



Alison Monahan: Welcome to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today, we're excited to have ex-BigLaw recruiter Sadie Jones here with us to talk about business development. Your Law School Toolbox host today is 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 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 here with us to talk about business development – something you should probably consider from your early days of law school if you want to work in a law firm. So welcome, Sadie.

Sadie Jones: Thanks for having me back.

Alison Monahan: My pleasure. Well, to start us off, what does "business development" even mean in a law firm context? And why is it at all relevant to young associates or law students?

Sadie Jones: Basically, I think it means anything related to clients. So, it doesn't necessarily mean you find somebody and bring them into the law firm; it's just any relationships that you have that could lead to business down the road, or work somewhere that the law firm might have business with. I think of it as sort of a broad term, and I think that it's just an important skill to develop early on, because you're going to build on it. You're not just going to bring in a client from the beginning; you're going to work on these relationships, and eventually people you know will move up in the same way you're going to move up.

Alison Monahan: Right, theoretically, at least.

Sadie Jones: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: When firms are thinking about the potential people might have for business development, what are they really looking for?

Sadie Jones: I think they're looking for people who are able to have relationships with other people, can be social. I don't think that's the only type of business development, but I think generally, they're looking at people skills. And I think they're looking at, are you thinking about this early? Is it something you're working on, are you going to events, are you keeping up with people, are you having lunches? That kind of thing. Sometimes these skills might be developed outside of a client



relationship, so maybe you're trying to build relationships inside the firm. I think they can tell the people who early on are headed in that direction.

Alison Monahan: Right. Obviously, it's pretty unlikely a summer or a first-year is going to bring business directly into the law firm – that doesn't seem like a particularly reasonable expectation for people to put on themselves. So, how can people demonstrate their potential in this area, assuming they don't have clients who they can just bring into the firm?

Sadie Jones: Demonstrate it – you mean to other people at the law firm?

Alison Monahan: Right. What kind of stuff can I do to show I'm a person who understands this is important and I want to get better at it, and I want to show you that I understand that this matters?

Sadie Jones: Well, first of all, I'd ask questions of the partners, the more senior associates that you're working with. Even as a summer associate, I would ask them about this topic, if there's anything offered at the firm in this area. You, even as a summer associate, can listen in on calls, potentially go to events, all of those kinds of things. So I think just asking questions and wanting to be involved and seeming interested, I think is the place to start.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I was always surprised when, as an associate or even as a summer, we might get invited to something that a partner was organizing or clearly mattered to them. Oftentimes, it would be a dinner or something, of say, some organization they were involved in. And they'd say, "Hey, who wants to come and sit at the table with us and go to this thing?" And it was always surprising how many people did not do that, because I thought that seemed like a pretty important thing to do.

Sadie Jones: I was going to say that is a job that I've had in the past, is filling those tables. And a lot of times there were really good speakers, it might be at a nice place. I know that these things can get old pretty quick, but I definitely think that that kind of stuff is important, and if a partner can't fill a table, that looks bad for them. And I think they notice, even if you're really junior, even if you're a summer associate, that you show up and seem interested. A lot of times they're getting these tables on behalf of a client, because the client requests their involvement in something, so you should know all of that. But absolutely, it's really hard to fill those tables and you stand out if you show up.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it does seem like a really easy way to curry favor with people, basically. I was like, "Well, okay, it's going to take me a few hours, I have to put on maybe a slightly nicer outfit. But it's right after work, I'll just go have dinner, maybe I'll meet some people. If nothing else, I'm making nice with this partner, who



probably is happy that they don't have to worry about filling the table anymore."

- Sadie Jones: 100%. I think that a lot of times, just early on, people don't think about it. They're not thinking about the bigger picture of what this is; they're just thinking, "I don't really feel like going to that event tonight."
- Alison Monahan: Right, it's not billable time if you're an associate, which matters. But also, I feel like if you go to a few of these, you start to see the same people over and over again, because they're probably the go-getters. And so eventually you're like, "Oh, hey, we met at last month's judges' dinner. How have you been?" So you start to actually build these relationships, and that's kind of the point.
- Sadie Jones: Definitely. And people inside the firm will notice if you're showing up. Also, a lot of them, you get CLE credit for, so that's always good once you're an associate.
- Alison Monahan: I can tell you've had to sell these to people before.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah, I have. But I genuinely think it's a good opportunity for people.
- Alison Monahan: No, I agree. I always found, generally, they were interesting. And if nothing else, you saw people... I always ran into people I knew from law school at them, all these kinds of things. This is one aspect of business development – it's like you've got to be out there seeing your people.
- Sadie Jones: Absolutely. And I'm coming from the perspective of, I have had to fill the seats sometimes, so I've personally had to go to some of these, and I don't know that they've been interesting.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. I mean, people are busy, but I feel like this is a pretty good bang for your buck for something that literally just requires you to show up for a couple of hours and not say anything offensive, basically.
- Sadie Jones: And they're a set amount of time. They're usually a structured event, so you know how long you're going to be there, where they are, all of that kind of thing.
- Alison Monahan: Right. Well, what if someone's listening to this and they're like, "This sounds really terrible. I just want to be a lawyer and do my work and go home"? Is that a problem?
- Sadie Jones: That's just a different track. So I think there absolutely is a track for people who aren't interested in business development, that there are roles at a law firm where business development is not really going to be required. On the other hand, everyone in a law firm most likely is dealing with clients on some front. So



