



- Alison Monahan: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today is our 300th anniversary episode, and we're going to be talking about some questions we get pretty frequently. Your Law School Toolbox hosts today are Alison Monahan, that's me, and Lee Burgess. We're here to demystify the law school and early legal career experience, so that you'll be the best law student and lawyer you can be. Together, we're the co-creators of the [Law School Toolbox](#), the [Bar Exam Toolbox](#), and the career-related website [CareerDicta](#). I also run [The Girl's Guide to Law School](#). If you enjoy the show, please leave a review or rating on your favorite listening app. And if you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to us, you might even be on a future show. You can always reach us via the [contact form](#) on LawSchoolToolBox.com, and we'd love to hear from you. With that, let's get started.
- Lee Burgess: Welcome back to the special anniversary episode of the Law School Toolbox podcast! Who can believe it? Three hundred episodes, a pandemic, it's just been a wild ride. Three hundred, I can't believe it!
- Alison Monahan: I can't believe it. I'm not sure we ever thought we'd do this many when we started, and here we are.
- Lee Burgess: I wasn't sure anybody was going to listen to it when we started.
- Alison Monahan: Right. I think we thought we might have 300 people listen to...
- Lee Burgess: Maybe if we were lucky. Oh my gosh.
- Alison Monahan: And we've got millions of downloads, literally.
- Lee Burgess: Millions of downloads, which is very humbling. So thanks for listening! I love hearing that people listen to it, it's kind of exciting. And it's also very funny where people tell me that they listen to it. I didn't think I'd be a good running companion, but apparently people listen to us on their runs, making dinner. The cooking one I could have guessed, and the commuting, but the running... I'm a big music runner, so the idea that you could run to the beat of our dialogue, I don't know, but I'm glad people do.
- Alison Monahan: Maybe they speed it up two times.
- Lee Burgess: Maybe, I don't know. We talk pretty fast already, I feel like if you took us at two-speed, it would be pretty intense.
- Alison Monahan: It would be like the Chipmunks to hear that.



- Lee Burgess: I know, right? Yeah, so it's a pretty cool milestone to meet though, considering we also have the Bar Exam Toolbox. So between those two, we have done a lot of podcasting over the last few years.
- Alison Monahan: We really have. Yeah, so today we actually wanted to reflect on some of the things we've learned over the years of doing this, and some listener questions, that kind of thing. One of the things I see over and over – and I think this makes a lot of sense, and I think it's actually a good thing for people to be thinking about – people are always wondering how to start off strong in law school. What do they need to do that summer before, what do they need to be thinking about? What have we learned about this?
- Lee Burgess: I think we've learned a lot, not only from developing courses on this topic, like our [Start Law School Right course](#), but also just talking to so many law students. And I think that we still believe that there's this push to overstudy. So, you can spend the whole summer reading supplements and things like that, and I still think that's a terrible idea. I really do, after all these years of hearing all of these stories. I think that something like our Start Law School Right course that focuses on skills is a good idea, or practicing reading difficult material, or learning something new to get your brain going. But starting off strong in law school is really not all about knowing law; it's really about showing up as the best version of yourself with the skills needed to absorb what's being covered at school.
- Alison Monahan: I think that's right. And I think there's actually a lot to that. Overall, I think oftentimes when we see people run into problems, they really have overfocused on this idea that they just have to learn all of this legal trivia and they have to learn this material and memorize everything, and they'll be fine. And that's missing a pretty big step of what law school is actually about. And so, I think these people come in and think, "Oh, it's all about learning what a tort is." And of course, that's important, but it's not really the goal here. That's only the first step of the goal. So, I agree with you, I think you need to show up as mentally and logistically prepared as possible, but there's really just very little point in... I remember I was doing some silly stuff – I was reading an unedited Supreme Court case on something, and just like, when did I ever do that again, you know? They edit these things for a reason when they're there in your casebooks. So, it was kind of cute. It was, "Oh, I read a case." But it was literally 85 pages.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think also really having your support network set up is so important, whether it be having a good therapist that you're working with, especially if you struggle with things like anxiety, which really bubble up in law school.
- Alison Monahan: Oh, for sure.



