



Alison Monahan: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today, we're excited to have Steven Arango here with us to talk about combining a military career with the law, and also to offer some useful tips on getting a clerkship or being published. Your Law School Toolbox host today is Alison Monahan, and typically I'm here with Lee Burgess. We're here to demystify the law school and early legal career experience, so that you'll be the best law student and lawyer you can be.

Together, we're the co-creators of the [Law School Toolbox](#), the [Bar Exam Toolbox](#), and the career related website [CareerDicta](#). I also run [The Girl's Guide to Law School](#). 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.

Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today, we're excited to have Steven Arango here with us to talk about combining a military career and the law, and also to offer some useful tips on hustling to get a clerkship and to get published. So, welcome, Steven.

Steven Arango: Thank you, glad to be here.

Alison Monahan: My pleasure. To get started, can you just give our listeners some sense of your background and your path to law school, so they have a little bit of context here?

Steven Arango: Yeah, absolutely. So, I went to a small school in South Carolina, called Newberry College, and after graduating from Newberry College in 2016, I went to Officer Candidates School for the Marine Corps, which is a 10-week long wonderful summer camp.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, sounds delightful.

Steven Arango: It is, it is. In the brochure, I don't think they paint as nice as a picture as when you get there and you really realize it.

Alison Monahan: Right, you're like, "This is great, what I've got myself into this summer. Awesome, really great summer vacay."

Steven Arango: Exactly. I was expecting more free time and more pool, but...

Alison Monahan: Right, like, "Where are the lifeguards?"

Steven Arango: Exactly, exactly. So, I did that for 10 weeks, I was fortunate enough to graduate in commission. And actually it went so long that I showed up late to law school by a couple of days. But I went to such a great law school – the University of



Alabama School of Law – that Dean Harrington, who is still there, said I had a good excuse to be late. And they let me show up a couple of days late, which was nice.

Alison Monahan: Oh, that's awesome. And so, what are you doing now? Are you in the military now? What's your plan? And talk to me a little bit about that in law school experience, some of the stuff you did there too.

Steven Arango: Yeah, absolutely. So, I am in the Marine Corps right now, I'm a first lieutenant. I'm on reserve because I'm currently serving as a federal law clerk in the Southern District of Texas. I'm clerking for US District Judge Fernando Rodriguez Junior. And I'll do this for a year. So in August 2020, I will have completed my clerkship, and then I'll head straight back to active duty in the Marine Corps. And then, I'm sorry, what was your other question about law school?

Alison Monahan: Oh yeah, I was just a little bit curious of how you kind of fit all the stuff together in law school. Was the military stuff going on while you were doing that? Talk to me a little bit about that.

Steven Arango: Yeah, absolutely. So, while in law school, I was on reserve as well. So, the Marine Corps had me on orders in law school, that was my full-time job. But you still have to stay in Marine Corps shape, you have to do physical fitness tests and stuff like that every six months. So, you're still going through physical training and making sure that you're staying in that Marine Corps shape. But as I mentioned, your main focus is excelling in law school and making sure you pass law school.

Alison Monahan: Right, yeah, which is not the easiest thing. And so, when you finish your clerkship are you going into the JAG program? Is that kind of what you're doing?

Steven Arango: Yeah. So, the Marine Corps is a little unique about that, where technically, we don't have a JAG program. Army, Air Force, Navy, and Coast Guard have a JAG program. We're called Judge Advocates. And although we're very similar, we're lawyers, we do a lot of the same legal work, our track to becoming a Judge Advocate is very unique. So, every Marine officer, excluding Naval Academy graduates, because they're unique in their own right, they have to go through Officer Candidates School. And as I mentioned, the Officer Candidates School is 10 weeks long, and you're really not learning too much about being a Marine. You learn some of the basics, the esprit de corps and learning about Marine Corps fundamentals. But really what it is, is it's testing you physically, mentally, and emotionally to see if you can become a Marine officer. So, every Marine goes through that, and if you're fortunate enough to graduate in commission, every Marine then goes on to six months more of training at The Basic School. And The Basic School trains every Marine officer in basically tactics and leadership, and how to handle a rifle platoon. So, even if you're a Judge



Advocate, like myself, a logistics officer, any type of other officer, you're going to get training on how to handle yourself in a possible combat situation and lead a rifle platoon, if that opportunity or situation ever arises. Now, that's not obviously likely in a Judge Advocate position.

