



- Lee Burgess: Welcome to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today we're talking about starting law school. Your Law School Toolbox hosts are Alison Monahan and Lee Burgess, that's me. We're here to demystify the law school and early legal career experience, so you'll be the best law student and lawyer you can be. We're the co-creators of the [Law School Toolbox](#), the [Bar Exam Toolbox](#), and the career-related website [CareerDicta](#). Alison also runs [The Girl's Guide to Law School](#). If you enjoy the show, please leave a review on your favorite listening app. And if you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to us. You can reach us via the [contact form](#) on LawSchoolToolBox.com, and we'd love to hear from you. And with that, let's get started.
- Alison Monahan: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today we're talking about starting law school in these, shall we say, interesting times. Well, Lee, can you believe we're still having basically the same conversation? I really didn't think that this is what we would be doing when I thought about this earlier in the summer.
- Lee Burgess: No. Back in May, we just had such high hopes for normalcy, but it all seems to be crumbling around us right now.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. Even like early July, everything was looking good. And I'm like, "Great! Everybody's going to be back in person, no problem. We're talking to law students, everybody's excited." Now, we're just kind of in the middle of it again. I guess it is what it is.
- Lee Burgess: It is what it is. But it's just awful. I really feel for everybody who is heading back to law school, because I think a lot of people probably deferred due to COVID and thinking this year was going to be better. And I think it is going to be better maybe than last year, but I'm sure that there's still a lot of uncertainty around the start of law school.
- Alison Monahan: Right. Or even people who did one year and they were totally virtual and now they're coming back and it's sort of the reality, the real law school almost happening again. But we're not talking about those people today, we're talking about the people who are just coming in for the first time. So, let's talk about law school. Well, we've got a lot of content on this. Frankly, people can go and listen to a bunch of ideas we have for incoming law students, but let's run through a list, so you don't have to go backwards in time. And we'll also talk about how COVID is impacting some of these things. So Lee, what's first on your list of things you should be thinking about as you begin law school?
- Lee Burgess: Well, I think you really want to make sure that you have your life in order. So hopefully, if you're starting school in the next few days or weeks, it's very clear about what your school environment is going to be like. And I'm going to guess that you're still going to end up doing a lot of work from home, even if you're



going to school. So you want to make sure that your home life, your housing is set up, you've got a workspace in your house, you have a plan for feeding yourself, not just pizza. How you're going to take care of yourself physically – are you going to take walks, go exercise, all of that stuff. And I think that what makes this year continuing to be unique is that you have to do all of this stuff knowing that there could be COVID restrictions on them, even if you're vaccinated. Although many people may have wanted to go to the school gym, that might not feel comfortable for you. So what's going to be your option? I did an online yoga class today in my office before doing podcasting. Zen! But I have to say that I've gotten kind of used to it and I actually enjoy it. I never used to do that kind of stuff before COVID, but I think we have a lot more options for taking care of ourselves in our home spaces than we used to have.

Alison Monahan: No, I think it's a great point. We do always talk about this kind of top of the list, and I think sometimes that confuses people. We have to like, "But what about reading cases?" And it's like, "Well, yeah, but you can't do any of that unless you're in a certain physical and mental state to be able to focus and be present and that kind of thing." So, even if it might seem boring, I think if you're... We just talk to so many people who end up having problems their first semester, and it's basically because their life was in chaos. So issues with their transportation or housing or relationships or whatever it might be, but that kind of chaos can just really cause a lot of turmoil in your actual academic life. And I'm thinking now you probably may not be able to go to the library to study, the library may not be open. All these places, all these things I did in law school to kind of stay sane and break up my day and break up the monotony of reading case after case after case, I would do that in lots of different places. Maybe for a few hours it would be a coffee shop, and then I might go to a different library that wasn't the law library. And a lot of that is probably not immediately going to be accessible to people, unfortunately.

Lee Burgess: Or you have to wear masks inside depending on where you're at school. And so for me, maybe it's worth it to be able to be in class and wear a mask. I mean, my kids do it, I'm pretty sure that as a grown-up, we can all do it. However, I probably don't want to... I used to hang out at the library for five hours or six hours a day.

