office, it can improve sleep, it has all these other benefits. So, trying to harness the power of your mind for good versus evil can really change how you physically feel and how you perform in these challenging conducts.



- Alison Monahan: Yeah, there's a lot of science behind this. So if you're a skeptical law student who's like, "Ugh, this whole thing just sounds totally ridiculous", go listen to our Mindsight podcast. And you can read that book, because it has some pretty convincing stuff in it.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, I still love that book. I still think about that book a lot.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. I was actually having an argument with myself which is one of the things he talks about in that book, that you never win an argument with yourself. And I was like, "I should stop doing this. This is totally not a good use of my time."
- Alison Monahan: There you go. Recognize the problem, identify maybe this isn't productive. And I think the idea is that this is a practice, a lifelong practice. You will never be the perfect meditator, and that can be frustrating for people with perfectionist tendencies, which many people in law school do have.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: So, I think in the law school context, we really recommend these types of exercises to help with a variety of things, one of them being self-compassion. So, maybe you got a bad grade, maybe you feel bad about the way you prepared, maybe you're feeling bad about whatever, you didn't get that job. These are ways to kind of be more gentle with yourself.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. Forgiveness, forgiving yourself. Procrastination – that's a big one.
- Alison Monahan: Yes.
- Lee Burgess: Self-sabotaging behavior.
- Alison Monahan: Yep. Long list.
- Lee Burgess: Worries, anxiety, sleep, you name it. So, what we wanted to do is kind of walk through a couple of common mindfulness exercises that you can dive into a little bit more if you find that this is interesting to you. As we mentioned, basic mindfulness meditation is sitting quietly. Some people do it on a cushion; many people do it in a chair, feet on the floor, hands in your lap. And you just sit quietly and focus on your breath. Some people like to choose a word and repeat it as a mantra. You can just tell yourself, breathe in, breathe out. You can breathe in love and exhale kindness. There are different versions. But especially I think if you are struggling and you're focusing on an exam or something like that, sometimes you can repeat positive mantras to yourself while you do this.



The key is that you're just trying to keep the mind from being the crazy, they call it the monkey brain, or lots of people have different terminology for it. But you're trying to bring it back and have it be quiet. We have very busy brains, so you want quiet brains that can increase focus. And that practice of quieting and focusing the mind is what helps you then be able to call on that to focus in an exam or when you're doing work or whatever it might be.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and even if you struggle through the actual sitting part and you feel like it is not going well, I find it's typically very relaxing afterwards and you're like, "Oh, my brain just feels so much clearer."

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: So, spend five minutes doing just a brief sitting meditation. If you're feeling like you're tired or you're not really focusing on your studying, that kind of thing, even a few minutes can really shift the energy.

Lee Burgess: So true. If you don't want to sit in silence or sit with yourself...

Alison Monahan: Picking thoughts.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, oof!

Alison Monahan: Oof! They're gone.

Lee Burgess: They're gone! You could try guided meditations. A popular app that you can load onto your iPhone or whatever phone you have is [Headspace](#), but they will walk you through guided meditations. Some people find these a lot easier because it gives you something to focus on. So, I don't know. Every now and then I like a guided meditation, but sometimes I don't have one that's on point.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, you need to find somebody whose voice you like and that kind of thing. But if you find the right person, it can be very soothing. Some people you can just listen to forever. So if you look on Headspace or [Calm](#) or even just online and you find that person where you think, "Oh, I can just listen to them all day" – that's your person.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. One thing that Dan Siegel talks about in that [MindSight book](#), which we've also read a lot about, are body scans. So one of the things that we don't do frequently is we don't listen to our bodies.

Alison Monahan: And this is very, very common for people in places like law school, who are very cerebral and possibly kind of fear-based risk averse about not wanting to experience emotions. Well, those are all in your body. Martha Beck is a good



person. If this is you, go read Martha Beck's [Finding Your Own North Star](#) or something like that.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. It's interesting, because even if I try and be body aware, especially the more stress you get, the less aware you get. I mean, I was doing yoga with a friend who's yoga teacher, and we had been working a lot. It was bar season, so we were sitting, hunching, not ergonomic, whatever. And she was like, "Wow, your whole left side is crunched." And I'm like, "No, I'm fine." She's like, "Have you been working a lot?" And I was like, "Yeah, I'm very busy. I have a lot going on right now." She's like, "Cool. I see that you don't look normal, you know?" But for me, I was just like, "I've just been working a lot. I'm fine."

