



- Alison Monahan: Welcome to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today, we're talking about maintaining motivation in your second semester. Your Law School Toolbox hosts 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 back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today, we're talking about maintaining motivation in the second semester. Whether you're a 1L or a 3L who's about to graduate, this can be a challenge for almost every law student.
- Alison Monahan: That is true.
- Lee Burgess: Or even a 2L. Really anybody.
- Alison Monahan: Really. Exactly, anyone in the whole process. Well, let's talk about why does the second semester... I just think it is such a struggle.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. I mean, you go home for the holidays or you do something, and then you come back. And in most places, winter is depressing.
- Alison Monahan: It is. It is so cold. I'd come from California to New York City, and I think we had the coldest winter they'd had in like a generation. And I remember landing from California in early January at JFK at 2:00 in the morning, and it was sleeting and it was cold. It did not get above freezing for the next three weeks, and I did not have clothes for this. And at that point, nobody's selling winter clothes.
- Lee Burgess: Right.
- Alison Monahan: It's like, "Oh, spring season." I'm like, "No, it's early January..."
- Lee Burgess: It's cold.
- Alison Monahan: "I need winter boots. I need sweaters." I finally found some sweaters, I think at J.Crew, and I had to buy three different colors because that was literally the only heavy sweaters I could find, and I just wore those all winter. And then finally, thank goodness, I ordered the full-length down jacket that is really life-changing if you're in a very cold climate. But you don't know this if you've been living in San Francisco. San Francisco doesn't get cold. Tahoe doesn't even get cold compared to this.



Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: I have ski clothes; they weren't warm enough. It was horrible. I ended up clinically depressed, probably partly because it was so insanely cold and dark and depressing.

Lee Burgess: A lot of people get seasonal affective disorder, and they don't really realize it.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. No, it was crazy. It was a bad, bad winter my first year I was not mentally prepared, I was not physically prepared, and things did not go well. That was not a fun semester.

Lee Burgess: And even if you are not some place miserably cold, it's still dark. It's dark. It gets dark at 5:00 or something.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, at 5:00.

Lee Burgess: Well, in California it gets dark at...

Alison Monahan: Have you ever lived in Boston?

Lee Burgess: No.

Alison Monahan: I clerked in Boston. It literally was dark by 3:45.

Lee Burgess: Oh my gosh, that's insane.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, you have no idea. You're a California person. It gets dark at 5:00.

Lee Burgess: That's why I just don't leave.

Alison Monahan: Come on. People are listening to this like, "5:00? I would give my firstborn to have light at 5:00 PM in the winter."

Lee Burgess: Yeah. So, if you live through any sort of winter, even the California winter, where it gets dark at 5:00...

Alison Monahan: Ooh, dark at 5:00, and it's in the 50s. Oh, it's so cold.

Lee Burgess: When spring comes, often times you just want to stop working and hang out.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. Okay, we've survived the winter, yay! Everything is telling you, "Go outside, hang out with your friends, breathe the wildflowers." I don't know. And then you have exams.



- Lee Burgess: Right. It's not great timing. And even in places where the weather is not extreme, like San Francisco, I remember the spring shifting and all of the sudden it's April and it's gorgeous and everyone's jogging. And you've got to write outlines and study for exams.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think the weather, winter and spring both, just make it hard to stay motivated.
- Lee Burgess: Yep. And the other thing that can happen, I think, is that job stuff can be a huge distraction, depending on what year you are.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think this can happen really with any year. If you're a 1L, we recently did a [podcast about finding a 1L job in the spring](#). And that's the reality for most people, is you are looking for these jobs in the spring. Most people haven't gotten them, that's normal. If you're a 2L without a summer job, you have serious problems.
- Lee Burgess: You're scrambling and...
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, and if you're a 3L without a job, maybe you're going to put this off until after the bar and that's totally fair, but this is going to be weighing on most people's minds, if you have not secured something for after graduation.
- Lee Burgess: Right. 3Ls also might be worrying about the bar exam.
- Alison Monahan: Oh, for sure.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, because maybe they want to start studying early, or they have concerns, or they've struggled academically, or they're trying to move to a different jurisdiction to take the exam. Whatever it might be, that can be a huge distraction as well. Or doing your moral character – what a distraction.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. Or just generally sitting around, worrying about the bar.
- Lee Burgess: Well, that too.
- Alison Monahan: Which is what most people just seem to do, is worry about it, not really actually execute on doing a whole lot to prepare. But, worrying about the bar's a common 3L activity, I feel.
- Lee Burgess: Yes. And then, if you're on a journal, often times it's very busy in the spring.
- Alison Monahan: Oh yeah, this is when everything's ramping up, you've got to get those things published, you've got stuff to do. If you're writing, you may have some writing



