



Alison Monahan: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox Podcast. Today, we're excited to have ex-BigLaw recruiter Sadie Jones here with us to talk about the basics of lateralizing. Your Law School Toolbox hosts are Alison Monahan, and typically, I'm 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 ex-BigLaw recruiter Sadie Jones back with us to talk about the basics of lateralizing, or what other industries might refer to as "finding a new job that's not your first job". So welcome, Sadie.

Sadie Jones: Thanks for having me back.

Alison Monahan: My pleasure. Well, to start us off, what does the legal industry mean by "lateralizing"? Is this something only within BigLaw, or are people leaving BigLaw? What does this even mean? And why is there even a word for it?

Sadie Jones: So, I would say it's really anything that you're switching jobs from your first job to another job. So, once you have your job out of law school, then anything after that is a lateral move, and it just means that you have some kind of legal experience before you've moved. It could be anywhere in your career, and as long as you've already had one job out of law school, and it could be anywhere. I think the term may be more common in BigLaw, and you're referring to specific people with certain kind of experience, but I would consider a lateral move anything at all to any job.

Alison Monahan: Right. And here we're not really talking about a clerkship. We are kind of talking about that first real job after you clerk, if you clerked straight out of school.

Sadie Jones: Exactly. I consider that more kind of a tag-on to school, I'd say. So, it would be after the job after your clerkship.

Alison Monahan: Right. Well, assuming someone starts off as a law firm associate – because I think you're right, this is probably most commonly used in that context, is where people will probably hear it – when do they typically start looking at lateral options?

Sadie Jones: Well, I don't know if I could say there's an exact typical, but generally year three, year four, I would say a lot of people are starting to move. There's going to be



the outliers that maybe only have a year of experience and move, and either something went wrong, maybe they move with a partner that's at the firm that's moving. But usually around year three or four, you're sort of either going to stay on partner track and you're going to try to make it – if we're talking about BigLaw, or you're looking at other options.

Alison Monahan: Right, that's what I've always heard, that by the time you're a third year, you should definitely be thinking about this. And what are some of the options that people are typically looking at?

Sadie Jones: I would say it's probably different whether you're a transactional or a litigation, but some things are the same. So, in-house is obviously a popular option.

Alison Monahan: Let me stop you there. What does that even mean, for people who are like, "That sounds great. What, in-house, like I'm going home, I'm working from home?" What are we talking about?

Sadie Jones: Good question. To back up, "in-house" means working for a company. So basically you're on the client side. So if you're at a law firm, you're being hired by the in-house attorneys at a company to help them with their legal issues, and so it would be like you're on the client side.

Alison Monahan: Right. I just wanted to clarify that, because sometimes we throw these terms around and people probably having no idea what we're talking about. What a lot people don't realize is a lot of law firms are working for companies, but a lot of these companies also have in-house counsel. So there are certain things that they do fairly routinely, and then the less routine stuff, like they get sued by someone and they need to go to trial or whatever it is – they'll actually hire the outside law firm. So, depending on the type of work you do, you might actually work directly with clients, or with lawyers in your client's business. And so it's kind of an interesting mix. You mentioned a minute ago, your options may vary depending on if you're a litigation person or a transactional person. Can you talk a little bit more about that?

Sadie Jones: Sure. So, I would say that in-house might be particularly popular for transactional attorneys. There are a lot of in-house options versus if you're a litigator, you may have a wider variety of options. So you may look at government work, there may be other things outside of that. I would say that transactional, it's sort of an easier transition to be in-house, so that's maybe where I would draw the distinction. But there are litigators obviously in-house, like you said, who are working on if you get sued, if you're going to go to trial, that kind of thing.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. And I think more and more a lot of tech companies have a large in-house staff of people who used to be litigators working on things like anti-trust stuff



and privacy things that they don't necessarily want to fully outsource. So, I think certainly the reputation has always been that it's much easier to go in-house on the transactional side, but I think that might be shifting at least somewhat.

Sadie Jones: Definitely. And something that's kind of interesting about the in-house option is, you may go and work for one of your clients on the other side. And I think there might be sort of a misconception if you don't know much about this process, that a law firm would feel like, "Oh, you're leaving us, you're quitting, you're going to work somewhere else." But it's actually great, and law firms love that, and then they have one of their own inside. You have your relationships at the law firm, and so they're hoping that you're going to continue to give them business. So it's a really good thing and looked on positively.

Alison Monahan: Right, because law firms expect that most people are going to leave.