- Lee Burgess: Recently with the online law school, it seems that that's been a lot more triggering for folks because they don't have as great of a sense of community. But making sure that you have your support network and that you feel like you've got a team behind you, whoever is in that team, whoever is going to help make your life happen. Because when those tricky moments inevitably come up, you need to be able to rely on folks to help get you through. And in the beginning of law school, yes, you're going to make friends, but you don't have that immediate community. So you still want to rely on the community that you have going into school, even if they aren't local. You can still have this big difference from home, or rely on family. Someday, I guess we'll be able to go to gym classes or running clubs again. A lot of people find community that way. But you have to just make sure that your whole person is being taken care of.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think that's right. And I think it's easy to get so caught up in the experience that people are just only studying. We talk to people who just have been studying 12 plus hours a day in addition to going to class, they're not taking any time off, they've lost contact with everyone they used to talk to. And frankly, they're pretty miserable. I just don't think that's a great way to go through life, and I don't really think it makes you typically that successful.
- Lee Burgess: No. And I think one of the things that I've really learned from these COVID times is how much of life and sanity are these simple pleasures.
- Alison Monahan: Right.
- Lee Burgess: I think for me personally, I've really noticed how social interaction, in-person, with people I care about is so important to me. You and I recently, being vaccinated, got to be together and we haven't seen each other much at all for the last year plus. And it's like I get a lot just by being able to have dinner with you, which is something that we used to do all the time. We would go to events and do stuff all the time. But I really filled up my cup. And I think it really has shown me that these things that I oftentimes took for granted, that maybe I would have even eliminated from my life when I'd get stressed and busy, are actually very important to our mental health, and you need to be able to carve out time for them to keep your life rolling. Also, life is uncertain, and you should still try and enjoy the life that you're living, even if you're trying to accomplish something hard, like law school.
- Alison Monahan: Right. And I think that people who oftentimes do the best, are not necessarily the most miserable. So I don't think this idea that you have to suffer to do well is really actually that accurate. I'm sure there're some people who are suffering and end up with top of the class, but I don't actually think that that's really the case. I would guess there's very little correlation between people's misery level, and success level.



- Lee Burgess: Yeah, because the misery just leads also to... We're going to talk about it in a minute, but self-sabotaging behavior, and not sleeping. Usually, the misery doesn't help you perform at your best.
- Alison Monahan: Right. When I was clinically depressed in law school, I don't think it was my best semester.
- Lee Burgess: Right. Exactly.
- Alison Monahan: I probably could have done better by avoiding that happening.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. But I think what we've also learned is that a lot of people start off with the best of intentions, but it all kind of falls apart as they go through it.
- Alison Monahan: It does.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. And I think this happens for a lot of reasons. One thing we were just talking about is time management. I think there's this idea that hours in equals outcome. So it's like if you are at the library from open to close, then you'll get good grades. And that is just not how this works. I had a lot of friends who were on academic probation, who hung out at the library all the time. That doesn't mean that they were doing the things that they needed to do to get the good grades. So there are all these things you can do that really aren't leading you to manage your time well, that make you feel like you're being very productive, but you're not actually putting in the work that leads to the outcomes you're looking for.
- Alison Monahan: No, that's absolutely true. Things like re-reading cases three or four times, or watching your lecture again, that sort of thing. You just don't really have time for that. And so, I think people can choose their focus about what to spend their time on, and spend it on the activities that are really going to get the most bang for the buck. And then hopefully, that gives you enough spare time that you can do things like go on a walk and actually...
- Lee Burgess: Cook a nice dinner with some friends.
- Alison Monahan: Right, exactly. I think you can't just study, study, study in these ways that aren't very effective for years on end, and come out on the other side any sort of functional human being.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think that that's very true. And this leads right into something that we see all the time, which is, people just start doing self-sabotaging behavior. And we've all been guilty of this. So it's not like I'm sitting up here saying, "Well, I never self-sabotage." Of course we all do; we've all been there. Not



necessarily... Maybe academics is not my self-sabotaging area of my life, but we all have our self-sabotaging behaviors.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly.