requirements you need to fulfill. Your note may be published. All of this stuff can really consume just ridiculous amounts of time.

- Lee Burgess: Yeah, if you have seminar classes, this is...
- Alison Monahan: Clinics.
- Lee Burgess: ...when those papers are really cranking. It can be a lot. And sometimes people are just kind of burning out in school.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. You've been doing this for the better part of a year. At this point, I think the novelty and excitement is typically worn off.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. And sometimes you have... Spring break happens, and then you leave, and then it's really hard to come back and refocus, because when you come back from spring break, depending on when your spring break falls, often times you have five, six weeks of classes left. It's usually a pretty fast turnaround.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, I remember my first year, we did spring... That was, like I said, the worst winter ever in New York. And my roommate and I were like, "We've got to get out of here. What are we going to do?" And so, we went with some friends to Florida. It was great. We were in Miami, it was sunny. We're hanging out on the beach, we're going to clubs, we're having a great time. And then we have to go back.
- Lee Burgess: And it was still cold, right?
- Alison Monahan: And we're just like, "Oh, this is horrible. Why didn't we go to law school in Florida?"
- Lee Burgess: Right. Yeah. So, you've got to find a way to stay focused when you even come back from taking those breaks. The other thing is that a lot of 1Ls are just demoralized by their first semester grades. And they can make you feel like there's no way that this is going to get better, and you don't have the skills. It's going to be hard to move on, and you've got to come up with a way to refocus and regroup.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think overall, 1Ls after the first semester tend to be pretty demoralized, because even people who do very well, typically are not doing as well grade-wise as they've done before, simply because they haven't experienced a curve before.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.



- Alison Monahan: So, if you're used to getting straight As in a class where 40% of the people got an A, and now your grades are B+, A-, A, those are great grades for first semester.
- Lee Burgess: Right, yeah.
- Alison Monahan: But you're like, "I've never seen a B anything in my life, what is going on?" Or you might legitimately have done fairly poorly, when you've never done poorly. You're below the curve, and you're just like, "Oh my gosh, am I going to lose my scholarship?" People have real problems. And so, I think it's hard to sort of stay focused and maintain motivation to try to do better, particularly if you feel like you really did everything you possibly could have done. You studied so hard, and then you get straight Bs.
- Lee Burgess: And sometimes the second semester classes can be doozies. A lot of people take Real Property second semester.
- Alison Monahan: Con Law.
- Lee Burgess: Con Law, and it's not like the fun Con Law. It's typically like federal powers and the Commerce Clause. It's not the fun cases of equal protection.
- Alison Monahan: Or you're like, "My Con Law class, I just do everything." And you have a professor who's 95 years old and assigns something like 50 pages of reading a day, which is really not realistic for Con Law.
- Lee Burgess: No.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, that was a struggle.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: So, yeah, I think often times those classes do get sometimes harder. They're not like contracts and torts anymore. It's suddenly like, "This stuff is more complicated."
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. I mean, future interest for real property is no joke.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, we didn't even do property till our second year.
- Lee Burgess: Oh, okay.
- Alison Monahan: Which made it even worse, because then you're like, "Why am I taking this first-year class when I have other things to do?"