Alison Monahan: I'm thinking like a large portion of my day was spent either in a coffee place or a library.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And also if you are COVID conservative, I also like to think about a lot of these decisions, where am I going to put my risk? Every activity has a risk level. Sure, there's going to be risk to doing class and other things that you want and need to do in-person, but maybe you feel safer by studying in your home bubble, but then you also need to have a good place to do that. You don't want to just be doing that on the couch or you'll start developing bizarre body



problems from just studying on the couch. Maybe even if you were able to pull that stuff off in undergrad, as we age, it's just not as easy to study and work for as long as you do during law school, unless you have a good ergonomic setup to take care of yourself.

Alison Monahan: Yes. This is all the not super interesting stuff, like do you have a good ergonomic chair? And places like [Craigslist](#) can actually be a good place to get those, it doesn't have to be something brand new or even something super expensive. But it probably shouldn't be a dining chair that you're going to be sitting in for 8 to 12 hours a day while you're reading and doing other things. And it probably shouldn't be, like you said, a couch or a lounge chair. You need something that is actually supportive or you're going to end up with carpal tunnel and neck problems, all of these things. And again, that's just not great for your academic focus.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Other places that are great to find furniture and things like that, that I just recently started using [Nextdoor](#) for this.

Alison Monahan: I've heard good things.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. A lot of people are posting stuff on Nextdoor, as well as [Buy Nothing](#) groups on Facebook. But the bummer about Buy Nothing is it can take you a while to get accepted to the group, whereas it can be very quick to get onto Nextdoor, so you might be able to even accumulate stuff much faster because there won't be the lag that some of the Facebook groups have.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I just gave something away on [Freecycle](#) actually.

Lee Burgess: That one I haven't used.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, well, it has both – people are looking for things and people are offering things. It's kind of ironic because I was cleaning my garage, as I think you know, and I came across these big pieces of plastic that were designed to go under your office chair, but I'd changed the carpet. They're like four feet wide type of thing, so they're big and they're kind of bulky. And I was looking at them and thinking, "Man, this is probably something nobody would ever want. I don't know. How am I going to be get rid of this?" And I just happened to open one of the emails from the Freecycle, and someone was looking for them. Exactly that. And so, he came and got both of them and now they're out of my life and this guy is happy and everybody's happy.

Lee Burgess: Yes, I have been doing a parallel garage cleanout project, and it is amazing what other people need and get excited about.



- Alison Monahan: And he seems thrilled. He's like, "Yeah, I've got this office, it's U-shaped. You've got two of them, this is going to be perfect." I'm like, "Great. Take them off my hands and use them. I am very happy for you."
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. So, you really don't need, or even should, invest a ton of money in setting up a home workspace, but you want to have one. So if you don't have one set up, that would probably be one of my first things to think about as you're getting ready for school. But as someone who did maybe study a little too much at my dining chair and my tiny table that I got off of Craigslist for \$15, I wouldn't recommend it. Even my 25-year-old self, I just wouldn't recommend it.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. I did most of my reading on our dining table that we bought for 100 bucks at IKEA with chairs and table. It was fine. It was actually not that terrible because at least it was a tiny little room and I was the only one in there. I kind of claimed it, because I had two roommates. I claimed it as my 7:00 PM to 10:00 PM reading zone, and no one really bothered me. But it definitely was not the most comfortable chair to sit in long-term. I also had a desk chair in my actual bedroom. So if I was writing or something, I would use that.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. The other thing – and we've talked about this on other podcasts – is just to get your life in order to automate as much as you can, so you don't have to spend time paying bills or keeping track of something. You should be able to automate your rent, to automate all your bills. Just automate, automate, automate and get it all set up, so you just really don't have to constantly be thinking about things. The other thing that I think can be helpful as far as getting your life in order is really think about how you're going to track your to-do list. I personally have been nerding out this week on this [blog post I read about using Gmail as your to-do list](#).
- Alison Monahan: I saw you sent something about that, but frankly, I did not open and read.
- Lee Burgess: That's okay, because you're better with your to-do list than I am with mine. I keep breaking up with all of my to-do lists. But one of the things that reminded me was, you've got to have a solid way to capture things that need to be done, especially as your life gets busier and busier. So if you don't have a system in place for that and you're starting school in the next few weeks, I would suggest that you try some different systems and see what works for you, because you're going to need to make sure stuff doesn't fall through the cracks.
- Alison Monahan: Right, there's going to be a lot of things of varying degrees of difficulty and varying degrees of importance that you need to do. And some of the things aren't hard, but they are important. If you don't file a certain piece of paper, bad things may happen. So, it's just all this stuff. I typically do some combination of an online version on Trello, and then I have a handwritten version that I kind