Sadie Jones: And they need you to leave.

Alison Monahan: Right, that is the business model actually, they can't really have people sticking around. Out of a class of 100 people, a handful, if that, of those people might make partner, so all these other people are going to disperse. And depending on the firm, some of them really support their alumni and whatnot and really keep them close; other ones don't so much. But it's always a good thing, like you said. I'm thinking who would be good on a pitch business at a tech company or something for a case we were looking to get on to. People are waving to their old associates in the hallway, it's like get the special thumbs up. Obviously, you had an inside line on that work as an outside firm.

Sadie Jones: Definitely. And where I think that law students and junior associates sometimes miss the boat on these things is that they're not thinking about this when they start, or from the beginning. And so, a situation that can be difficult is that you get past the third or fourth year and you sort of think you might be making partner or think you're going for that, and that's not really going to happen for you. And so, you can get past this point where it can sometimes be harder to lateral, especially if you want to go in-house or you want a certain kind of position, and it's almost like you're too experienced for what you'd be able to get. So I would just tell everybody to really sort of think about what your strategy might be. And you don't need to know this right away going into it, but I would definitely be thinking about that in year two.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I've heard that you're most marketable for things like in-house positions between year three and year six or so. Do you think that's around accurate?

Sadie Jones: Absolutely. I think year seven, year eight, it gets a lot harder.



- Alison Monahan: Yeah, because I think people start thinking, "Oh, what's going on here? Are they just kind of stuck? Did they think they were up for partner and then they got passed over? Why are they getting passed over?" I just think it becomes harder. Depending on the firm, they may have people to talk to you about this sort of thing, but I think a lot of firms just leave you to your own devices, and suddenly people who've just had their heads down working for six or seven years look up and it's like, "Oh, what happened? Where did my options go?"
- Sadie Jones: Absolutely. And also, sometimes you need to take a hint, which is like they may be counseling you into doing this sort of thing. So you should listen to that feedback if you're getting it.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. How can people figure out if they really have a shot at making partner or not? what kind of signals do firms send?
- Sadie Jones: Not always direct ones, I would say, so some of it may be sort of reading the tea leaves. But I think you know if there's a partner who's on your team who's telling you that they're going to be helping you and pushing you along, and they're going to be your mentor and they're going to be your sponsor. So that's one way to know. Do you have that person? Do you even have anyone like that on your team? If you don't...
- Alison Monahan: You also have to look at, does that person realistically have the power to get this done?
- Sadie Jones: Definitely, it's not just like somebody likes you.
- Alison Monahan: Right. You can have people love you, and they're like, "Yeah, they're great", but you realize they're a junior partner who doesn't have the ability to actually come into the partner meeting when this is being decided and say, "This person is critical to my team, they have to be made partner." Nobody's going to listen to them at that point.
- Sadie Jones: Absolutely. I also just think what's the kind of feedback you're getting, because usually you're going to get at least one review a year, if not more. And so, sometimes they will directly tell you whether you have a future, what your path is. It depends on the law firm. But I would listen carefully to what that all is.
- Alison Monahan: Right, and I think probably having somebody to work with on the outside is probably a good idea, to kind of bounce these off of, "Well, this is what they said. What do you hear there?"
- Sadie Jones: Exactly, because you might be too close to it and you're just like, "Well, they like my work. They said I was doing a good job." But that's not all you need.



- Alison Monahan: Right, and there may be options. I don't want to say they're exactly lateral, but even within a firm, if you're not going to be a partner, you might be able to be like counsel position. I think people just need to be aware of what options exist for them and which of these seem appealing, which of these seem feasible, because just thinking that, "Oh, I'm starting as an associate, my career set" is not really how this works.
- Sadie Jones: I also think that the entire system, especially if we're talking about BigLaw, is sort of confusing and misleading in terms of the salary, because your salary starts so high and continues to go up every single year. You hit this point where maybe you expect that, and so, to be clear, the in-house positions are going to pay less. That's just the way it is, and the government positions, and probably all your other choices are going to pay you less.
- Alison Monahan: And definitely non-profit positions.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah. But they're going to give you probably a better quality of life and probably more job security in a lot of ways, and you may have more of a future to move up, and in some companies there might be stock options. So, there are other things that make those jobs appealing. And then in terms of staying at the law firm, those counsel positions are not going to be like partner positions, but they're also going to have less of the business development component attached to them. Again, you may have more job security. So you may feel like you're sort of taking a cut or not moving up, but you need to think about long-term. It's just like the system doesn't continue the way it does for that first few years.
- Alison Monahan: Right. As with transactional litigation, there are certain practice areas that are more conducive to having a counsel position. If you're in a very specialized area that's useful, but not super lucrative for the firm and you're not developing huge amounts of business out of it, that might be a very nice life for your life, nice career where you don't have the stresses of being a partner, but you're still making a decent salary and doing work that maybe is less stressful and more interesting to you.
- Sadie Jones: Definitely. So I think you really need to look at the bigger picture and how this is all going to work out. And also, however you can, you should be trying to budget and think about your finances when you're making more towards the beginning, is something else to think about.
- Alison Monahan: Definitely. I remember the judge I worked for was like, "Don't take on a huge mortgage when you're working in a law firm, because you want to be able to quit when you want to quit."