- Lee Burgess: So, if you find yourself just lacking in motivation or feeling demoralized, there are definitely some things that you can do to regroup. What do you think is the first thing that people need to do?
- Alison Monahan: Well, I think the first thing is actually just really recognizing this – that it's common and kind of accepting it. Sometimes you talk about just sort of sitting with that feeling. Kind of recognizing this feeling of like, "Okay, let me try to identify what's going on here. Am I feeling burned out? Am I feeling tired? Am I feeling frustrated?" Rather than just feeling like you're some terrible person, or that you're a total loser, or that you're not trying hard enough. That type of talk is not really productive. It's really more about, "Okay, what is going on here?" For me at some point it was like, "Okay, I think I might actually be depressed, and I think I might need to go and talk to somebody about this." Like, "Let me look at the evidence. I basically haven't really left the house, except to go to class, and not even always to go to class. I'm not sleeping, I'm not really eating. Hmm, this seems to be a little beyond just like I'm feeling sad because it's cold out."
- Lee Burgess: "I'm having a hard time." Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: So I think not necessarily judging how you're feeling, but really getting clear on this: Is it just that I'm not feeling that motivated and maybe I need a little help? Or is this something beyond that?
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think that that's true. And then utilizing all your resources. We talk about this often –the schools. I'm sure schools, especially where it gets very dark and cold, have people that you can talk to about this, because it's very common.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, they weren't surprised in January when a law student showed up at the Student Mental Health Services to be like, "I think I'm depressed, I need a therapist." They were like, "Great, we'll get you signed up right away. Somebody can see you tomorrow, does that work for you?" They're used to this.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: And frankly, like I've said before, that was probably one of the better decisions I've ever made in my life, was walking through that door and being like, "Okay, I am not alright. I need help with this."
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. The other thing that we forgot to talk about that happened to me first semester in the winter was I got the flu, which I hadn't gotten in years.
- Alison Monahan: True, because you're not sleeping, not eating, stressed out, etcetera.



- Lee Burgess: Right, and you're with a whole group of... You're sitting in these rooms with all of these people.
- Alison Monahan: And particularly now that some crazy virus is possibly circulating in the world, who knows.
- Lee Burgess: So, one of the other things I think that can be challenging about second semester is often times people come back from break with all sorts of new viruses. And then you get sick, and it can be really hard to regroup from that.
- Alison Monahan: Oh yeah. A friend of mine actually came back from Christmas break – she didn't know this for two years – with a parasite.
- Lee Burgess: Oh my gosh!
- Alison Monahan: From a beach in Central America. And was literally sick for basically two years until they finally figured it out. But that started in January of her second semester.
- Lee Burgess: So, I remember sitting in class and not feeling great, and then my Real Property professor... I started seeing double.
- Alison Monahan: Oh, that's not good.
- Lee Burgess: And then I turned to my friend and I was like, "I think I might have a bad fever." And she's like, "Please leave, I'll give you all my notes." She was like, "Please walk to Student Services." Like, "Please leave this classroom. I don't want you to sit next to me." But I was out for days, it took me days to regroup. And then you have to kind of play catch up and have a strategy, and not let that derail you.
- Alison Monahan: Oh yeah, I'd forgotten about it. I'd blocked this one out. But yeah, at some point in the early spring, when it was supposed to be the busiest day of my entire semester – literally, I had eight things, that I was totally committed to doing, and I ended up getting called on in like two classes. However, I was not in either one of them, because I had an incredibly terrible food poisoning...
- Lee Burgess: Oh no.
- Alison Monahan: ...and spent the entire day at the health center trying to convince them to give me IV fluids, until finally they did.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, that was great.