Alison Monahan: Hopefully not, but you just never know.

Steven Arango: But the Marine Corps is very focused on making sure that every Marine is a rifleman. So, that six months of learning how to qualify in your rifle, a lot of hiking with a lot of weight. And as I mentioned, leadership and tactics with a rifle platoon. Once you finish those six months, you head to Naval Justice School. So finally we've arrived at the legal part of your training, and that's two months of training. And the other sister naval services such as the Navy or the Coast Guard will also be present there, and they use that as their Naval Justice School as well.

Alison Monahan: So that's very interesting. And have you done these pieces yet, or these are still to be done?

Steven Arango: I did OCS, so I did those 10 weeks and I graduated in commission, so I am an officer in the Marine Corps. But the way the Marine Corps structures it is you don't go to TBS until after you graduate law school.

Alison Monahan: Okay, and you're clerking.

Steven Arango: Right, exactly. So, the Marine Corps also has a program that allows you to clerk and they will give you that time to clerk for a year, and then you can come back to active duty. And it's really nice because there was a bit of a wait time to get to TBS right now, which is about eight to nine months. So, clerking helped out the Marine Corps and it helped myself out, because I get some great legal experience. So, it really was a win-win situation.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, that's awesome. I did a clerkship also for a federal district court judge and really look back on that as one of my... Probably the favorite legal experience ever. And we'll talk about this in more detail later, but I think it's a really fantastic thing to do and it's great that you have that opportunity.

Steven Arango: No, absolutely. I was actually talking to a couple people that I've been mentoring on the side, who want to clerk as well. And I've only been doing this for, I think four or five months now, and I already know that, looking back on my career, this will be one of the highlights. The judge I work for is phenomenal, my colleagues are amazing. And like you said, the issues – I've had admiralty law cases, I've had immigration cases, I've had southern border wall issues. You name the flavor, and it comes through the Southern District of Texas. It really is an interesting and exciting time to work on a lot of these issues.



Alison Monahan: Oh, I'm sure, yeah. It sounds like you had a very different set of cases than we did in Boston. But I feel like everywhere you go, there's going to be some really interesting stuff, just because that's what ends up in federal court.

Steven Arango: Right.

Alison Monahan: And you've also worked in a couple of other branches of government. So, tell me a bit about those experiences.

Steven Arango: Yeah. I've been fortunate enough to work in all three branches of government. I've worked on The Hill as an intern. I interned for Congressman Jeff Duncan, out of South Carolina, and that was a great experience. That was my first time living in DC. I've had a couple other times now since then. And I love DC, I think it's one of the most wonderful places in the world. One of my favorite things to do is go for... There's a perfect like six-and-a-half or a seven-mile run, where you can hit all the memorials. And then at night time, it's beautiful. But anyway, I digress on that. So, I worked on The Hill during a semester, so I was up there when there weren't a lot of interns. And it was nice, because I got to be up there for about four and a half, five months. And working in a South Carolinian's office, I learned how to make really great sweet tea.

Alison Monahan: Oh wow, okay. Yeah, I grew up in North Carolina, but...

Steven Arango: Okay. So you get it, you know.

Alison Monahan: A little bit. I really wasn't a tea drinker when I was a kid, but I know the style. It's definitely unique.

Steven Arango: Exactly. I stick to water, but I will say that when constituents came into the office, if there wasn't a pitcher of sweet tea, there was going to be hell to pay.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, there would be problems. That's funny.

Steven Arango: Exactly. So, after that, went back to undergrad, finished all that up. And then my second round in DC, I was fortunate enough to work for the Pentagon. So I worked in the Office of General Counsel, International Affairs. And the office does exactly what the title says. It's the Office of General Counsel, and we do international legal work. So, I worked on international memorandums, dealing with combat operations against ISIS, Syria, our combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. So, really doing a lot of international law and kind of getting an understanding of that was fascinating. But also, as a 25-year-old, you get to present to one-star or two-star generals, when you're like, "Man, I should be making coffee. What am I doing in here?"