- Sadie Jones: Exactly. I also know a lot of people who pay off more of their loans at the beginning, and then they feel this freedom later, because they can live off just a normal salary.
- Alison Monahan: Right, yeah, people might stay like five years at a firm and pay off all of their student loans in that timeframe. So I think these are just things to be thinking of, rather than drifting into this and be like, "Cool, I'm set up forever." That's not how this works.
- Sadie Jones: Exactly. And don't let these things just happen to you. You have control over it, you can sort of think ahead about your career and where you want to go and where you want to end up, and planning for it early is going to be better.
- Alison Monahan: I agree. Well, on that note, once people have been associates for not really very much time, they're probably going to start getting calls from legal recruiters. Do you think these people are worth paying attention to, and when should people start paying attention to them?
- Sadie Jones: This is hard, I have a lot of mixed feelings about this. I don't think you shouldn't pay attention to them; I think you should be discerning about who you feel comfortable with, and you feel you can trust, and you feel is telling you the truth. They will sell you on things, they will tell you jobs that don't exist, they will submit your stuff to people that you haven't given them permission to submit your stuff to, sometimes. All of that can happen, I would be careful. I would make sure that everything's in writing, that you've said, "This is okay." I've seen all sorts of weird things happen. So that's number one. Number two is, a firm would always rather not pay a recruiter to hire you. So if you apply directly, they will see your stuff, it doesn't mean anything more than a recruiter sent it to them. The recruiter will tell you that they're giving you something, that they have these relationships, that they're going to get you in the door. That's never been my experience. So, applying on a website for a lateral job gets you seen in the exact same way, and if anything, you're minus \$40,000 to \$100,000, so that's a positive. And a lot of firms when they're cutting their budgets just say that they don't work with recruiters. So, I think you just need to think about those things. That being said, I don't think there's anything wrong with having a conversation.
- Alison Monahan: Right. I think someone who's really good at what they do as a recruiter, at least has a pulse of what the market's like. And I think you're right, you've got to be careful. Is this person telling you a realistic assessment of things, or are they just telling you what you want to hear to get your resume? But I think people just get inundated with recruiter calls, and I think you're better off finding one person that you like and just telling everyone else you're already working with someone or whatnot. Because I think you're right, there are going to be more jobs that are outside of that context necessarily than within only that context. It



doesn't seem like any firm would ever be like, "Oh, we're only posting this position with the recruiter."

Sadie Jones: Right, because they don't really do retained searches with a recruiter where they're only working with that person. So if they tell you that, that's probably not true. Maybe for partners...

Alison Monahan: Certainly not these types of positions.

Sadie Jones: Exactly, it wouldn't make any sense. And sometimes they only work with recruiters for people who are at a certain level, where they feel like they need that person to vet them. So, I would also look on the website and the job posting, make sure there's a posting that they say they have a job at this place and it should be posted. And it should say whether they're working with recruiters. So I would even go as far as looking at that. And also, it would be a good idea to look on LinkedIn, see if you know anyone who knows that recruiter, see if somebody else worked with them and can tell you that they liked them, I think is always a good idea.

Alison Monahan: And I think it also could be different if you're actively looking to make a transition, versus just kind of passively, you're a third year, and so now you're kind of thinking about this. If you definitely need to get a job in a different city or something for personal reasons, that might be a reason to work with someone in that area.

Sadie Jones: Definitely. I was going to say if you're moving cities, then I think it makes a lot of sense, and they may know the market better. So try to find someone that you trust and believe in. I just think there's a misconception that just applying for a job yourself is not going to get you seen, and that's not true.