- Lee Burgess: This stuff happens. So you have to be able to be in a place where you can strategize, and ask for help, and regroup. And that's where I think you call in your village. And it could be like, "I've missed these classes." Or you talk to your professors. I think so often we feel like we can't ask for help, that it's a sign of weakness. I remember getting the flu and emailing my professor and being like, "I have the flu." And she's like, "Please do not come to class."
- Alison Monahan: Right, exactly. Don't do that.
- Lee Burgess: "You can follow up, come to office hours. I will answer your questions, get notes from somebody else." But I think we forget that they don't want you there.
- Alison Monahan: No.
- Lee Burgess: They don't want you there. They want you to take care of yourselves.
- Alison Monahan: Well, and it's just not really a great idea for you to do for anyone else in your class, to show up terribly sick. If you're in that scenario, just stay home. Someone will help you.
- Lee Burgess: Yes.
- Alison Monahan: If your professor won't help you, call the Dean. The Dean is not going to tell you to go to class if you're running a 103 degree fever and puking.
- Lee Burgess: Yes.
- Alison Monahan: Just don't do that.
- Lee Burgess: Yes.
- Alison Monahan: But yeah, I think the illness thing really tends to come into play second semester.
- Lee Burgess: I think that's true. Alright, so these things happen, but when you are really derailed along with reaching out and asking for help and realizing that this is super common, I think you also have to reconnect to your "Why", and focus on that. We even talk about, to students and people studying for the bar – write yourself a letter about why you wanted to go to law school. Sometimes you can really get caught up in the inertia and forget that there's a reason why you're there.
- Alison Monahan: Right. I mean, no one is holding a gun to your head, hopefully, and forcing you to go to class. I mean, if your parents are doing that, you should probably have some conversations about that.



- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: Basically, this is a voluntary choice and you can opt out at any time. And I think even that can sometimes give people just enough perspective to sort of be able to take a deep breath and say, "Okay, you know what? I am choosing to do this. This is my choice, no one is forcing me to do this. I'm going to kind of take a step back and deal with it."
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: And part of that I think is – this sounds a little bit counter-intuitive if you're feeling unmotivated – but I think the key often times is really to give yourself a break.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: Take that time off because if you block out, say... What I used to like to do, probably not in the middle of the winter so much, but at least in the fall, I remember doing this in the spring, is I would take really long walks all over New York. And New York is a great walking city. You can just point in a direction and walk and walk and walk and walk and walk for hours. But doing that on purpose allowed me to say, "Okay, I'm going to take this afternoon off, but then I'm going to come back tomorrow and I'm going to start working on X, Y, and Z."
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. I also think sometimes just changing it up. From a business perspective, we will take at least a little retreat once a year, where we just go somewhere. It doesn't really matter where we go. And we even find that just by changing our location, or working different hours, or having different dialogues just changes and allows us to get stuff done that maybe we've been noodling on for an incredibly long time.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. I remember whenever it was around exam time I would basically rotate through a bunch of different libraries on campus, just to have a different place to study.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: So I'm like, "Oh, today I'll go to Teachers College, and then tomorrow I'll go to the Social Work School, and then I'll go to the Business School, and I'll go to the Architecture School, and I'll go to the Undergrad." I had my favorite spot in all of these libraries. But if you are feeling really just burned out and unmotivated, something like that can even shift your perspective enough to allow you to be like, "Oh, okay, I'm not so bored. I'm at least in a pretty library."



Lee Burgess: Yeah, I used to study at the UCSF Medical School library, which has sweeping views of the Golden Gate.

Alison Monahan: Nice.

Lee Burgess: And I found it very refreshing.

Alison Monahan: Yeah.

Lee Burgess: I would just walk in and it was beautiful, and there were no other law students there. And medical students would sleep in there. It was all very nice, very pleasant.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think you can just mix it up. And again, it's like this is about paying attention to even who you're spending time with, even if it's people you're not actually talking to. Are these people dragging you down, or are they helping your mood?

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: I always actually liked hanging out in the undergraduate library because they were kind of peppy. They were having fun.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, it wasn't so serious.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. I avoided the law school library like the plague, because it just depressed me to walk in there and see all these people who were so stressed out. Business School library, also great. Apparently, their school seemed to be hanging out. That was what they got graded on or something, I don't know. They never seemed to be doing any actual work; they were just networking. But it was kind of refreshing. It's like, "Oh wow. These are the people who are also in grad school and they're not totally miserable. Maybe it's possible."