- Alison Monahan: And was this is a summer position in law school?
- Steven Arango: No. That's another great thing about Alabama Law. They have this GC Externship Program. So, an entire semester of your law school, you're up in DC. You get full credit, you take a night class, which is run by two Alabama Law graduates – one's a successful lobbyist up there, and the other one's a successful partner at Hogan Lovells. And they both take a different approach to the class. So you take that once a week, and then you have your full-time, 40-hour job during the week as well.
- Alison Monahan: Right. Yeah, I think I've heard about that. I think it was a student of ours actually was involved in it. It sounded like a pretty cool experience. And then in the summers, what did you do in law school?
- Steven Arango: So, following the Pentagon, I wanted to be home with my wife. So I just worked at a small law firm there, which again was a great experience. And they do a lot of bigger cases in Alabama, so it was good to get kind of an inside look of how a law firm operates. And again, just different experience that I never had. And then the summer of my 1L year, I worked at the US Attorney's office in Tampa, Florida, where I'm from. So, as you can tell, government service, or working for the government has been kind of the thread throughout my undergraduate and legal career as well.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, it definitely sounds like it. I think it's great to have that firm experience, at least to kind of try it out as well. One of the things I know you're involved with is a [Service to School](#) program, which I actually know about from a professional friend, Anna Ivey. Can you talk a little bit about what that program is, and how people can find out more about it, because it sounds like it's pretty awesome?
- Steven Arango: Sure. So, Service to School – a friend of mine, who's actually a lieutenant in the Navy JAG Corps, he first told me about it a little while back. And I got involved with it back in August, about four or five months ago now. And what Service to School does is they help transitioning military soon-to-be veterans. They help them transition to the academic world, whether that's undergrad, law school, business school, some sort of schooling. And what they do is they take someone like myself, who's an ambassador for Service to School, and connects them with an applicant that is trying to go to, let's say, law school or undergrad. And basically, you help them navigate the process. So right now, I'm helping two law school applicants and one undergraduate applicant, and they're fantastic. I get to give them resume advice, cover letter advice, writing that personal statement, what law schools they should target. I know for me, I had no idea what a federal clerkship was, honestly, probably, 'til the end of my 1L year. So, these things that we take for advantage, it's just good little pieces of advice that you can pass on to them, and it's a great way to give back to the community. And the last thing I'll say is, you don't have to be a veteran to be an ambassador



for Service to School. One of my best friends, who's clerking on the Third Circuit, he's right now an ambassador, and I know he's mentoring two applicants. And that was his first question, he was like, "Oh, I didn't serve in the military." I said, "Hey, don't worry. You're a great lawyer. You're clerking. That's going to be great experience. You can still give back to Service to School."

Alison Monahan: Oh, that's interesting. Yeah, I didn't realize that civilians could participate as well.

Steven Arango: Oh yeah. All are welcome, all are welcome.

Alison Monahan: Oh, that's good to know. And then, how was your experience, sort of combining this military training and background, and interest with the legal profession? It sounds like your school was pretty supportive. I think people have very different ideas about how that might be. Talk to me about your experience there.

Steven Arango: Yeah. So Alabama, I can't speak highly enough about the law school, and really the people there. The professors, the administration, from the people that help clean the building – every single person is just friendly. And they're extremely supportive of military. In fact, at least when I graduated, if you were reserve, active, they would give you in-state tuition automatically, because of your military experience or your military status. So that was really helpful. And then balancing stuff. Obviously you have your physical training, but for me, the Marine Corps has given me such a focus and discipline that... Law school was still hard, don't get me wrong. There's still a lot of words, when I read them in a brief or on [Westlaw](#), I'm like, "Man, I have no idea what that word means." So, I don't want to sound like I'm the smartest guy in the room that often, if ever. But the Marine Corps really instills the idea that if you have a problem, there's always a solution. It's just how hard are you willing to work at it? So, it really helped me persevere in law school, and I think that leads nicely into persevering and finding a clerkship, especially when I wasn't at the top of my class, I wasn't on Law Review – some of the more stereotypical things that people think of when they think of a federal law clerk or a state law clerk.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. Actually, let's switch gears now. Perfect timing. Let's talk a little bit about how you got your clerkship, because like you said, you didn't necessarily have the top of the class grades, weren't on Law Review. I think a lot of people would have looked at this and been like, "Eh, I don't know, maybe not really worth it." But you made it happen. So, talk to me about that.