of do every few days to kind of get the brain dumpout, which has resulted in my office being a pile of notes at this point, but...

Lee Burgess: That's a side note, the cleanliness of your workspace.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I do think there's actually something to be said about blocking out some time every week, even if it's 30 minutes, just to kind of tidy up your workspace, go through all these papers that accumulate. All this stuff, it can kind of weigh you down and make you not want to be in that space. So again, it sounds ridiculous to say this is a key to success in law school, but I think it is actually worth looking at.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think it is, and just committing to something and really trying it out. At some point, you just have to have a system in place.

Alison Monahan: And have your process.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, you've got to have your process. And so for me, one of the things I had been doing – which is why I got so obsessed with this blog post that we'll link to in the show notes, because maybe someone else will share my obsession – is, I frequently, when I'm out and about in the world, email myself to-do's, but then they get lost in the disaster that is my inbox.

Alison Monahan: Oh my gosh, Lee, do you not realize I set you up a Trello board you can email to?

Lee Burgess: You did. The problem is I just don't, because it's faster, because I'm in the email. I know. See, the thing is, you solved this problem for me, and I couldn't do it.

Alison Monahan: No, this is how I solve the problem. This is literally how I organize my life, is I can email to that board and it just pops up immediately in my email, and I'll just CC that email address. Sometimes I'll send it to myself thinking I'll do it or whatever, but I always CC it because literally, I'll go in two days later and be like, "What in the world is this about? Oh, right. That was that thing I was supposed to do." Got to have it.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I know, you've got to have it. We have another great [blog post](#) that we have talked about before, about Trello being a great way to manage your to-do list. But you got to come up with a system. And if your system stopped working for you, you've got to pivot. So really, the reality is practice, do some research, try things out, but you have to be able to track all of your responsibilities in your life in one place.

Alison Monahan: Right. And that's long-term and short-term, which is kind of what makes this challenging, but there are ways to handle the onslaught. And the sooner you get



good at this, the better because it's not something that goes away when you start being a lawyer; it just accelerates. You have more things to keep track of.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, and then the more complicated your life is outside of work, it just gets crazier and crazier.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Even things like shared calendars with partners and stuff like that. Get all of that set up now.

Lee Burgess: Oh yeah, learn Google Calendar. How powerful is that? It really is amazing, all the different types of calendars, sharing calendars with people, it's great. You can have a study group calendar. The options are endless, but you've got to understand your technology and be able to use it to collaborate. Alright, you also need to get all of your support system in place. So, these are setting expectations with friends and families. If you have a therapist, you should be deciding how you're going to meet with them. If you don't have a therapist, you're probably going to find out if your school has free therapy. But I think it is important to make sure that you have people to go to when there are difficult moments. Maybe you have a coach, maybe you learn about the options at school. Do they have TAs? Do they have tutors? What does their academic support office look like? How do you talk to professors? Has any of this changed in COVID times, because even the way people interact with professors may depend? I'm guessing schools in different parts of the country are going to have different models.

Alison Monahan: Oh yeah, I'm guessing that's true.

Lee Burgess: Oh yeah, guessing that's true. So, make sure that you just understand what your support options are, because I think everyone is going to want some sort of support in some way during school. And so, you want to make sure that you have all that laid out. And especially if you move to a new location if you don't have a doctor, understand what student services is going to be, because you might get a sinus infection. It's not just about COVID, it's just about what do you do if you need a prescription for something? Who are you going to go to?