Lee Burgess: And I used to try and remind myself that law school was a privilege. I had worked, and I know you had worked too. And there is something about going back to school after working, because there were so many things about being in school that I enjoyed.

Alison Monahan: Right, like being able to go to a gym class whenever you wanted.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm. I used to go to Trader Joe's at 9:00 o'clock on a Monday morning, and nobody was there. It was magical.



- Alison Monahan: Oh yeah, we'd go to Fairway in New York, which is normally super crowded on the weekends. But, yeah, if you go at like 2:00 PM on a Wednesday, you can walk right in.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, super easy. And so, just even reminding yourself that I traded in a job for this and...
- Alison Monahan: Just thinking about all the money that you're spending and not getting.
- Lee Burgess: Not getting. But then I really tried to make the most of it and make sure that I enjoyed the school lifestyle, because it was going to be for a limited amount of time.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, one thing I would always do, is we had... I don't remember if they were free, I think they were very low cost, classes at the gym.
- Lee Burgess: Oh yeah.
- Alison Monahan: And so, my roommate and I would always pick some random class to sign up for once or twice a week, maybe like two or three times a week. Like one time in the winter, we did belly dancing. Maybe that sounds silly, but actually it was great exercise and it was a really fun class. For one hour, twice a week, we would go and belly dance. And I think we even liked it so much, we got a video series to watch at home. God, it was so funny – I remember there were these twin sisters who were belly dancing instructors. I don't know if someone can go find that. But yeah, that was what we did on our off-days from belly dancing class, is we would belly dance in the living room. Because why not, who cares?
- Lee Burgess: Well, and I think that's a great example of sometimes really mixing it up and doing something goofy. I don't know, a couple of months ago, I went and took a hip-hop dance class. And I'm not...
- Alison Monahan: If you've never seen a picture of Lee, she does not look like a person who would be into hip-hop dancing.
- Lee Burgess: Hey, I used to do that sort of dancing back in the day, in a different life. Sure, I looked goofy, I'm sure. But I love listening to loud music, and it makes me feel like a different part of my life, when I used to do that sort of stuff more. And there's something fun about that. There's something about connecting to different parts of yourself and being silly and laughing at yourself, and it just lightens everything up.
- Alison Monahan: Oh yeah, sometimes my roommates and I, we had this tiny little kitchen in New York City. I don't know why we did it always in the kitchen, but we would put on a couple of our favorite songs and literally dance around like crazy people in the



kitchen. And I just remember it faced a stairwell, and we'd look out and see other people staring at us like we were totally insane, because I'm sure we looked crazy. But yeah, it was great. Why not?

Lee Burgess: Oh yeah, we used to do that in college. I can't remember, there was some song, and my college roommate and I would probably get drunk too, and then we would throw our stuffed animals around the room and dance to. I cannot remember what it was, but it was just fun. I have pictures.

Alison Monahan: I remember one of them, it was called Kids in America. I love that song. And it was a total one-hit wonder from a band you've probably never even heard of, but it was a really great song to just dance around to.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. So anyway, just don't worry about whether or not it makes sense; just be spending your time doing this sort of stuff. I think the reality is that doing things outside of your comfort zone, or being able to be silly, or go to a... If you're worried that your law school classmates are going to see you somewhere, go somewhere across town where you're not going to run into anybody. But doing something just for you, it can do a lot for your mood and make it easier to refocus.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, fun. People forget to have fun. And you can have fun in just a couple of minutes. It doesn't have to be this thing that you're going to plan your whole day around it. It's like you can just put on your favorite... I used to have a playlist that I would listen to over and over, that just had upbeat music on it. And every time I now hear this one Beyoncé song, I'm immediately transported back to my first year of law school.