Lee Burgess: But the things that we often see is this idea of wasting time doing busy work, but then also really moving near exam time, or not setting boundaries with family, or planning travel at inopportune times, or not doing some damage control, so you're always in a crisis. My personal favorite is compulsive TV watching, which we all love a good Netflix binge, but maybe not in reading week. I think we've heard it all over the years. So, you do have to kind of check in with yourself about these self-sabotaging behaviors. If you're not getting the outcomes that you want, you have to make sure that you're not practicing habits that are working against you.

Alison Monahan: Right. And I think you've got to get at the underlying issue too. It's like if you're doing this self-sabotaging stuff, why is this happening? Do you not want to be in law school? Do you have untreated anxiety disorders that are making you drink too much? Whatever these things are, you've kind of got to get to...

Lee Burgess: True, I totally left the drinking off. That's a huge one in law school.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. So I think if you're going to be functional, you've kind of got to get to the bottom of this stuff. And it's totally fine for people to walk away and say, "Yeah, this is making me miserable. I don't want to do it." That's completely legitimate.

Lee Burgess: Yep. And I think this is where if you are struggling, talking to a therapist... And a great reminder – we always say it – most law schools give you free therapy through the university.

Alison Monahan: Take advantage.

Lee Burgess: Take advantage. And I think one of the things I always love about checking in with a therapist, even if you don't go very often, is it is somebody who listens to you talk and then says something like... I mean, just hypothetically, not that this has ever been said to me, but, "Didn't you say this was your goal? And it doesn't seem to me that you're doing the things necessary to reach that goal."

Alison Monahan: Right, and you're like, "Huh, good point."

Lee Burgess: And it's like, "Oh well, I mean I'm..." And then you backtrack, backtrack. And it's like there is some beauty to having someone on the outside saying, "Huh. Do you realize your choices are not actually moving you towards that goal? Did you?" And I think that is something that a therapist or a coach or a mentor, but



whoever kind of calls you on that part of your life can be so effective, because sometimes we can't see it ourselves. And then having your self-sabotaging behavior called out can be really helpful in shifting directions.

Alison Monahan: Right. Or at least making you recognize you're doing it, and then it's like, "Okay, I recognize that I made this poor choice to go out drinking the day before my exam. Hmm, maybe I'll learn something from this experience next time."

Lee Burgess: Yep. And it's possible that my first semester... Or I think it was my second semester 1L year, I did go to a bachelorette party a couple of days before my Civ Pro exam. I don't think that was a great choice. I mean, I had fun, and I "lightly drank". I put that in air quotes, because at that time in my life, lightly drinking meant something much different than it means now.

Alison Monahan: Not half a glass of wine.

Lee Burgess: Which is not a glass of wine. I remember the next morning being like, "Oh yeah, not my most productive self. Maybe not my best choice."

Alison Monahan: We all do things, it happens.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. I was young. So, I think another issue that comes up, even if you have good intentions, is that you're really not focusing on the end game. You don't understand the expectations and how these exams are graded in the beginning, and so you're allocating your time to all the wrong things.

Alison Monahan: Right, which ends up being self-sabotaging when you take your exam, and you realize you never actually did a practice test because you ran out of time.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly. So these are the things that you just have to watch for, and check in with yourself. If you don't have a mentor or you don't have a professor that you've bonded with, or academic support or a therapist or a coach or a tutor, whoever that you're checking in with, you have to check in with yourself to make sure that these accidental missteps aren't happening. So if it's Friday, and you're looking at the weekend and you're like, "I have so much work to do over the weekend that there's no way I can go on that hike with a friend, and there's no way I can go to that birthday party, and I'm drowning in work", and you're in the first month of the semester, you've got to check yourself and say, "Why am I drowning in work?" Because you shouldn't be drowning. You should be busy, but you shouldn't be drowning in work at that point.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think that's right. And then I think the problem people run into too, is they start to fall behind. And then once you fall behind, you're in this kind of vicious cycle of, you really are in trouble at that point. But I think you're right, and if you're in the first weeks of school, yes, of course, it's going to seem like