Alison Monahan: Right. At one point I got really horrible food poisoning and had to go to Student Health and get an IV and I'm like, "Okay, great, this is exciting." These things happen.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I got food poisoning a couple of weeks ago from a salad. The worst. The worst.

Alison Monahan: Very true.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I hadn't been sick since 2019, but the salad brought me down.



- Alison Monahan: Well, there you go. Only eat pizza. That's the takeaway here.
- Lee Burgess: Exactly. Don't eat the kale. Don't eat the kale.
- Alison Monahan: No leafy greens, they're dangerous.
- Lee Burgess: No leafy greens from a restaurant.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. There's good evidence that they've done studies of people who are in school and they found that people who kind of think ahead of time, like, "What would I do if this particular problem arose?" – actually tend to be more successful when the type of problem does arise. So you might think like, "Well, what if I'm midway into the semester, and I'm not understanding a concept? Who would I go to for that?" And if you think about it now, that's almost inevitably going to happen, so then you have your toolbox of like, "Oh well, I thought I could go to my study group or my TA or my professor, academic support, or get a tutor. These are all things I'm going to look at." So that you're not just kind of like, "Oh my gosh, I don't understand it. There's nothing I can do."
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, it's very true. The other thing you want to think about is what other life things might come up and make sure that... I would handle them in the early part of the semester. So I'm thinking about cars. Do you have a car that's going to need a smog check? Did you move to a different place where that becomes difficult?
- Alison Monahan: Register it.
- Lee Burgess: Do you have to go to the DMV and get a real ID? All of these life things can really feel big when you're very busy, and also feel very big in the COVID world when these different periods of time happen. So right now, we live in the Bay area and we are in the middle of the same Delta spike that is happening other places. There are appointments that I made, assuming I can just get everything handled right now, and I'm choosing to delay things, waiting for this to pass. And so you also don't want to leave things to the last minute, and then have to take care of things in an environment you don't want to take care of them. So maybe if you know you have to go to the dentist in a few months, look for a good time to go and then just get it off your list. I'm going to delay my dentist appointment again. I know you don't agree with me on this, but I don't want to go right now in the Delta surge. And now I feel bad, because I should have gone when things were much better a couple of months ago.
- Alison Monahan: Well, you can always go to my new dentist who makes you do a test beforehand, so I felt pretty confident about that.



- Lee Burgess: Yeah, well, we might get there.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, they're good. I trust the dentist, but I did switch dentists because I didn't trust the first one I was going to. But yeah, the other thing you can think about if you're a student is, "How much of this can wait until winter break?" Your teeth are probably not going to fall out of your head. If you don't get your dentist appointment done now, you could probably do it when you're not in school. It's probably okay.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, that's true, but don't add it and then be all stressed out about it. Just decide you're going to table it. I think that's one of the things. Just making the decision and moving it off your plate is so important, because decision fatigue is no joke. And I think that if you are constantly having to make all these tiny little life decisions when you're also trying to learn a new skill, it can be a lot.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, it's currently driving me nuts because my health insurance people keep telling me I need to do something, and I'm perfectly willing to do this thing and make an appointment for it in October, but they haven't opened their calendar that far yet.
- Lee Burgess: Oh, it's annoying.
- Alison Monahan: And they just keep sending me... I'm like, "I would do this. I would put it on the schedule if you would let me, but you won't, so stop bothering me about it."
- Lee Burgess: Totally, I don't want to respond to these things.
- Alison Monahan: Mailing me something in the mail when you've already left me a voicemail and sent emails is not going to make me do it. I've actually checked the website; it's literally not possible to schedule when I want to schedule yet.
- Lee Burgess: Great.
- Alison Monahan: Like, leave me alone. It does become annoying, and every time I see one of these things I'm like, "Oh, I still haven't managed to do this, but it's not my fault."
- Lee Burgess: Totally. Okay, so you've got to get your life in order, get your support network in place, try and remove as many distractions from the semester time as you can. You also need to kind of figure out from an academic perspective what exams are going to look like. I think this is one of the big mistakes 1Ls make, is they don't really appreciate what the end game is in the beginning. So, you want to make sure that you're listening and reading your syllabi and things like that if they have that information. Or if not, figure out how you're going to get that



information, either by talking to your professor, getting a mentor that might be older, going to TAs, going to meet with the professor. But you need to understand what the end game is when you get ready to start studying.

- Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. And if people literally have no idea what an essay exam in law school might look like, they can go listen to our favorite unappreciated [episode of the podcast](#) that we did many moons ago, where Lee and I actually go through an exam, talk about it. We will link to that episode, it's really one of our favorites, it gets very few listens. So if you listen to it, you'll probably be ahead of the curve.
- Lee Burgess: And it makes us happy, because I was really proud of that episode, but I don't know why people aren't as excited about it.
- Alison Monahan: Well, it probably sounds boring to them.
- Lee Burgess: Maybe. Boring but important.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. But I think the point is, you don't want to, for the first time look at what you're going to be asked to do on an exam a few weeks beforehand. That's too late.
- Lee Burgess: No. Too late.
- Alison Monahan: And a lot of people do. Even I, halfway through the semester or something, I think I started looking at some practice tests to be like, "Oh okay." But you get so focused on the day-to-day of class and what you're talking about that it can really I think confuse people about what, as you said, the end game is. So the end game is not, "Can you tell me the holding of case X, Y or Z?" That's not what we're asking. It's, "Can you synthesize and use this information and apply it to a new set of facts?" And so that's something that if you understand what you're going to be asked to do, I think it would inform a lot of the decisions people make throughout the semester, in terms of what are you highlighting in your class notes, what are you putting in your briefs if you're doing them? All of these kinds of things, so that you make sure you're really learning the material in a way that's going to be useful.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, because you need to build in time in your schedule to do what we call "[deep work](#)". You have to do all the busy work too, but the deep work is really when you're synthesizing the information, when you're doing the practice hypos. But how do you know what kind of practice you're supposed to be doing if you don't understand what the exam's going to look like?
- Alison Monahan: Right. If you have [multiple choice](#), you need to practice that from the start.



- Lee Burgess: Got to practice that from the start.
- Alison Monahan: Where are you going to find those questions? Maybe you need to think about that now. We give you a hint – you can buy the book.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly. The more information you get early, the better you can apply that deep work to work that's actually going to have a good outcome. And then you don't do what so many people do, which is they just spend all this time building these 100-page outlines that don't actually get them closer to what they need to do. And then they end up scrapping them and doing something different, kind of come a few weeks before exams. So make sure you are working to the end game.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think there's just this tendency for people to kind of think more is better, and more is really not better necessarily here. More in your outline, a longer outline is not really what you need to be doing. You need to be actually kind of the opposite, consistently cutting that material down. So you start with everything you read in a case book, which is hundreds of pages, maybe thousands of pages. And by the time you go into that exam, you really want to have the basics of that class on two pieces of paper. So that's your goal, not having a 150-page outline that just sort of condenses what you read.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, absolutely. And the only way you can really appreciate what needs to be in those two-page sheets is by practicing and utilizing what you need.
- Alison Monahan: Right. You've got to apply it.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, that's the thing, you have to find out... Everybody works slightly differently and you've got to be able to test your own materials and make sure they're working for you.
- Alison Monahan: Or even radically differently. I'd say that's another piece of advice. I did law school radically differently from other people, because I'm a visual learner. That's what made sense to me. I was drawing things, I was doing colored flowcharts. And that was fine, it worked out fine. But for someone else, you might look at that and be like, "This is a total waste of time. You're doing art projects."
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly.
- Alison Monahan: But that's fine, you can do it differently.
- Lee Burgess: It's true. The other thing that you need to keep in mind is how you're going to handle distractions. Before we got on this podcast, we were discussing my tendency to doomscroll these days, which is not helping my productivity at all.



And you were talking about how you have been totally distracted by something else and how much better you feel not doomscrolling and reading the news all the time.