Steven Arango: Yeah, absolutely. First off, it was a blessing from mentors and professors really going to bat for me and helping me out. I wouldn't be where I am without their support. Secondly, it was a grind. I think I sent out over 150 applications, and I did all this while working at the Pentagon. I had the night class, so there were a



lot of late nights and a lot of printing. And I'm sure my roommate at the time did not appreciate the printing sound at 2:00 AM.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, like, "Another set, really?" You're like, "I'm still looking."

Steven Arango: He's like, "You're not getting the job, stop printing!" No, he was definitely supportive. So, I think I spent almost \$1,000 on stamps, resume paper, envelopes. It's unbelievable how expensive printing materials can be. Those little things can kind of wear you down. You think, "Man, I've sent out 100 applications and I've gotten two interviews." The one thing that the Marine Corps helped me realize is there's got to be a judge out there that they're not so focused on what law school you went to – although Alabama, I think, in my mind, is an excellent law school. They're not worried if you did Law Review. What they're worried about is, "Is this person going to approach an issue and find a solution, and are they a good writer?"

Alison Monahan: And, "Are they someone I can tolerate spending a lot of time with?"

Steven Arango: "Is this person a weirdo? Do they smell funny?"

Alison Monahan: Well, they're just like, "Are you not nice?"

Steven Arango: Exactly.

Alison Monahan: Definitely the judge I refer to is like, "Wow, I've made a hiring mistake once, I will never do that again if I can help it."

Steven Arango: No, no, I think that's a huge point. And people that I've talked to say, "Just be yourself, be a nice human being. It's okay to be funny and relaxed. The judge is a human being as well." And that doesn't mean be disrespectful. But we have lunch every two weeks with our judge, we meet with him every single day, and we'll talk about everything. We'll talk about sports, we'll talk about music. And people don't realize when you're in that type of insular setting where it's just you, usually one other clerk if you're in a district court level, and the judge, you want someone that's a human being, not just this Westlaw person that knows every single legal case, but can't have a conversation about anything else.

Alison Monahan: I know. Literally, the judge that I worked for basically hired me because I have a master's in architecture, and he really enjoys architecture and he wanted someone to talk to. It sounds crazy, but the outgoing clerks, when I met them, they were like, "Oh, as soon as we saw your resume, we knew you were in. He would die to hire you." And I'm like, "What?" And they're like, "Oh yeah, the architecture thing." Some people think that it's a downside to have these other interests or whatever, but for the right person, they're like, "Oh, this person



sounds interesting. I'd like to talk to them about that when we have some spare time." So you just never know.

- Steven Arango: No. No, that's another great point. I wrote an [article about how to pursue a clerkship](#), especially if you're not at the top of class. And one of the things I mentioned is going into [fjc.gov](#), which has basically the entire book of all the federal judges at the district court, appellate, and the Supreme Court level, and a basic idea of what their backgrounds are. And I always tell people, "Find people that went to your alma mater, find judges that played baseball in college, or were part of the orchestra, or whatever it is that makes you unique. And talk about that in your cover letter." Because like you said, a lot of judges gravitate to people that are like them and have similar interests. So there's nothing wrong with highlighting those things in your cover letter or your interviews.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think absolutely. And we will link to that article, but give me a little bit of kind of background of some ideas you have that people may want to look into, whether it's through their network, or any other ideas if you are kind of this middling, middle of the class person, but you really want to do a clerkship of some type.
- Steven Arango: Yeah, for sure. So, my overarching message is: Don't quit. As I mentioned, over 150 applications, almost \$1,000. There is a judge out there, whether at the state or federal level, that is right for you. It's a war of attrition, and are you willing to keep fighting? So that's my big message, if you don't take anything else away – keep applying, keep asking people, keep asking for help, and it'll work out.
- Alison Monahan: So, when did you actually start applying, just logistically?
- Steven Arango: Yeah, so I started applying, let's see, it was 2L year and it was around January of that 2L year that I started applying. So, a little later in the game than most people start.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, and at that point, I think the hiring plan had probably totally fallen apart anyway. I think maybe it's a little bit more back up and running now. But yeah, for people listening to this, there may or may not be a hiring plan, there may or may not be deadlines. But I think realistically a lot of people, a lot of judges are always hiring outside of that anyway.
- Steven Arango: Right, right. Absolutely. So, I try to do things of three, because I think that's how lawyers think. I mentioned that [fjc.gov](#) is a great place to get information on people you're applying to. The second thing I'd mention is [senate.gov](#) should be your homepage for whatever – if you have a Mac, your Safari, or your Internet Explorer. Every day you should check what they call the Hopper, and see what judges are being nominated, what judges are being confirmed. And the reason I