there's a lot of work and it's very intense, and you're spending a lot of time doing these things. Sometimes I have to laugh because people are like, "I'm spending all of my time working." And then you actually ask them about, "Okay, well, what did you do yesterday?" And it turns out they did like three hours of reading, and they think this is totally abnormal. I'm like, "That's not abnormal for law school. You're in law school."

- Lee Burgess: Right. That's what you do.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. I'm sorry, you're going to be doing this every day. That doesn't mean you're drowning. That's what you do.
- Lee Burgess: Right, exactly. And it can be exhausting in the beginning, because you're not used to it.
- Alison Monahan: Well, of course. It's not easy.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. No.
- Alison Monahan: But if you're reading 15 hours a day just to keep up with class work, that's too much.
- Lee Burgess: Right. Or if you can't move your schedule around to go to a birthday dinner for a friend, then that's another warning sign. You should be able to find time. You can't go out every night. But if you want to go out on a Friday night to a birthday dinner for a friend, you should be able to work your schedule around it. And if you don't have that time, then you need to evaluate what you're doing, because you should have time to do things like that.
- Alison Monahan: Right. And that's what is important, like you said.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think another thing that often gets lost is why people are actually in law school. This is a question I often ask law students, if I can't clearly figure it out by talking to them, or even bar takers. We'll have this conversation when they are complaining about the bar and I'll be like, "Why do you want to be licensed in X jurisdiction? What is your goal?" And I think to the point where we've even in the past had students write letters to themselves about why they want to be in school, why are they doing this? And I think it's important to check in with yourself about why you're there, so you can put up with this nonsense.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. The reality is, everyone's going to run into some sort of struggles. And the more that you can say, "Oh, I'm here because this is the goal that I'm trying to achieve, or this is what's motivating me." I think getting in touch with that underlying motivation. And again, if it's not there, it's not there, and that's something to think about is, "How did I end up in this position?"



- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: And what am I going to do about it?
- Lee Burgess: Yep. So, still after all these years, after all the blog posts, all the podcast episodes, all the curriculum we've developed, how to do law school – the process, the outlining, the exams – still seems to be such a mystery to so many people. Why do you think it is so hard to demystify this experience for folks?
- Alison Monahan: Well, that is what we're trying to do.
- Lee Burgess: That is our whole business model, really?
- Alison Monahan: Literally, we're going to demystify it for you. Well, I think some of what's going on is it's kind of this balance of, you have to figure out what works for you, but there are also things that you have to do. And you can do them in different ways, but they're these big chunk-like things of knowledge. First you have to know some law – you can't do a law school hypo if you don't know some law. So, there are different ways that people can think about learning that, and thinking about putting it together, and make sense of it, but you have to do that piece. I can't tell even you, I can't be like, "Well, this is exactly how you should learn the law." You have to process that for yourself. But I can tell you what your goal is, and I can give you a lot of different ideas and you can try them out, and I can help you figure out if they're working. So it's this back and forth.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think that's true. It's just tricky. I think it's so foreign to what most people have done in the past. I went to a liberal arts college, where I wrote lots of papers. It's just, this is what I did. And I was even from a family of lawyers, and it still felt very foreign. It's just different, it's a tough thing. And you have to go in with this [growth mindset](#), something we also have been talking about since the very beginning of this podcast, is you've got to be willing to change what you do, and learn, and grow, and fail. And that's not easy.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. And I think the people who have the most resistance to this idea that they need to do something differently, or learn something, or change, the more rigidity you have around what you already know and what you're already comfortable with, I think typically the harder it is for you. We talked about [Dan Siegel](#) and this idea of the river where you're kind of bouncing between rigidity and chaos, and I think for a lot of people that is their experience.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, that's so true. Yeah, I definitely remember some points of feeling super overwhelmed and stressed out, and just treading water and not really sure I was going to get everything all done. That's not a great way to exist, and it probably wasn't my most productive self.