Alison Monahan: It is true. We won't discuss my new distraction, but leave it as what it is, and it's sort of funny. But it is actually very, very distracting, I will say. And in some ways, that's good because it does keep me from doomscrolling, but it also, unless I'm careful, can make it hard to get other work done.

Lee Burgess: True.

Alison Monahan: I think it's not realistic for people to think they're not ever going to be distracted and that's not even necessarily healthy. You can't just work all the time; you do need distractions. I think this is a question of really being cognizant of, are you spending a bunch of time doomscrolling the news? Are you spending tons of time on TikTok that it's not making you feel more relaxed? Are you doing whatever crazy stuff you're doing? And I think you've just got to put boundaries really around that. Basically the goal, I think, is when you're working and you're studying, that's your focus time. And then when you're not, that's your time off and you can do whatever you want. But when those start kind of meshing together, it almost ends up being not great on either side.

Lee Burgess: I think that's true. I was reading a blog post... See this is the problem – I was reading an Instagram post or a blog post or whatever I was scrolling through...

Alison Monahan: Something on the Internet.

Lee Burgess: Something on the Internet. But it was discussing the importance of being present in whatever you're doing. And I think this is also such an important concept, especially when you're doing something intellectually challenging. In law school it's not about multi-tasking. So if you are taking time off and doing whatever your distraction is, even if it's TV, put the phone away. Don't have your materials on your lap. Just enjoy the brain space. I've been watching a lot of subtitled European TV shows on Netflix.

Alison Monahan: Oh, how fancy.

Lee Burgess: And the nice thing about that is... Yeah, well, it is very fancy, but in reality, I can't look at my phone and watch those TV shows because I don't speak... One of them is French and I don't speak French. Other than words that I understand, I cannot follow the plot if I'm not reading the subtitles. And I found that it's kind of an easy way to just be like, "You've got to put down your phone or you can't follow the TV show." It really calls you out. And so, being present in your work and tabling distractions is important, but also being present when you're doing your distractions so you can enjoy them.



- Alison Monahan: Yeah. Last night was sort of funny because I needed a distraction from my new hobby that was stressing me out, and so I was like, "Oh, I need to watch the finale of an old episode of the British baking show." So that was really engaging to distract me from my distracting hobby.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. Everybody's got to do something to distract themselves. But I think it is important to just be present in whatever you're doing and not try and multi-task, because it makes us all crazy. Even though we think we can do it well, most of us cannot.
- Alison Monahan: Well, and it makes you make bad choices. I can also attest to that from my new hobby, where I did something that I would not have done except I was also talking on the phone and wasn't really paying attention.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, yeah. You need your whole brain. The other thing, if you are struggling with things like doomscrolling and things like that, I also have time limits for social media on my phone. I think that that is also a great reminder to just be like, this is how much I've decided I can scroll during the day, and then when it's over, it's over. And I found that really helps too.
- Alison Monahan: Well, and also just be careful what you're doing at night. If you're doing something on your phone that's upsetting or even really engaging right before you're trying to fall asleep, and you've also got all this stuff that you're learning going on in your head, I think being kind of cognizant of your sleep hygiene and the wind down period and all of these things. It also sounds boring, I know, but as someone who had chronic insomnia for three years in law school, I will say they make a difference. The blue light stuff, but also just maybe you read a boring book for an hour or take a bath or do some yoga or something to kind of get your brain calm and let you actually sleep, because that's so critical to memory and retention, all of those things. And it can become, trust me on this one, a very bad downward spiral if you're not sleeping.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. I was reading something about helping kids sleep, and they were talking about how good we are as parents, typically, of creating this routine for them and they know exactly what comes next and it's this whole preparation for sleep. And then for ourselves, we plug in our phone and go to bed. That's not really... We still need the same sort of signals to wind down, and so we have to think about what those routines are. My routine lately has been trying to read in bed instead of watching TV on my phone or scrolling or whatever, and it is amazing how much better I sleep if I don't have devices with me. It shouldn't be that surprising, because every single article you read about sleep says that, but it's so hard to put them down and let it go.



- Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I just think the more information you're trying to cram into your brain on a daily basis, the more important it is to pay attention to that wind down and things. It's hard what you're doing and your brain is really active, and our brains don't just shut off because we want them to, unfortunately.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. Alright, the other thing going back to the classroom and school is, you've got to manage disappointment and frustration, especially when weird things happen in class and you don't know the answer when you're called on, you might be embarrassed... The Socratic method is really set up, so you're going to end up having a negative experience at some time in law school. And you've just got to realize that although you will be scarred by it, no one else is scarred by it, nobody's going to remember, nobody's going to talk to you at your 10-year reunion about what you said in some class. You've just got to learn to let things go.
- Alison Monahan: Right, you could probably tell them. We could both tell you the story about the time we blew something, but I guarantee you, no one else remembers any of that.
- Lee Burgess: Nobody. No. And I don't remember anyone else screwing up in law school.
- Alison Monahan: No, never.
- Lee Burgess: No, never, never. So, you've got to practice letting those things go, work on your [growth mindset](#), make sure that you can take things as a learning experience and figure out how to let things go. And it's also a good skill because you're going to make mistakes at work.
- Alison Monahan: Definitely.
- Lee Burgess: You've got to learn how to fix them and let them go too.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, definitely. And I think part of this, in terms of making mistakes, I think one of the things people want to be doing early on is really realistically evaluating how things are going. And by that, I don't mean you made a mistake in class, you're going to flunk all of your exams. I mean really paying attention to, how long are things taking you, does this seem reasonable? You want to try really hard not to fall behind at the start of the semester, because I think where people really get sunk is they fall behind for whatever reason, and then suddenly, they're at a point where there's almost no way to catch up. And that's just a bad situation.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. And I think this happens in normal times when people would get sick, is usually the first time people fall behind. I remember I got the flu my second



semester of first year of law school. I am embarrassed to say I was in class with 103-degree fever...

Alison Monahan: Oh my God.

Lee Burgess: And I didn't know that, and then I got worse.

Alison Monahan: The things we used to do.

Lee Burgess: I got worse while I was there. I left at the break, but I didn't realize I was so sick until my friend was like, "Please leave." I'm like, "Fair point." But I think we're much more cautious about that now, hopefully. We've all learned a lot about viruses and how we get sick. But I also think that missing classes, then you don't necessarily read for class or you might be sick, or what if you have to quarantine for COVID? There are lots of different situations where you might miss class and you just have to figure out how you're going to keep up. But what you can't do is, let's say you get sick – hopefully it's not COVID – you miss a few classes, you're behind in your reading, you're behind on class. What you cannot do is continue to stay behind for the rest of the semester. At some point you have to decide you're not going to do the reading, or you're just going to take the notes from class, or you're only going to read a couple of the cases. But you've got to get caught up and keep moving forward with the class, or you can get into a downward spiral where you just never catch up through the rest of the semester.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think that's a situation where you want to get a good supplement, read the relevant sections, and also think about who in your class seems like the nicest, kindest person, and just really ask them if you can borrow their notes, and most likely they will say "Yes".

Lee Burgess: Yes. In fact, that was what my friend said next to me when she realized I was sick – she was like, "Please leave, I will take really great notes."

Alison Monahan: Even if you don't have a friend in the class, who seems friendly? Just explain the situation, they're probably going to be willing to help you out.

Lee Burgess: Exactly, yeah. And you can always go to your professor and get questions answered. The only thing terrible that can happen is if you don't try and remedy it and just stay under water the rest of the semester. You can come back from missing a few classes, it's fine.

Alison Monahan: And also people may not be aware of it – academic support often have someone who's a designated notetaker for various reasons. I think you even did that.

Lee Burgess: I did.