did this was twofold. First, the people that are being nominated are usually at law firms, NGOs, their own private practices. And they have an email that you can find online. And I know that sounds creepy, but hey, this is the clerkship game, and if you want to clerk, you have to do things like this. And so what I would do is I would find their email and I'd reach out to them and say, "Hey, congratulations on being nominated! That's wonderful. Whenever you do get confirmed, I would love to apply for you for X, Y, and Z reason", whether they had a background I liked or something. And I would attach my resume. And I can't tell you how many people loved this. They were like, "Wow, first off, thanks for reaching out." And some of those people, I didn't get interviews with, some of them I did. But the one thing that stuck with me is, I've kept in contact with a lot of those people. So now, as a mentor, I have the opportunity to give back. So, "Hey, Judge So-And-So, I don't know if you remember me, but we talked." "Oh, absolutely." "There's a great candidate I'd love to pass on." And I've done that for several people now. So, although it may not help you now, it can be really helpful for people down the road.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, that's a great point. Your point earlier that judges are human – it's like they want to hire good people, so they're always looking to people they know or people they trust, or that they got a good sense about. And sort of like why not? Of course, if they're like, "Oh, that kid was nice, even though I didn't hire him. And I don't know, he's sending me this resume, I'll take a look at it." Maybe they hire them, maybe they don't, but at least it gives this person an in, and I think that's so critical. For me, the judge I ended up working for, one of my professors had called him and they had a conversation before he interviewed me. It's like what we were saying – you're in a very contained environment with these people and you want to make sure that you are getting someone as a judge who is not going to make your life horrible.

Steven Arango: Exactly, exactly. I think that's the biggest thing, is to get your resume or your package in front of someone. I know the other chambers that we work with very often, I think they had 400-500 applicants. And some chambers do go through all those applications; I know they do. But I also know a lot of chambers don't go through them all. They may find a stack or the judge may have the idea, "Hey, find the first two that are best and let's get through the process." So, the biggest thing is getting that resume in front of someone that you know will take a look at it.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think people sometimes think, "Oh, I'm listening to this, and why would I be sending out all these paper things? Just apply through [OSCAR](#)." And it's like, "Well, how many other people are also just applying electronically through OSCAR?"

Steven Arango: Exactly, exactly.



Alison Monahan: It's like, you've got to think of something. If you don't have the classic path, you've got to think of something that's going to make you stand out and you've got to hustle. So, I definitely like that. You've kind of done the same thing about publishing, right? So, you have another [article we can link to about publishing articles](#), and frankly, you've published in some pretty impressive places. I think the average mid-20s law student would think like, "The Wall Street Journal? They don't want me." How did you make that happen? And what advice do you have for people who are interested in doing something similar?

Steven Arango: Well, I had to pay a lot of Wall Street Journal editors to get that article through, but it was... No, I'm kidding. I was fortunate enough to... Like I said, same approach, using social media mentors of mine. I've been lucky enough that I know a lot of people that have published. And it's the same idea as applying for a clerkship. You go to law school, or if you're an undergrad – if you believe you're a good writer, chances are you are a good writer, and especially if you keep up with the news, whether it's politics or the economy, whatever you're reading. There's a lot of times that you can read something and you're like, "You know what? No offense, but I can write something better than that." And so, if you have that level of confidence – I believe you should, especially if you're in law school – go ahead and send out your materials to people. And let me tell you, you're going to get the door slammed in your face hundreds of times. Because I know I've sent articles to Washington Post and Wall Street Journal more than probably 50-60 times, and I've only had one article published in the Wall Street Journal and none in Washington Post.

Alison Monahan: Hey, but I know about that article. I'm like, "Wow, that's impressive!"