- Alison Monahan: Right. I remember one day where I had so much stuff to do – I was a 2L or a 3L, I can't remember. Maybe it wasn't, maybe it was a 1L. Anyway, I had so much stuff to do I was scheduled from 7:00 in the morning until 10:00 at night, and it was all really important stuff. And then I woke up in the middle of the night with the worst food poisoning in my entire life. And it was just that moment of like, "Oh, okay, I'm obviously not doing any of this." I ended up getting an IV at the student health center later in the day, and then I got called on in two different classes. It was just one of those things where in the end, nothing happened.
- Lee Burgess: Right.
- Alison Monahan: It was fine. I missed everything, and life went on.
- Lee Burgess: It's true. Yeah, life goes on. And I think that there's this issue for law students who tend to have some sort of perfectionist parts of their personality, to feel like there's just no room for stumbling or failure. But life happens, sometimes you get sick. I think that one of the things that COVID times has really taught us is the importance of health. We only have our health. We're basically spending all of our time trying to protect our health and the health of others. And even more than it used to be, if you get sick, you can't go to class.
- Alison Monahan: Right. You don't show up if you have a cough.
- Lee Burgess: Right. Every time I hear one of my children sniff, I'm always like, "Do you have a runny nose? What's wrong? You can't go to school if you have a runny nose." But it used to be like, "Oh, you don't have a fever. You're fine."
- Alison Monahan: You're fine, it's a low-grade fever.
- Lee Burgess: I know, right? We've become so hyperaware that life happens. But I also think that maybe all of us have gotten conditioned a little bit better to realizing that life does happen, and that sometimes we just have to roll with it.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. And the reality is, if an exam goes poorly, that's disappointing. You can feel disappointed about it. That is not going to ruin the entire rest of your life, that's just not the way this works.
- Lee Burgess: It is true. I will be honest, I remember after... It was my second year, I think it was one semester final, I can't remember. It was my First Amendment class, so it must have been second semester. First Amendment class, and my computer crashed during the exam. And I then had a dinner planned with girlfriends who were not in law school, because that was my last exam, and I was a wreck. Oh my gosh, I was super dramatic. I was, "Oh, you don't understand, guys. If this test goes poorly, my GPA", da, da, da. And on, and on, and on, and on. And now,



maybe it's possible I was slightly over-dramatic, and it's possible one of my girlfriends called me on that, and I was like, "You just don't understand."

Alison Monahan: And they're like, "It's a test, you'll live."

Lee Burgess: She was a vet at that point, and she was like, "I think it's going to be okay. Not life or death, don't really know what you're talking about."

Alison Monahan: Yeah, like, "No animals are dying right now, you're cool."

Lee Burgess: Yeah, no animals, no people. It'll be fine, whatever. You're smart, I'm sure you've figured it out. But yeah, so there is that too, of just trying to ride the waves a little bit more. And that's part of life, is getting better at riding these waves, because life is complicated. And when you go out into the workforce, life is still going to be complicated, and you're going to have to figure out how to balance all of this stuff.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely.

Lee Burgess: School is simple in that way. Often, your life is not as complicated as it will be later in life.

Alison Monahan: Oh, that's for sure true. I feel like people who absolutely cannot handle law school, I'm always just sort of wondering, "How are you going to handle being at trial as a lawyer?"

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: That's going to be way more intense than this.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And usually, as we age, we then become responsible for more things. So it's like not only are you going to be a responsible lawyer, but maybe you'll have a partner, or children, or dogs, or you'll be responsible for a friend, or a nephew, or a niece or... Life just gets more complicated.

Alison Monahan: Well, and you'll have clients. They want stuff.

Lee Burgess: Oh yeah, and clients that want stuff. It's like life just gets more complicated. It's not a bad thing, it just does. So you've got to be able to manage all of the things in your sphere.