- Alison Monahan: You go to the professor, you go to someone at your school and be like, "I had to miss three days of class because I was sick and I didn't go. Can you help me?" The odds are they may be actually like, "Oh yeah, cool. We can give you these three days of notes."
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. There are lots of options that are better than just staying behind. So, just make sure you remedy the situation if you've had to miss class. Just figure it out so you can get back on track.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. The one thing I would say people don't need to worry about at this point that they often do – I was guilty of this – I think you can really mostly set aside job concerns for the first semester.
- Lee Burgess: Oh, I agree.
- Alison Monahan: This is like learning to do law school, try to get the best grades possible, not be obsessing about, "Am I going to get a 1L summer job?" It's just too early for that, and don't worry about it.
- Lee Burgess: No, you just got to put that down, move on. There'll be plenty of time to look for jobs. The best thing you can do for your job prospects is get good grades.
- Alison Monahan: Right. And if you do want to do a little bit, we also have some podcasts that we can link to. But really, you don't need to be worrying about that right now.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, especially in COVID land where networking and all of that is just not the same as it was. So, just go ahead and do the best you can academically, and that's going to give you the most options when it comes to your jobs.
- Alison Monahan: Exactly.
- Lee Burgess: COVID, I feel like this is the doomscrolling part of the episode. I'm tired of talking about it, but it's so omnipresent. The problem is we can't plan ahead, there's a lot of uncertainty, we've all got to be flexible, we're all fatigued, and we just have to keep moving forward because there's no other option, other than getting vaccinated. So please, if you have not gotten vaccinated and you are able to do so, please, please, please, please, please. As a mom of two little kids who are not eligible to be vaccinated, please get vaccinated.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. To be honest, I just don't feel like people are going to have that much sympathy for you. That might be the one time I wouldn't give someone my notes, to be honest. It's like, "You know what? I don't feel that much sympathy, I'm sorry. Maybe it makes me a terrible person, but you're not getting my notes."



- Lee Burgess: I know. If you go to class, you're endangering other people around you. Please, just please do it. Just please do it. I would just do that to protect yourself and those around you, and also just be sure that you have a plan if your classes do have to go remote or if you have to quarantine. Again, this goes back to setting up a workspace in your house, making sure you have good Internet, all of those kinds of things, because you don't know what's coming down the pipe. None of us do.
- Alison Monahan: We do not know. It looks like we're just going to have to roll with this for a little while longer. I think we can all hope for the best, but the reality is we are in a very uncertain situation, things will likely be changing, and they may change very quickly and you just have to be responsive to that.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. Any final thoughts before we wrap this up?
- Alison Monahan: Yay! You're starting law school. Congratulations!
- Lee Burgess: I know. Hopefully, you will graduate in a better world than you have started. But I think maybe one of my final thoughts is that we have helped a lot of law students during this COVID time, and I think not all of them have hated some of the changes that law schools have made. Hopefully, your school has better online resources, the professors are more available virtually, and that may be easier, especially for people who are at commuter schools. I think maybe professors are going to implement technology in a way that they hadn't before. And I think there might be some benefits to going post-COVID, because lessons were learned on all parts.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. I don't think it's the worst thing ever. I think take advantage of whatever opportunities present themselves, but just be prepared. And I think one thing too that people really learned last year is, if you are just sitting in your house alone and studying all the time, that can get really hard. And so, it's okay to reach out to people and say, "Look, I am really struggling right now", because you've got to take some steps to do something differently. But there are definitely options, and I think just the more that you can be aware of your own state of mind and that kind of thing, the better off you're going to be.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, I totally agree. Well, good luck! Have a growth mindset, roll with the punches. And someday we'll all look back at this time, and I don't think we're going to laugh, but at least we'll have some stuff to talk about. That's how I'm looking at it now.
- Alison Monahan: It's kind of a growth experience for the world, I guess, in a way.
- Lee Burgess: It is, yeah.



- Alison Monahan: I don't know, not one we would have picked. But you basically just have to roll with it, there's really no other option.
- Lee Burgess: There isn't, so you might as well make the best out of the situation you're handed. And don't doomscroll. Don't do as I do; do as I say.
- Alison Monahan: And get vaccinated, please.
- Lee Burgess: And get vaccinated. I did get vaccinated. We've been vaccinated for a long time. Alright, well, 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 could always contact us via our website [contact form](#) at LawSchoolToolbox.com. Thanks for listening, and we'll talk soon!

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