I would say if you're more of an introvert and this all sounds really far out of your comfort zone, I would at least kind of dip your toe in and try to develop some of the skills. You don't have to be the schmoozing partner in the end, but I would just be able to deal with clients on some level. But there are roles where that's not really going to be part of your job.

Alison Monahan: Right. I think the harsh reality though is, those roles are not partner roles.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely not. But I actually think those roles can be really great for the right person, and in certain ways can be kind of more job security.

Alison Monahan: Oh, I agree.

Sadie Jones: So you're going to make less money, and it's going to be a different kind of more of a helper role, but for the right person, those are great opportunities. I just think that these skills are good to push yourself at, if we're talking about early on. So I wouldn't just say, "That's not for me. I'm an introvert, I don't like talking to people."

Alison Monahan: Right. I think people just have to understand the business model of the law firm and what type of people are being promoted to partner and that kind of thing, if that's a path that you want. No one's saying you have to go aspire to be a law firm partner. I certainly didn't at some point, that's why I left the law firm. But I think sometimes students have, I think, a very unrealistic idea of what it requires, I guess, to become a partner at most law firms. Do you think that's true?

Sadie Jones: I think that's absolutely true.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think people have this idea of, "Oh, if I show up and I do good work, then I'll just magically get promoted to partner." And maybe several generations ago, that's kind of how this worked, but now if you're not bringing in a certain amount of business by the time these things are being looked at or have high potential to do that, you're unlikely to become a partner.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, I think people think that just doing good work is the way to get ahead because that's how it worked so far. As a student, you do well, you move ahead. But if you think about it, relationships always matter and your relationships with your professors matter, and other activities you're in.

Alison Monahan: Well, let's talk a little bit about what law students can do when they're in school to start building these skills, whether that's honing traits they already have or really pushing themselves outside of their comfort zone. What are some ideas you have on that?



- Sadie Jones: I think attending events, I think relationships just with your classmates are a good place to start, because those are the people that are all going to be working places that you're going to want to have those relationships with down the road. Being in clubs, speaking activities are helpful as well, and some of those activities have relationships with law firms and outside employers. So I think basically just building the skills to develop relationships with people and get comfortable going to events, that kind of thing.
- Alison Monahan: I think this is particularly important maybe for people who haven't worked in a professional environment before, to really start that professional networking, which is probably different than hanging out with your friends in college and that kind of thing. But isn't this really just the same as networking? And do you think introverts can be successful here?
- Sadie Jones: I think it basically is the same as networking. And everybody has a different definition of what that means, so it's not the same for everyone. I think introverts can be successful at this; there's not one way to network or talk to people, and not everything needs to be at a big event. You can have a personal one-on-one relationship with people, and sometimes introverts are a lot better at the deeper relationships and making those connections. So I don't think you should just count yourself out because you're not an extrovert, life-of-the-party sort of person.
- Alison Monahan: Right. And I think more and more firms, particularly women partners and things, are doing much more intimate scale events and things like that as part of their client building, because they realize it's not actually fun for people just to go to some loud dinner party or something. Maybe people would like to get their nails done, or have a cooking class, something that actually sounds fun. But there's no reason that if that sounds fun to you, that you can't put that type of event together.
- Sadie Jones: Absolutely. I think that if you're interested in it, there's going to be other people that are like you. Not everyone wants the same type of thing, so talk to people that you connect with.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. A crowded football or baseball game for networking is not my idea of fun, but for other people it is. And that's cool, they can do that, but there are other things I would rather do.
- Sadie Jones: Exactly. Or even a cocktail party, kind of traditional thing – that's not necessarily for everyone either.
- Alison Monahan: Right. Yeah, and I think more and more, hopefully at least, firms are opening up their idea of what a networking event for their clients and associates and summer associates and all that, can even look like. Maybe you do an event



together or maybe you do a volunteer thing together. I think they're expanding beyond just drinking, the classic, "Go to a strip club". This sort of thing doesn't really fly.