Alison Monahan: Right. You also want to make sure your materials are up to snuff. If you haven't written a resume since you graduated from law school, one way or the other, you probably want to have some work done on that, but you can do that independently as well.

Sadie Jones: Yeah. And I would get maybe a few opinions on the resume. Don't just let the recruiter say that's good or that's it. I would probably get a few people to look at it and see what they think.

Alison Monahan: Definitely. Well, on that note, when people are trying to lateral within BigLaw – so, from one firm to another – what is the new firm really looking for?

Sadie Jones: Well, first of all, they're going to look at all the stuff they looked at when you first came in, is my experience. So they are going to look at what law school you went to, they're going to see your grades. They're still going to look at that. It



becomes less important as you get more experience. It sort of fades into the background more and more, and it's going to matter more and more what your experience is. So they're going to look at what firm you were at, what group you were in, what kind of experience you have, have you hit these milestones they expect for your level? They may even look at the partners that you were working with, which may be known depending on what the practice group is. So, your experience is going to be the most important, but they're also going to expect an explanation of why you're leaving. So, if you've been at your first job for six months, it's going to be hard to explain that.

Alison Monahan: Well, let's talk about that a little bit. What are people typically looking for when they decide to transition? Why might somebody want to do this?

Sadie Jones: What's the real reason or what's the reason you want to say to somebody?

Alison Monahan: Well, I'm not saying like six months in; obviously there's a problem there. But say somebody who's been at a firm for three years – what's the point of moving to a different firm?

Sadie Jones: Right, and sometimes there is no point. So if it's just like, "Oh, I didn't like this BigLaw firm, I think the other one will be different" – I would caution you that BigLaw tends to be sort of similar. There may be a place where the personalities just don't fit. But typical reasons are, one, you're moving cities or something like that. You may want to move to a different group. You may not be getting the experience you want. Maybe they have kind of indicated that you don't have a future there. It may depend on your class size, who the other people were in your class. Some of it's kind of out of your control. But typically, I would say they just either want different experience, want to try something else. And a lot of times people will try, let's say, two BigLaw firms to see if, again, maybe it's different, to see if BigLaw is the right move for them. And then if that second one isn't right, they'll make a totally different decision.

Alison Monahan: Right. And you touched on this earlier – say somebody's like, "Okay, I've done one or two BigLaw jobs, I realize this is probably not my path forward." You mentioned they're probably going to take a salary cut, but what are the reasons people transition out of BigLaw?

Sadie Jones: For lifestyle reasons, I think is the first, that they can't keep up with the kind of schedule of BigLaw. And then also just that they're not on the partner track, and so they're not going to make that. And so they need to find something that's going to sustain them long-term.

Alison Monahan: Right. I think people just have to be realistic here. If you're getting the signals that partner track is not for you, it's not for most people, so that's not really something that you need to feel bad about. But I do think you have to be





realistic and not get stuck in that kind of purgatory of being an eighth year who doesn't have any other job and suddenly is scrambling to find something.

Sadie Jones: Exactly. Just remember that it's a really small percentage of people that are going to make partner in your class. So, that's most likely not going to happen and you need to think about what you're going to do for the next 30 years.

Alison Monahan: Right, and more and more firms are actually taking lateral partners, which a lot of them used to never do. So there may be that no one in your incoming class ends up being a partner at this firm, because they just hire people from other firms who were already partners. Well, before we run out of time, can you give people some tips for setting yourself up for a successful lateral process, whether you think this is going to be to a different firm or in-house or government or non-profit? What should people be thinking about in terms of making this successful down the road?

Sadie Jones: Well, one, always keep your resume updated. You should constantly be updating as you come up with new things that you need to add to it, so that's available given the right opportunity. And always keep networking and keep that up whether or not you know you're going to move, so that you're not in some kind of rush if you need to – so, your relationships, and it might include getting to know a recruiter, that kind of thing. And then also I just suggest that you have your story straight and you know what you're telling the firm, and in no way are you bad mouthing where you are. So, just to keep it positive.

Alison Monahan: One thing someone suggested, which I admit I didn't do, but I later, in retrospect, wish that I had done, was really any time that you got a new type of assignment – whether that was a case or you did something on that case, you took a deposition, you defended a deposition, you wrote a brief, you did this, you did that – just to write that down someplace, so then when you need it later, you have it at your fingertips, versus trying to think back like, "Oh well, two years ago at that clerkship, what exactly did I do?" I thought that was a really good advice that I wish that I had followed.