Lee Burgess: I do think that we lose fun a lot. I've been thinking about this a lot, about what's the difference between fun and joy and productivity, and feeling good about things. But this is our one life you are living while you're in law school, and if you are debilitatingly miserable, then you'd probably need to ask yourself some serious questions, because life is happening right now.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think there are things you can do that are pretty predictable that are going to probably improve your mood. I mentioned gym classes – that hits a couple of things. It's a commitment to do something for yourself. It's also something you're doing in a group. It's something that hopefully is fun for you. I played squash and did squash classes, and did belly dancing. I tried not to do the stuff that seemed like a drag. I was like, "Oh, that seems very serious."

Lee Burgess: Even going back to stuff that you may have liked when you were much younger, or a teenager, or a kid. I have a lot of friends who used to be dancers, and they talk about going to take a ballet class, and they're like, "I might be in my 30s and have not taken a ballet class in 10 years, 15 years", but then they do it and it



brings them joy in a way that they don't get that joy. I used to sing, and sometimes singing is something that can connect me to a different part of myself that I didn't used to be. So yes, I do love hip-hop dance classes. I also used to train in opera. I'm a complicated person.

Alison Monahan: Aren't we all?

Lee Burgess: Aren't we all?

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I signed up for ballet when I was in my first grad school, but unfortunately I was getting credit for it and I almost failed it because I kept not being able to go. So, that did not bring me joy.

Lee Burgess: That's different. Did not spark joy.

Alison Monahan: I do not recommend trying to get credit for your program for a PE class, because that is just going to increase your stress level.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: It seemed to be a recurring theme. I almost didn't graduate from college because I was about to fail my aerobics class, which I was required to take something. God, it was awful. It was at 8:30 in the morning.

Lee Burgess: I definitely did not take a Physical Education class.

Alison Monahan: Oh, we had to.

Lee Burgess: Really?

Alison Monahan: Yeah, to graduate from college, I think you had to take two or three. It was insane.

Lee Burgess: Oh, that is weird.

Alison Monahan: Plus pass a swim test. But yeah, I had some ex-cheerleader at 8:30 in the morning, and it was just odd.

Lee Burgess: That's just awful.

Alison Monahan: It was terrible. It was really terrible. But literally, I wasn't going to graduate if I didn't finish it.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that's not good.



- Alison Monahan: So yeah, take voluntary classes. Do not take credit classes that you're going to end up regretting.
- Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm. Another thing that you've got to watch out for is being a perfectionist.
- Alison Monahan: Oh yeah. This is a big one.
- Lee Burgess: This is a big one. Don't we have a great [article](#) somewhere about recovering as a perfectionist by Judi Cohen?
- Alison Monahan: Probably.
- Lee Burgess: But this is something a lot of us struggle with, because the personality type that becomes a lawyer often times has perfectionist tendencies.
- Alison Monahan: Right. It's very common.
- Lee Burgess: It's very common.
- Alison Monahan: Part of the motivation is feeling like you're able to succeed. So, if you don't feel like you're able to succeed because you've set your expectations so incredibly high, it's going to make it really hard to stay motivated. I don't want to say to set your goals super low, but set your goals reasonable. And if you're having a bad week, a reasonable goal might literally be to show up to class and do your reading. That's enough.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. And sometimes that's all you can ask of yourself, and that's okay.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. What I learned in my second semester of law school, when I was clinically depressed for half of it, and basically wasn't going to class or doing anything, is that you can actually do a lot in a very small amount of time, if you really focus and if you really need to. So for me, we got to a few weeks out from exams, and I was kind of a mess, let's face it. I don't think I'd read anything for Con Law. It just wasn't going well. So, I asked good friends of mine, "Look, I'm struggling right now and I need your help. Can you help me with this class?" And a lot of them said "Yes", because we were friends, and I would have done the same for them, and maybe did do the same for them later on. But I remember sitting down two weeks before exams or something, including the Reading Week, and being like, "Okay, it is time to triage. What am I going to do?" I remember my therapist being like, "Well, are you going to take your exams?" I'm like, "Of course I'm going to take my exams." She's like, "Well, you can probably get them postponed." I'm like, "No, I'm going to take them." She's like, "Alright, you're committing to taking them." And I was like, "Yes, I'm committing to



taking my exams." And once you've made that commitment, it's like, "Alright, what am I going to do to try to make this not be a total mess?"