Alison Monahan: Sometimes you see those people who are just walking around and you're like, "Wow, that looks so uncomfortable." For me, when I ended up clinically depressed, beginning of my second semester of law school, just on point, right on schedule, I went to therapy for the first time and she would ask me questions like, "Well, how does that make you feel?" And I would literally say, "I have no idea what you're talking about." And she's like, "Okay. Well, let's start with the body. What are you feeling like in your stomach? Do your hands feel sweaty? Do you feel tension in this area?" And I was like, "Huh. So that's what a feeling is like." She's like, "Yeah, that's what your body is telling you." It was totally eye opening. I had no idea.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I went to the chiropractor today for the first time in months and months. It was amazing. But I literally walked out and was like, "Wow, my neck is longer. I clearly had been doing some stuff." Just sitting here, I feel so much taller, like I gained an inch. So, it is interesting. It's so easy to lose that mind-body connection, so if you're getting anxious and saying, "Okay, what feels anxious? Is it in my belly? Is it in my chest? Is it in my shoulders?", and thinking, "Oh, why are my hands or my wrists hurting?" Well, that's really connected to the shoulder, which is connected to the... It's like you can kind of start to use that acknowledgement to release tension and be more aware. So that's another thing that I think can be really helpful.

Alison Monahan: And again, there are multiple ways to do this, so, go and do some research. You're a law student. You can do research.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. Dr. Google. Sensory meditations are also, I think, very interesting, where you focus on either listening to sounds or how things feel. There're even eating meditations, where you focus on taking bites of food and how food feels in your mouth. So again, if your jam is not just sitting quietly, I think you can use awareness to still train the mind in different ways.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I did an interesting yoga walk recently, where they had one of these, where he asked us at one point just to notice the most distant sound you can



hear. And he said that's a great one to do anytime that you're starting to spiral or even in a conference room or something, stressful meetings, stressful class. Just notice what it is. And it really does do something in your brain that stops that spiral.

Lee Burgess: It engages a different part of your brain.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. It's literally using a different part of your brain. It's kind of like someone told me once – if you're about to cry and you don't want to cry, start doing math in your head. It actually is pretty effective.

Lee Burgess: Because I bet that's the left brain.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. It totally switches the brain part and you're basically moving out of that emotional into the more rational. So yeah, pro tip.

Lee Burgess: I do it with my baby. She loves to clap her hands, and sometimes you see her starting to whine or get very frustrated. I'll be like, "Clap your hands", and you can see it, like a switch flips and then she's like, "Oh, I can clap!" I think it still takes effort for her to clap, she has to engage her brain to clap and it pulls her out of something. It's really funny.

Another one that can be popular, and this is one thing that we talked about when I did the mindfulness training for lawyers is love and kindness meditations. This is where you walk around and kind of send love and kindness. And you don't have to say it to people because that could be a little weird, but this offering up of love and kindness to the people around you and how that shifts the energy in a room and this idea of, even people who might agitate you, if you offer up love and kindness for them, how does that change the energy in the space? It can feel a little goofy when you're doing it, but it's also the whole idea of, smiling just makes you happier. There people who do laughing yoga, because even if it's fake laughing, fake laughing changes the way that your brain is responding to things.

Alison Monahan: And you actually start really laughing.

Lee Burgess: And you start really laughing.

Alison Monahan: Like seven something.

Lee Burgess: Something like that. And so, these little things can kind of shift the energy, which like you said, can just stop a spiral or change the dynamic.

Alison Monahan: I remember sitting in class, and that one person that you just cannot stand raises their hand again. And so, do you do the, "Ugh again?" or do you just try to



flip that energy and be like, "Wow, I'm going to send that person some love and kindness and hope that they're having a great day." Which seems really fake in some ways, but...

Lee Burgess: You're doing enough. If it's kind of genuine, I think it can help. I know I saw this article – I didn't have a chance to read it this morning because it's been a bit of a crazy morning, but they were saying that some law students are trying to provoke racial conversations, not in the inclusive nature of racial conversations in some law school classrooms.

Alison Monahan: Yes.

Lee Burgess: And I was just thinking about how you would really want to have something that you could call on, to not lose your mind in some of these classes. I can only imagine. I mean, we had some folks who had more extreme political views in my classroom, but I went to law school in San Francisco, so it's self-selection a little bit.

Alison Monahan: I went to law school in New York, and definitely people came out with some things where you're like, "Wow. Okay, where do we start with this?"