Sadie Jones: Definitely. And I would specifically make note of anything that's sort of impressive or is a big deal, a milestone, that kind of thing.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and you mentioned that briefly earlier, but a lot of firms actually have things that they think you should be doing at certain times, a lot of them have a list. And part of your professional development is that if you're a litigator, you're essentially going down that list every year and saying, "Well, have you defended a deposition? Have you taken a deposition? What have you done?" And so, I think people should try to have access to something like that and see if you're hitting those different milestones, because if not, when you look to lateral people are going to ask you these questions and it's like, "Well, how are you a



fourth year and you've never defended a deposition as a litigator? That doesn't make sense."

Sadie Jones: Yeah, and I would say that those things can sometimes sort of snowball, because you haven't done it and everyone thinks you've done it, and then you're sort of hiding that you haven't done it. So, try to catch that early, because I did notice there were some people who were way too senior to have never done a depo, and they sort of didn't know what to do about it and they were kind of faking it.

Alison Monahan: Right, and it's hard if you're that person that everybody just thinks, "Oh yeah, I'm sure they've done that", and then you haven't, and then you don't know how, and you haven't been trained on it. It's one of those things you often just get thrown into at some point. I remember they just basically told me to go defend some deposition. I'm like, "I don't know how to do that." They're like, "Here's a book." Actually, I think I was taking part of the deposition. I was like, "I don't know how to take a deposition, I never took trial advocacy", and they're like, "Well, you've got a cross-country flight. Read this book about it." And it wasn't a big deal. It was a huge joint defense group, I asked like five questions, but at least I could say, "Yes, I've taken a deposition."

Sadie Jones: And I think we've talked about this before, but pro bono can be a good opportunity to get that kind of experience.

Alison Monahan: Oh, definitely, yeah. So I think you've got to think creatively and try to understand what people would be looking for in terms of your career development when they think about hiring you a few years down the road, because you don't want to just be like, "Well, all I've done is document review." That's not going to get you very far.

Sadie Jones: Exactly. Also, I would say though be careful that you're not over-selling what you've done, because I've seen that also. One, people don't necessarily believe it, and so you don't look honest, and then two, you don't want to end up in a situation where you're way over your head.

Alison Monahan: Right, yeah, you definitely have to be careful. And hopefully, the firm, wherever you're working, has training opportunities too. That's also a valid way to say, "I haven't personally done this, but I did this week-long trial scenario where we practiced all of these things." It's like, "Okay, cool. That's better than nothing." And don't lie about it.

Sadie Jones: Exactly. And generally, most people at certain levels are going to have done similar things. Again, there are outliers, but generally it sort of works out.

Alison Monahan: Right. Alright, well, any final thoughts on this topic?



- Sadie Jones: Just that this is something – I think I've said before – but that you should think about early, and I just feel like isn't told to associate soon enough, and that they're not necessarily being prepared for the future. You're the only one who can kind of take control of your career. And so, just know that at some point you are going to lateral, and I would think about it sooner rather than later.
- Alison Monahan: Right, because even if you don't, if you end up being a partner, maybe you still want to lateral at some point to be a better partner. People are always looking to upgrade.
- Sadie Jones: Exactly. I think being a partner used to be sort of a lifelong position back in the day, and then it's not like that anymore.
- Alison Monahan: Right, people are always looking for that next step. And the reality is, a lot of people move in and out of places too. So if you are someone who's in a law firm and maybe you go in-house to work for a particular government, and then that government changes, you might then go back to a law firm as a partner, these kinds of things. People are often moving back and forth in ways that I think aren't necessarily that transparent.
- Sadie Jones: Absolutely.
- Alison Monahan: Alright, well, thank you so much for joining us.
- Sadie Jones: Thanks for having me.
- Alison Monahan: Our pleasure. With that, we are out of time. For more career help and the opportunity to work one-on-one with us, you can check out [CareerDicta.com](https://www.careerdicta.com). If you enjoyed this episode of the Law School Toolbox podcast, please take a second to leave review and rating on your favorite listening app, we would really appreciate it. And be sure to subscribe so you don't miss anything. If you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to reach out to Lee or Alison at [lee@lawschooltoolbox.com](mailto:lee@lawschooltoolbox.com) or [alison@lawschooltoolbox.com](mailto:alison@lawschooltoolbox.com). Or you can always contact us via our website [contact form](https://www.lawschooltoolbox.com/contact) at LawSchoolToolbox.com. Thanks for listening, and we'll talk soon!

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