Sadie Jones: Definitely. And I think just with how things have been this year with so much virtual stuff, there are lots of different ways to do things. And some of that stuff can be easier for introverts too, and I think it'll still exist.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think people just have a broader conception now. And really, like you said earlier, this is all about relationships. So I think if you're a law student, you just want to be thinking about building relationships with your classmates, with your professors, with people in the legal community, and not building a reputation as someone that they would not want to do business with.

Sadie Jones: Exactly.

Alison Monahan: Alright. Well, let's switch gears a little bit. Lots of lawyers actually end up going solo, which I think a lot of law students don't fully appreciate. Statistically, I think I saw recently more than half of the practicing attorneys are either solo or very small firms. Do you think students should be thinking about this as an option? And how does this play in if they really hate the idea of doing business development?

Sadie Jones: So I think this is a really tough option, and some people think it'll be an easier path for some reason. Business development is going to be huge here, it's going to be a lot of pressure on you. Now, there may be a situation where you're teaming up with a classmate or another person, and maybe they're more the business development person and you're more the worker. But if you want to be a solo practitioner, you better start these skills early, because it's going to be all on you to be able to pay your bills.

Alison Monahan: You're literally running the business.

Sadie Jones: Yeah. Even if, let's say that you start it thinking you already have a client or something, and that's why you're starting it – you can't count on that. This is a long, hard road.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think the idea of going solo straight out of law school, although some people do it obviously, is very difficult. I think the more common path is, someone gets some experience, and then for whatever reason they decide that they want to go out on their own. It's funny how many people don't necessarily think about that is becoming an entrepreneur, which is very different from the experience of practicing law, but it's definitely something that you can do. Lots of people do it, like we've said. But I agree, if you think this is any possibility being in your future, you definitely want to start thinking about these ideas



now. Certainly, if you told me in law school I would be running a business, I would have thought that was laughable. But when I started thinking about it, I realized, "Oh okay, there's a lot of stuff I actually need to learn about here." And so I think the earlier you can start thinking about those things, probably the better.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely. I actually think that there's no path that you're going to take where these skills won't come in handy somewhere along the way. So, I would just start thinking about it as a law student. Whether or not you think it's your path long term, these skills will be useful.

Alison Monahan: It's funny, I think the relationship between the marketing department in a law firm and the lawyers – I don't know in your experience – in my experience that was always sort of a... I don't want to say treacherous, but complicated relationship might be fair to say.

Sadie Jones: Definitely, because I think the lawyers just don't really think that way. So I think talking to the marketing department, figuring out how they're doing these pitches, is a good idea.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, that's actually a great point. Even as an associate, I would basically sometimes have to be brought in on pitches. I don't know if people listening to this really understand this, but law firms will go out and they actually... For example, I was doing patent litigation, and there would be somebody gets sued, some big client that we've worked with before, or a small company or whatever. But they basically bring in really teams of lawyers, and so to go to the pitch, you have to essentially do an analysis of their case. And so, obviously the partner is like, "Great, who do we have to do this? Bring in some associates, have them write this document, do a bunch of slides." It was a very intense process, actually. You would spend a few days very deeply involved in this, and then oftentimes we would actually go to the meeting where there'd be teams of lawyers exiting the room and teams of the next firm's lawyers coming in. And essentially you're there to talk to the client about like, "Well, this is how we see the case. This is how we think we would proceed. Do you want to work with us?", etcetera. And they were quite interesting.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, and I think that's just an area that isn't really taught to law students.

Alison Monahan: Oh, I had no idea.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, and I think it's just you don't think that way. It's just a different way of thinking about everything, and they're more thinking of the legal work and not how you're pitching the business. So I think that's just a great experience, and I think even as a summer associate, you can definitely get involved and show interest, that kind of thing.



Alison Monahan: Yeah, it was always interesting. So we're sort of like, "Why am I along on this?" And I'm like, "Oh right, because they like the fact that I was a programmer, and I'm also a woman. And oh yeah, right. Okay, check, that's why I'm being brought along on this."