Steven Arango: Exactly. Well, thank you. I appreciate you think it's impressive.

Alison Monahan: It's the Wall Street Journal. It must be impressive, right?

Steven Arango: Exactly. Yeah, something like that. But yeah, that's the idea – just keep trying. And as you refine your writing, as you publish more, I can tell you that a lot of publishers like to see other credentials, just like lawyers and law firms – they want to see the credentials pile up, so when they publish you they can say, "Oh, this person has been featured in Huffington Post", or Washington Post or wherever. So, not only are you going to get better at your writing skills, but you're also going to add to your credentials and then the bigger publications are going to start to pick you up as well.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it's definitely far easier to get published again, once you've done it once. I think for a lot of people it's just getting that foot in the door. And I think your point about just basically banging your head against that door, as long as you're willing to keep doing it – eventually someone, assuming you have something



useful to say and you are a decent writer – someone's probably going to give you the thumbs up and be like, "Yep, let's do it."

Steven Arango: Absolutely.

Alison Monahan: It's just a question of getting to that point, which is not that easy. So, you mentioned mentors a couple of times. Can you talk to me a little bit about how you find mentors? That's a question we get a lot: "How do I find a mentor? How do I maintain a relationship without being annoying?" Give me your thoughts on that.

Steven Arango: Sure. So, with mentors, usually that happens naturally. For example, when I worked at the Pentagon, my boss there, he was a Marine for 30 years, and he naturally became my mentor. But other times, I've directly asked people, "Hey, will you mentor me?" And for some people, this is uncomfortable or it seems a little odd, but don't feel uncomfortable about this. If you see a person, whether you meet them in person or you add them on LinkedIn, or whatever way you connect with them, and you look at them and say, "Wow, they have worked for the Department of Treasury" or, "They've worked for Hogan Lovells" or, "They've worked for the New York Yankees", whatever they've done, and that's what you're aspiring to do – people love to help people. That's one thing I've learned throughout my 26 years in life. You're going to meet people that slam the door on your face, or "Oh, I'm too busy." Okay, that's fine. Ignore those people. There are people that are in extremely high positions that I've been fortunate enough to know. And again, that's not me bragging, that's just me saying if they can make time, other people can make time, it's just whether they're willing to do so or not. So, if you see someone in a position that you're aspiring to get to, ask them, "Hey, I'd love to sit down, I'd love to buy you coffee. Can you be my mentor?" And 99% of people are going to be flattered, because they think, "Me a mentor, are you kidding?"

Alison Monahan: Yeah, "What do I know?"

Steven Arango: Exactly. When people reach out to me on LinkedIn or find my email and they say, "I saw your article about clerkships", and I'm just like, "First off, I'm a failure. I applied for a hundred..."

Alison Monahan: Hey, you got a clerkship, you're not a failure.

Steven Arango: I snuck in there somehow, and my judge still hasn't figured out what happened, but don't tell him. But yeah, I'm like, "Me? I'm still going to mentors myself." But just because you're young or you're new in your career and you have a lot of mentors, which I do, doesn't mean you can't give back and be a mentor. So, just be confident in what you've learned, but also be humble that you have a lot still to learn. And I try to keep that mindset.



Alison Monahan: Yeah. And it sounds like to me you're a person who also recognizes opportunities. If you see a person where you're like, "Oh, it seems like I could learn something from them", and they seem receptive, you're going to make that ask. And I think that's kind of the skillset you need of finding a great mentor, is kind of asking them the right questions and approaching them in a way that makes them want to help you. And it sounds like you're pretty good at that.

Steven Arango: Oh well, thank you. Not a lot of great skills, but I pretend that I'm good at that one, at least.

Alison Monahan: Hey, that is definitely a key life skill. And once you've found a person who you feel like is a good mentor, but maybe you're not working with them or something, it's just someone you met, do you have any suggestions on keeping in touch with them, kind of keeping top of mind? I know one of the things that annoys me is when somebody only comes to me when they want help. And after three or four of those interactions it's sort of like, "Okay, I see how this relationship goes for you." So you don't want to be that person, but what else can you do?