Alison Monahan: So, law school's good practice.

Lee Burgess: It is. So, let's talk about job stuff, because I think...



- Alison Monahan: Another ongoing mystery to people.
- Lee Burgess: Ongoing mystery. It's still hard for people to figure out what lawyers do during the day, and how BigLaw is different from other types of practice – public interest versus more for-profit corporate stuff. I still get questions and people will be like, "Well, when you practice, what do you do? What did you do?" And I will say, "Oh, I did corporate defense." And then there's some follow-up question, and then I answer that, and then it's like crickets. There's no more information, but nobody still really understands what that means, what did I do. But the day-to-day stuff is I mostly read doc review, and wrote responses to motions. That's really what I did. And some pro bono work.
- Alison Monahan: I think people just really have very little concept of what the day-to-day of any type of lawyer... Unless you grew up with lawyers, so you had some idea what they did. But again, it's all very specific.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. I knew what my dad did, but I couldn't have told you what non-criminal lawyers did.
- Alison Monahan: Right. Everything is so niche. I met someone and they're like, "Oh, you did patent stuff." I'm like, "No, I was a patent litigator. I didn't write patents, that's a totally different thing. I don't know anything about that."
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly.
- Alison Monahan: "No, but you did patents." It's like, "No, not in the way you think of it."
- Lee Burgess: Right, yeah. Litigating them is different than...
- Alison Monahan: I'm like, "I was fighting about it after the fact. I was not preparing the application."
- Lee Burgess: Right. Totally different.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. And so I think it's very hard to get what do people even do. And then how do you find out, or figure out what you would like to do when you literally don't even know what most lawyers are doing?
- Lee Burgess: And I think this is what's interesting about content we developed way in the early days about [informational interviews](#), that one of your goals in law school should be to meet as many people doing interesting things as you can, and try to learn about what they do. Because I think there are so many interesting types of law that you may not even know will resonate with you. But then I just had someone that I knew in law school leave her family law practice, which she hated. And that's not to say everybody... I have another friend who's a family



law attorney who loves it, she thrives in it. This person just... It was probably 10 years of her life, and she was miserable.

Alison Monahan: Oh, that's awful.

Lee Burgess: I know. I'm happy for her that she left and is now trying to pivot to something totally different, but it's also just kind of sad to think that she spent that much time being that unhappy. And I wonder if she had asked more questions when she was in law school, or tried out a few more internships, or changed jobs earlier.

Alison Monahan: Pro bono.

Lee Burgess: Pro bono. Then maybe she would have learned, "Hey, this is not good stuff for me. I should do something else", because a lot of it's just finding fit.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. When I left BigLaw, I strongly considered starting a family law practice. I did an informational interview with this woman who was a very successful solo family lawyer. And she was great, she was totally willing to take me under her wing, mentor me. She was like, "This is fantastic, you'd be great." And so I did a pro bono divorce case. Holy wow! I was like, "Absolutely not."

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: I was like, "This is not something I want to wake up and do every day."

Lee Burgess: I know.

Alison Monahan: Felt good that I did that.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly. You save yourself a lot of time, energy, money, everything.

Alison Monahan: I spent three years working on that one case pro bono, but hey, it was better than trying to do it full-time forever.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly. And some people really thrive in that environment. You've got to ask questions...

Alison Monahan: That was so not for me.

Lee Burgess: ...yeah, about conflict and meeting people when they're in crisis and, "Are you okay?" Some people thrive being around people in crisis, some people don't. You've got to figure out who you are.



Alison Monahan: I was also just like, "Wow, Family Law Court is really different from Federal Patent Court."

Lee Burgess: Oh yeah.

Alison Monahan: I was just like, "This is a whole different world, and it's not one I want to be in."

Lee Burgess: I know.

Alison Monahan: Like, this is chaotic.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, it's totally crazy. So you've really got to learn. And so I think that the best advice we can give is, just always be learning, asking questions.

Alison Monahan: Try things.

Lee Burgess: Try things.

Alison Monahan: Don't commit to them, just try them.