Lee Burgess: Right. And a lot of that can be sitting down with someone in academic support, or with a tutor, or even a TA for a class and being like, "Okay, not everything's going to happen. So what's in and what's out?" And really making that triage list.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. The reality is, all of these first-year classes you can get a commercial outline for, basically, unless your school is doing something super weird, in which case, there's probably a pretty good one from a previous year from someone who was very into the class, floating around. Just get that and start with that. You've got to be realistic. You may not be getting A+s, but you can probably do okay if you just basically get a commercial outline, learn the basics, do some practice questions, particularly if it's open book.

Lee Burgess: And you can't go back to the beginning of the semester. I think this is one of the things that happens to a lot of folks second semester when they do get derailed. I remember when I got the flu and somebody was like, "Well, you can't go back and re-read everything, you've got to just cut your losses. Take your notes, skim some briefs and move on." You can't go back and do four days of reading because you had the flu.

Alison Monahan: No, exactly. It's like at some point, it's just like you've got to work with what you have and you have to be realistic about that. Also, I think people can get really caught up in this guilt cycle of, "Oh, I can't believe I wasted all this time at the beginning of the semester. I should have been doing this and I should have been doing that." Okay, maybe you should have been, but that's not really where you're at. You've got to evaluate the situation, figure out a way to move forward, and start executing on that plan right now, because that is the only way that you're going to get out of this semester alive.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. So in the end, this is a struggle for a lot of law students. So if you are struggling with motivation or getting your act together second semester, you're definitely not alone. If you can just recognize this is what's happening, that is definitely step one, and realize that doing less could actually be the answer. As long as the time you do the work is focused, you're welcome to take some time off and get some R&R and relax.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think that's the key. It's like you've really got to figure out, what is going to give me the most bang for my buck here? Alright, what do I need to do in the rest of my life to be able to do that? And maybe that means that you commit to only studying five hours a day during the Reading Week. I don't really care. I'd rather have you study five hours a day of really focused work, and doing



practice questions and doing all that, than to pretend to study for 10. What's the point?

Lee Burgess: It's so true. I remember by my third year, second semester, I would try and leave the library at 7:00 to go home and eat a good dinner, and not eat crap out of the Student Services little kiosk thing or whatever.

Alison Monahan: Oh God, some terrible wrap or whatever.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that was \$15 or something like that. But I think that setting those parameters sometimes at 5:00 o'clock... I'm one of those people who always had the lull at 4:30 where it was like, "Oh, it's hard to get motivated." But if I'm like, "Okay, well, you only have to be motivated until 7:00", I could sometimes squeeze out the rest of the work, and then I got to go and eat a good dinner and then hang out with my boyfriend or whatever, and be happy. And I think that even that goal setting of breaking up my day was very powerful than my friends who would sit in the library and watch The Daily Show until 11:00 o'clock at night and then be like, "Oh, I was at school all day."

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think this is where getting serious about your schedule is what you need to do, especially around blocking out that time to do the deeper work, and also the job hunt. You do need time to do that, but you also have to make sure it doesn't take over. So, say you study five hours a day, and then you work on your job for two hours a day – that's great.

Lee Burgess: That's great.

Alison Monahan: If you do that day after day, you're good. I'd rather have you do that than pretend to be doing stuff that you're not really doing for so many hours a day that you can't sleep.

Lee Burgess: Yep. So the reality is, all is not lost. You just need to come up with a plan, and then try and execute it and take care of yourself.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I recommend restorative yoga.

Lee Burgess: That's a good one.

Alison Monahan: Totally great, it's my new thing. But yeah, something that truly is relaxing is a very good way for you to spend time.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Alright, well, 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 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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