Sadie Jones: Exactly. I think that may happen, but I also think it's a great experience. And so, for whatever reason you're in the room, absorb it and figure out what's going on.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I just thought it was pretty interesting. I think generally, any type of learning about ideas of marketing and selling – these are all dirty words, usually, to lawyers. Again, when I decided to launch a business, I had to read a bunch of stuff about how do you sell things, how do you market things. And these are not necessarily a slimy type of thing. I think [Seth Godin](#) is really good on this, if people are interested; he's kind of a classic. But his point is really, marketing is not a dirty word; it's basically just trying to figure out what you do and who you help, and then find those people and help them. Lawyers are like, "Oh, it's so terrible", but I don't think that's really true. I think it's a useful thing to understand.

Sadie Jones: I completely agree.

Alison Monahan: Alright. And so, if we're thinking, before we wrap up, about law school activities – we kind of touched on this – it might be good for business development. I think any type of club or a thing like that, where you're meeting people, particularly – we've talked about this before – you can be in a leadership role. I think any type of leadership type of roles are always useful. And some people may have to push themselves, but law school is a good time to push yourself to do something at very low stakes that could help you learn a skill.

Sadie Jones: I agree. I think just getting involved in something, and like you said, taking some kind of role. It doesn't have to be the main person, but just some kind of role where you're developing relationships, you're being a leader, I think pushing yourself outside of your comfort zone. I don't know if it matters which activity exactly. I think it could be anything that you're interested in.

Alison Monahan: Right. And it doesn't even have to be stuff in the law school. I think sometimes people can get in the silo of, "If I develop this relationship with this judge, then my life will be set." It's not really what we're talking about. Business development type things are actually mostly outside of the strict legal world. One thing that I did in law school, which I thought was fun and also probably helped me meet other people is, I took a bunch of classes at the gym. So I signed up for squash class, for example. And basically, the people who play squash, as it turns out, are lawyers and business people. The class was basically



like half lawyers, half MBA students, and then a smattering of other people who had come from squash countries like India or something. But it was actually quite fun, we all became friends, it made me meet people outside of just the limited school universe. So I think something along those lines, whether it's a dance class or acting, improv, anything that gets you out of that law school bubble and lets you meet other people could actually be really beneficial, a) for practice talking to people who are not lawyers, and b) because you never know who you might meet.

Sadie Jones: I agree. And also just putting you outside of your comfort zone, trying something new. I think networking, these relationships can apply to so many different things. Just do something that sounds interesting.

Alison Monahan: Right. Because ultimately, a lot of this is really about finding the fit between what you find interesting and what you want to do with your life and spend your time doing, and what other similar people want. So if you're really into sports, then great, you can be the person who goes to every single baseball game. Oftentimes, firms have boxes of these things, or season tickets. And I'm guessing that's kind of like the table – it's hard to give away those every day, right?

Sadie Jones: Absolutely.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I know this because I've been invited along when I wasn't working in a firm for other people's baseball games that they couldn't give the tickets away to. But I think whatever you're into, there are probably other people who are interested in it, and it's just really a question of finding that fit. The other idea of, a piece of business development is, it's really about maintaining relationships as well. So, you want to make sure that you're a person that can be trusted around a client and that kind of thing, because ultimately, most of the business of a firm really probably comes from their existing clients, I would guess anyway, more than people they just pick up on the street. Do you think that's right?

Sadie Jones: I think that's definitely right.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. So I think one of the key things is, you don't want to be that person that they're afraid to have be around a client.

Sadie Jones: And I think those are the things they're looking at just for regular summer associate events. That's what's in the back of their head – how are you just in a social situation? So that's what we've talked about before – that you don't have too many drinks, and that you can chat with different people and stay away from those sort of hot button issues. So all of those things, they are thinking about what you'd be like with a client.



Alison Monahan: Right, because the client relationship really is like, who is a client working with? Who are they comfortable with? Could I send this person out to supervise something on-site? A lot of what you're doing ends up being related to the client or the people who work for the client. When I was a patent litigator, I had relationships with engineers, for example, and I would call them up or they would have questions, that kind of thing. That in an indirect way, at least, was developing that business because I needed to be a person that the partners could trust to talk to those people, because if I don't know what I'm talking about and I say something completely stupid, obviously they're going to go to their boss who was the in-house counsel and be like, "Well, it doesn't sound like Alison was really up to speed on this, I'm not sure we trust her." And that is not the way to develop more business with that particular client.

Sadie Jones: Definitely. And I would say if you are as a summer associate or a junior associate involved directly with clients, make sure that you're clear what the partner or senior associate is expecting from you – whether you're just there to listen or they expect you to contribute. I think it'd be good to figure that out so you sort of know your role.