Lee Burgess: Go to coffee, talk to people. I think it's just really important to learn as much as you can, so you can have a picture of what these jobs really look like, because it's not all just about how much money you can make. If you're miserable, it doesn't really most of the time matter how much money you make. You're not going to be hugely successful if you're really unhappy and if it's a bad fit.

Alison Monahan: Right. There are those people who do love what they're doing, and the same thing you're doing, and they will be out working morning to night and loving every second of it. And they're the ones who are going to be thriving.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think it was my summer at my BigLaw firm, we did a talk with this woman who had been a partner in this firm for many, many years. And this firm did corporate defense, products liability defense, a lot of medical device, toxic tort, all this stuff. So basically, her whole career was taking depositions of people who were hurt, or had lost somebody, or who were dying. It's sad stuff, but she was talking about it and she was like, "This is how you... Act like you're sympathetic without admitting anything." And I remember just sitting there being like, "Cool? I don't know if I want to... Do I want to do that?"

Alison Monahan: You're like, "This sounds kind of horrifying, but you seem to be good at it."

Lee Burgess: I know. I get that there's a dance to this, and I respected her dance to it. I respected that she had her way to move through the process. Now, one could say that as a summer, if I'd gone to that talk, that maybe I should've thought more about it before I accepted a job at that firm doing exactly that type of



work. But I don't think I was that wise at that age. And so I just took my job offer, and I was happy about it, and I went about my life. And then left and did something else. But you should really listen when people talk about what they do at these jobs, and make sure you want them.

Alison Monahan: Right. The classic one, no one ever asked when we said we're going into litigation if you like arguing. It's a critical question to ask yourself.

Lee Burgess: It's so true, yeah. Alright, well, the other thing that's been going on in the world, of course, is COVID. And when auditing what we've been talking about, we've done a lot of episodes since the [250th episode](#), which was about COVID. COVID was [episode number 236](#), March 24th, 2020. Wow, we've talked a lot about COVID for a long time.

Alison Monahan: We have. Yeah, at first I was like, "Oh, go back to 250 and see how many times we've mentioned COVID." And I was like, "Oh wait, these were not even the first ones we did. I've got to go back further in time."

Lee Burgess: I know, which is crazy. So, I'm hopeful that we are going to not have to talk about it as much as the world hopefully opens up. But I also hope that we don't lose some of the lessons we learned, and I think law school and the bar exam might be forever changed by COVID. It'll be interesting to see how it continues to play out.

Alison Monahan: It will be interesting, I'm just hopeful we might soon have some bandwidth for thinking about other things.

Lee Burgess: I know.

Alison Monahan: We'll see.

Lee Burgess: Exactly, yeah. And then there are topics we're surprised people don't talk to us about more, like financial stuff, scholarships.

Alison Monahan: I'm always surprised. We get a few questions from people writing in saying, "Hey, I'm considering these two options. I have money at school X and not at school Y. What do you think we should do?" I'm like, "Hey, I don't know you at all, but here's what I might think about." But beyond that, people just really don't ask these questions, at least not to us. I don't think we've ever gotten a question about student loans, for example.

Lee Burgess: No, and that's such a huge issue. We do sometimes get questions about, "Should I go into debt to go to this school? Or take a scholarship at this school? And how much debt should I incur?" But I think there's a lot about the realities of student loans, and student loan forgiveness and what it really looks like to



pay off loans, that's not very commonly discussed. I just did a guest episode with a friend of mine who's a financial coach and when we were talking about all these decisions around finances, and how people think about money and how as a student you should start thinking about this stuff – again, it was a great reminder how we don't talk about this stuff as often because people don't raise the questions to us. But it's so critical to life stability to have your finances figured out.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. The reality is, having this enormous debt has such an impact on your life, and I feel like that's one of those things people just sign up for. So I think, do your research. Think about this stuff.