Lee Burgess: Yeah. But I think it's such a politically and emotionally charged time, generally, that sitting in a Con Law class or Federal Powers class or Immigration Class...

Alison Monahan: Yeah, Family Law.

Lee Burgess: Equal Pay, Employment Law. In a class, maybe other than Civil Procedure.

Alison Monahan: Well, even that has some standing issues.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, it's true. I know. So, I do think it's good to try and if you find yourself really getting charged by classes, you can start to kind of explore some of these things that maybe could still allow you to be present and participate. And there's nothing wrong with getting angry. Lord knows we get angry all the time, especially about what's going on in the world, but there's anger that becomes unproductive and destructive to you.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. A lot of this turns into self-care issues. You can't engage productively at that point every day if you're super angry, and it's not good for you to walk around all the time being super angry. I mean, you see this in health studies of minority women and things like that. You're carrying a lot of stress, and that is not helping you.

Lee Burgess: Yep.



Alison Monahan: So maybe if you know that you're going into a class discussion that you think is going to be weighted, maybe you do some type of preparatory meditation beforehand, and then you have something that you can call on in class. And then you do something afterwards to kind of prepare your brain and take it down a notch, so that you're not spiraling the rest of the day thinking, "Oh, that person was so rude. I can't believe what they said."

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Which is a totally natural reaction, it's just not something that long-term is going to be healthy for you.

Lee Burgess: Yep. A couple of other things you can try out. I mean, we both do yoga. I've been doing yoga for many years, and a lot of folks find yoga very helpful.

Alison Monahan: I'm going to a restorative yoga class tonight. I'm so excited.

Lee Burgess: Oh, that sounds so good.

Alison Monahan: And that's great. It's like you just lay around for an hour with some props. It's lovely.

Lee Burgess: I did a restorative workshop when I was pregnant. It was like two and a half hours and I think we did like eight poses or something like that.

Alison Monahan: Oh yeah. In this hour class, maybe it's three or four.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, but by the end I just felt like I had been sleeping all day. It was just unbelievable. So, I think that would be a great thing to do. Then I'm always a fan...

Alison Monahan: Lee's favorite.

Lee Burgess: My favorite are the tactical breathing exercises. So, here we go. If you think we're cuckoo crazy San Francisco people, the military uses mindfulness exercises that they call tactical breathing exercises, some people call it box breathing. But snipers use this and they use this in sniper training because they have to be able to calm their nervous systems in high pressure situations. So I say if it's not too woo-hoo for the military, it's not too woo-hoo for anybody.

Alison Monahan: Exactly.

Lee Burgess: So basically box breathing or tactical breathing is you breathe in for four counts, you hold your breath for four counts, you breathe out for four counts, you hold your breath for four. The idea is, you're kind of controlling your breathing,



you're flooding your body with oxygen. And it calms the nervous system, it slows your heart rate, and it can clear your head. Because what happens when you get nervous is your brain becomes oxygen deprived, which is one of the reasons why we get...

Alison Monahan: Lightheaded.

Lee Burgess: Lightheaded. Our minds go blank when we're trying to recall information. And so, one of the things you're trying to do is pump your body back with oxygen. It's an easy one to try. You can use it for anything. Somebody cuts you off in traffic – try some box breathing.

Alison Monahan: If it's good enough for snipers, it's good enough for you.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. So, I think the big takeaway here is just this idea that you don't need to be perfect to get some of these benefits. You can try it. It's like anything in life – it's a practice, it's a journey, but life is always going to throw you curve balls. So you've got to find out some ways to cope with it.

Alison Monahan: The good news is, most of this is either free or close to free.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: You can spend 20 bucks on a book, and that might be totally life changing for you.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. It's also important to remember that you can always establish new habits. So depending on what research you believe – because there's research that says all sorts of things – it kind of takes 21 to 66 days to create a new habit. So, if you just try it daily for one semester, you can see how it goes. This could be like five minutes a day.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. It doesn't have to be this huge commitment.

Lee Burgess: It doesn't have to be a huge commitment. So, mindfulness doesn't have to be something that you have to impose on yourself. You can try it, you can play with it, but hey, five minutes, 45 minutes – give it a shot. You might like it.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. It's really about what works for you. So if one thing's not working, don't feel bad about it. Just go out and try something else.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. And with that, I think we're out of time. 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. Thanks for listening, and we'll talk soon!

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