Alison Monahan: Oh, absolutely, that's a great point, because there's nothing worse than a junior person going totally off script and the client... I got calls from people who were in-house counsel at major companies, because they had a question for me and they knew that I was a person who would have this information, so they'd call me up and they asked the question. Well, that can go a lot of different ways, and one way it should not go is that they started asking me things I don't really know about or I'm not really sure about, or about a case strategy, and I just start pontificating about it.

Sadie Jones: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: That's not going to end well.

Sadie Jones: And a lot of times you may just be there to take notes and listen. You should know if that's your role, because you also don't want to not be taking notes. You should be taking notes anyway, but you just want to know how they see you there. And I agree, you definitely don't want to go off script.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, you just really don't want to overstep your bounds. So if the client calls me because they're like, "We need a line citation to this thing in this deposition. Do you have that?" I'm like, "Yep, here you go" – that is totally fine, they're going to be happy about that. If they then say, "Well, what do you think about this motion we're about to file?" – that is probably not a question I should answer.



- Sadie Jones: Yeah, that's a point where you want to, say, maybe turn it over to somebody else, or you will find out and get back to them.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, like, "Oh, that's such a great question. I think it's going well. Let me have the partner call you back to talk about that."
- Sadie Jones: Yeah, you should probably have some of those phrases in the back of your head, how you're going to not answer the question and figure it out.
- Alison Monahan: Right, exactly, because you don't want to be... If you're the low person, you're the first-year associate, they're probably not thinking and probably not intentionally testing you – maybe they are – but mostly they're just probably not really thinking about it. And of course, as soon as you say, "Oh, let me have the partner call you back", they're like, "Oh, right, of course. That makes sense."
- Sadie Jones: Exactly. I will say that even though most likely you're not going to be, like we've said, bringing in business from the beginning, or that's not how we're sort of thinking about it – we're talking about building skills – there are situations where you may know someone who is somewhat important somewhere else. And these days a lot of younger people are having successful startups and in important roles inside companies, so I also wouldn't assume that you won't know somebody who has an important role even when you're a junior. So, don't discount it either, is what I'd say.
- Alison Monahan: No, I think that's a great point. I think it's important to know what your firm does, which sounds obvious, but if you're working at a large firm, you might not even be aware of exactly what the focus is, or what different departments are doing or capable of doing. And so, this is kind of an "ear to the ground" type of thing. If you are talking to your college buddies and one of them says, "Oh yeah, I've got this legal issue with my company" – be thinking, "Oh, I wonder if this is something we could help with." But you have to have a basic understanding of what type of work the firm even does.
- Sadie Jones: Definitely, because mismatching that stuff is not going to make you look good.
- Alison Monahan: Right. Does your firm have a Trust and Estates department, that kind of thing, before you offer to help.
- Sadie Jones: Exactly.
- Alison Monahan: Alright, we're running out of time here. Any final thoughts you have on this?
- Sadie Jones: I would keep up on your LinkedIn, is my final thought, because you never know where people you know end up. And so, that's a good way to keep these relationships and see where people are and that kind of thing. So just generally,



keep updated on it. It's kind of the best place, I think, to see the business side of this.

Alison Monahan: I think that's a good point. A lot of people – I'm probably guilty of this – set it up and then never look at it again, and never really... A lot of people request to LinkedIn friend me, or connect with me, and I'm like, "Great, cool." But I don't really use it, but I'm also not a lawyer. No, I think that's a great idea. I think it definitely is where people hang out with their professional network, and I think any type of school events and things, just to maintain contact, alumni stuff. These are happening all over the place. A lot of them are virtual now. But just being in that mix, if this is something that you think you're going to need to do, I think can only benefit you.

Sadie Jones: Exactly, because people say to me all the time, "I don't know anyone" or, "I don't have any connections." And I'm like, "I bet you do."

Alison Monahan: Yeah, you probably do. You went to school, you went to law school, those are already a lot of people. You have an outside life, you know people. And obviously some people are better at maintaining connections than others, but we all know people.

Sadie Jones: Exactly. It's just about figuring out where they are, so keep up on it.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. And I think maintaining that network before you're going to try to employ it is better than trying to build it from scratch like a decade out of school, when you've lost contact with everyone.

Sadie Jones: Exactly. This is going to make things easier if you do a little bit at a time.

Alison Monahan: Definitely. And just get curious about it – what is it like to sell things? That's actually a good thing to understand. Alright, well, thank you so much for joining us.

Sadie Jones: Thanks for having me.

Alison Monahan: My pleasure. With that, we're 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 a 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 or 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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