Lee Burgess: Oh, and the interest rates. Oh my gosh. I had different loans that ended up getting locked in at these very different rates. I can't even remember how many years after... I was like, "When did I graduate from law school and get married?" I got married a couple of years after law school, and part of getting married is you sit down with your partner – or if you haven't done this, I would recommend doing this – and you look at your financial landscape together. And I was like, "Okay, I have this student loan at this interest rate, and this student loan that's locked at this interest rate." And he's like, "What interest rate is that first one at?" And I was like, "This interest rate?" And he's like, "That's terrible." He's like, "That should not be. We should figure out how to get out of that." And I was like, "Oh." Because I kind of accepted that that was just the interest rate that loan was at. He was like, "No, we can come up with a plan to get you out of that loan." I'm like, "Let's come up with a plan." And I'm kind of embarrassed that I didn't sit down and do that for myself.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think it's just you sign up and then it just comes out of the bank account and you never really think twice about it. But I think it's something worth thinking about. This is a lot of money that most people are borrowing to go to law school.

Lee Burgess: Yes. Any final thoughts as we wrap up? I know we're almost out of time. Three hundred episodes.

Alison Monahan: Well, yeah, I guess my final thoughts is, we've got 300 episodes you can listen to. So almost anything that you're interested in, we've probably covered at some point. I will say there are definitely topics we would like to cover more and we're thinking about and working towards covering more, but we do have a lot of content on a lot of this stuff, so go and do some research. We have a list of all 300 episodes in order, we also have them sorted out by category. So you can go back in time and hear our thoughts in the beginning of the pandemic, when I think we were freaking out.



- Lee Burgess: Yes, I was definitely freaking out in March of 2020. I also really want to encourage people to send in questions, because we do read them and they get put on a list and we talk about putting them in podcast episodes. So I really encourage people if they have stuff they're wondering about, that they should send in notes to us. We are humans that read these notes, and it means a lot to us to hear what people are thinking about. I think too, one of the other things that I hope we talk more about, but I also would like people to think more about is just professionalism. That would be my other thing that I was thinking about today, when I got an email from someone that I didn't find was particularly professional. I think I forwarded you that email.
- Alison Monahan: You did.
- Lee Burgess: I did.
- Alison Monahan: I was like, "That is pretty funny. Wouldn't have said that."
- Lee Burgess: Right, exactly. And so, I think that in this world, especially in COVID, but even as we go back to normal, this professional persona and how you communicate in writing, in email, over text... I'm the worst about text typos – that's like something I really have to work on because auto-correct and I am not friends. And thank goodness that most of the people I text don't judge me based on my text messages. But I think that that's another thing I hope we talk about a little bit more going forward. I know you and Sadie talk about it some in the job context. But one of the things to work on as you're in law school is just, what is going to be your professional voice and your professional persona? Because that's a big part of who you are as a lawyer and what's coming up next in your career.
- Alison Monahan: I think that's a great point, and it's a good time to practice. Just like everything else in law school, this is basically the practice that doesn't have that many repercussions, hopefully.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. Make sure the awkward emails get sent to people without consequences.
- Alison Monahan: Well, the other thing I've noticed too is, sometimes people are dictating in text and stuff, and a lot of the times it's just not a really direct translation of what you want to say. So you've got to check those because sometimes I get something and I'm like, "What in the world is this?"
- Lee Burgess: I know, it could be so weird. I also had the thing happen on a text exchange yesterday that auto-correct... I can't even remember what the word was, but we were texting each other, and auto-correct kept doing the wrong word to each of us. The word we were choosing, mine had an error to her and then hers had an



error back to me, because auto-correct was working against us. So you have to even proofread your text messages. Super annoying.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, that happens a lot. I'm like, "No, I actually meant to type what I typed, not what you just changed those three words to."

Lee Burgess: Right. And it's not just "duck", it's other things too.

Alison Monahan: Probably not.

Lee Burgess: Not just "duck". Oh well, anyway. Well, thanks for listening. Here's to the next 300!

Alison Monahan: Whoa, that's hard to conceive of, but maybe we'll still be here.

Lee Burgess: You never know, exactly. Alright, well, with that, 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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