Steven Arango: Yeah. So, first thing I'll say – actually a mentor of mine who's a great guy, he said this – we look at "networking" as a dirty word. It shouldn't be a dirty word if you think of it this way: Networking means building a relationship. And if you're just going to people to use them and abuse them, you're doing networking wrong. What you should be doing is you're looking for a mentor to help guide you through your career, give you advice when a difficult situation arises. When you have to pick between going to the BigLaw firm or going to work for the federal government, which way should you go? When these issues or situations come up, you want to have people to turn to. So, to make sure that I'm still building a relationship all the time, you don't need to be texting your mentor every week, "Hey, how's it going?" You don't want to be fake like that. But I at least every couple of months check in. And again, it's not to check in to be fake, it's not to check in to make sure, "Hey, just want to make sure you are aware that I'm alive." It's to actually...

Alison Monahan: "Hey, I still exist, remember me?"

Steven Arango: Exactly. It's to check in to say, "Hey, how's life going? How's work at the Pentagon? What issues are you working on?", if they're not classified obviously. Checking in about their family, what they're looking like down the road. For example, a mentor of mine that works at the DOJ just left and he took a pretty great position at the Pentagon. And because we keep in touch, he actually reached out to me and he wanted to check in on me and said, "Hey, also, I just wanted to let you know I'm taking this position at the Pentagon." And I got to



celebrate with him. So, when you're "networking", and I put that in quotations, and you're actually building these relationships, it's going to be a two-way street. You're going to start to see your mentors reach out to you and they're going to want to celebrate their accomplishments and what's going on in their lives, whether it's personal or professional. So, the biggest thing is stay in contact, don't be fake about it, and just try to pretend like you like them. Hopefully, you do like your mentor...

Alison Monahan: Exactly. Hopefully, there's a reason you want to maintain this relationship.

Steven Arango: Exactly. Don't just, "Oh, they work for the Treasury, or the White House. I need to keep this." No, they're a human being, this isn't...

Alison Monahan: Yeah, that doesn't ever work.

Steven Arango: Exactly. This isn't someone you're just trying to ride their coattails. This is a person that you see value in because they've been successful, they're a good, moral person, and they can guide you through your career.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think that authentic relationship is really always the key. These should be people that you think that you want to know more about or you want to interact with for some reason, and it's not just because you think maybe they can immediately get you a job. Because the reality is, that doesn't really work.

Steven Arango: No, exactly. A lot of my mentors, we've been texting. I'm a diehard Yankees fan, and I'll text them all the time. Right now it's the off-season. The Yankees just, I think, gave pitcher Gerrit Cole \$324 million for nine years. And I'll text them and be like, "Hey, we got in the wrong profession" or, "Let's see..." I played baseball in college and I like to say I was an average to below-average Division II baseball player. Most likely the latter. But \$324 million, I think I still got some throws in my right arm. I might try to give it a go if the whole Marine Corps thing doesn't work out.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I mean, at least you're staying in shape, right?

Steven Arango: Exactly, exactly.

Alison Monahan: Alright. Well, unfortunately, we're almost out of time. Any final thoughts you want to share with people at this point?

Steven Arango: So, the last thing I would say to whoever is listening, if you've stayed on this long to my annoying voice and this terrible wisdom, but if you've survived, be a "yes man" or a "yes woman". And what I mean by that is, say "yes" to experiences that will challenge you and take you out of your comfort zones. There's a great quote, and I think it's by Richard Branson, who is the CEO of



Virgin, or past CEO. He said, "Say 'yes' and then figure out how to do it later." That mindset will take you so many exciting places, because I can tell you that I had people telling me, "Oh, you can't clerk, your GPA is not high enough", "Oh, you can't work at the Pentagon, you don't have experience", "Oh, you can't publish at the Wall Street Journal. You're Steven Arango, who the heck are you?" Say "yes", that you want to do something, or when someone asks you to do something, and then figure out how to do it later. And take solace in the fact that the most influential people in the history of the world usually failed the most. So when you fail, it's okay.

Alison Monahan: On that note, I think that's absolutely right. I agree 100%. Thank you so much for joining us, Steven.

Steven Arango: No, thank you so much for having me, and hopefully this wisdom helps a couple of people out there.

Alison Monahan: Well, I'm sure it will. With that, we are out of time. If you enjoyed this episode of the Law School Toolbox podcast, please take a second to leave a review or 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 Lee 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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