



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 being smart about your career goals. 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 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 good started.

Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today, we have ex-BigLaw recruiter Sadie Jones here with us to talk about being smart about your career goals. Welcome, Sadie.

Sadie Jones: Thanks for having me back.

Alison Monahan: My pleasure. Well, we were talking about this beforehand, and we get a lot of questions on this topic, so what are we really talking about here?

Sadie Jones: Well, I think it's just important to be realistic about what jobs you can get now and what your long-term career goals are, and how you can get there, and when you can get there.

Alison Monahan: Right. I think sometimes people think, "Oh, I can just apply for anything", and they get really fixated on a certain type of job. But why is it bad to aim too high? Shouldn't we just be aiming for whatever we want?

Sadie Jones: Well, I think of it more as how you're spending your time. So, if you really do have the time to submit a million applications for anything that might stick, then I guess you could spend your time on that, but I just don't think that's probably the best use of your time, and you're probably busy with school stuff too. So, I feel like it's a good idea to sort of be realistic. And you can apply for some places that might sort of seem like a reach; I just don't think it's a good idea to spend most of your time on that if it's not likely that you meet their qualifications. And so, it'd be better to do applications in places that you more have a chance at now, and then you can work towards your long-term goals later.

Alison Monahan: Right. I think of it almost like applying to law school. Certain reach goals are fine, go ahead and throw in a few applications to places that maybe you're a little underqualified for but you'd love to work at. But you also need to cover your target and your safety goals, because you don't want to end up at the end of this process with nothing. That's definitely not a great place to find yourself in,



so I think it's just as you said, important to be realistic while also being hopeful but not totally focusing on that.

Sadie Jones: Exactly, that's exactly how I see it. I think you just need to kind of focus on how you're going to get to your goal, and not necessarily when you're going to get to your goal. And also, just because you want something and you want a certain job does not mean that you're necessarily going to get that certain job.

Alison Monahan: That's very true.

Sadie Jones: So, being more flexible. I think some people really get things stuck in their head, "This is what I want." You just don't always get it.

Alison Monahan: Right. It's like that Rolling Stone song: "You might just get what you need, not what you want." Nobody is entitled to a certain job, nobody is guaranteed a certain job, it doesn't matter what school you go to or how you did there. So, I agree, flexibility is probably the best way forward, particularly when we're in a weird economy, which I think we're kind of in a weird economy right now. Well, let's talk about BigLaw, since this is the one people most often, I feel, have unrealistic ideas about. So, just give us the basics. If anyone's listening to this and they don't really quite understand how this works, how do people generally get entry-level BigLaw jobs?

Sadie Jones: Most people are getting BigLaw jobs through OCI in a really traditional process that is designed a certain way and you go through it a certain way. They come to your school – or now it's virtual – but they're coming to find students at your school who meet their criteria, and then you're coming as a summer associate, and then you're getting an offer at the end of the summer to come back after you graduate as a full-time associate. That's sort of the traditional path. And remember, they're coming to your school for OCI because they want students from that school, and so they're kind of actively trying to recruit those people. And so, that would be the way that most people are getting their BigLaw jobs.

Alison Monahan: Right. And someone who is listening to this and is like, "That sucks, because my school doesn't have OCI" or, "They don't have the option I want at OCI" – is this literally the only way in or are there other options, either entry-level or later on?

Sadie Jones: It's definitely not the only way in. You can still apply to firms that aren't coming to your school for OCI, or if your school doesn't have an OCI, I think you just need to be realistic that those hiring criteria are going to be even greater, because they're not coming to your school, so they weren't actively trying to find someone from your school. So I wouldn't say you can't apply; you just need to be realistic that it's less likely. And there are firms that hire 3Ls, so that would be an entry-level job, like you weren't there as a summer associate, you had a different job during the summer. And they may be hiring entry-level. We've



talked about 3L hiring more in other episodes, but that's also less common, and again, the bar is going to be high for that. And then later on, I think it's kind of more possible to maybe get into a smaller firm or another type of job, and then move to BigLaw is definitely possible depending on what your practice area is, what your experience is. The criteria sort of change for that person who's then a lateral associate.

Alison Monahan: Right. So yeah, I think I know a number of people who didn't start in BigLaw, but that was their longer term career goal – we'll talk about this later on as well in more detail. It's certainly possible outside of that entry-level hiring to get in, but if you want that first job out of school in BigLaw, the reality is, OCI is by and large the way that you're going to get it, although certainly you can apply. So what are these firms looking for, whether it's OCI or you just send them your resume and ask them you want to be a summer? What are their criteria?

Sadie Jones: I would say that really, grades are the most important criteria. And I know that maybe not what people want to hear, and that they're being looked at more in a well-rounded way, but that's just not true. So, they are going to look at your grades first, and they may have a set cutoff. I wouldn't get too stuck on whatever it said though in the materials you received, where they have to write a great cutoff a lot of times. And so, if you're close to that, that's when I think you can still go for it. If their cutoff they say is a 3.5 and you have a 2.6, that's not happening. That's just not happening. If you have a 2.6, you're not getting into BigLaw, probably anywhere. And so, I think you need to be realistic about that. Also, they're looking at what school you're at. So that's important too, and that's why they're deciding where they're doing OCI, which schools are going to. And generally, those are the only schools they are looking for students from, and they actually care about that. So, maybe they want students from a school that they haven't gotten someone from in the past, or it's just a top school, or it's the school that their hiring partner went to. There are lots of reasons that people add and subtract schools, but that's also really important, which doesn't mean that you can't be writing from another school and they may hire you, but it's just, again, less likely. And then aside from that, they are looking at things we've talked about before, like Law Review and moot court and activities you've done. They also are looking for diversity, they may be looking that you're active as a leader on campus. They're not really looking at how you did in undergrad, but maybe they will sort of look at have you excelled academically before, have you worked, do you have work experience, what is it, that kind of thing.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, so I think all these other factors come into play, I think around the margins. But the reality is, they're basically looking at grades in school. I've been at different firms, I've interviewed in places, you've obviously been at different firms, you've run the hiring. They do have these matrices, and some firms take them more seriously than others of, "We're looking for a 3.7 out of whatever



school this is. We're looking for a 3.6 out of this school." And if that's not close to where you're at, I think you've got to be realistic about that.

Sadie Jones: Exactly. And I know that close can be a range, but I do think it's within 0.1 or 0.2 of what we're talking about, so it can't be huge.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. If they want like a 3.7 and you have a 3.6 – okay, you've got some other things going for you that can probably work. Even getting into a 3.5, someone's probably going to say "No" to that. Again, it depends on the firm, some firms are more flexible. But I definitely worked at place where they're like, "If someone does not meet our grade criteria, do not send them for a follow-up interview. Done."

Sadie Jones: Right. Because then you're just wasting people's time, because there's no way they'll get through the final process. And that's actually respecting the student also – they shouldn't spend time to have you in if there's no way they can make you an offer.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think that frustrated some of the people who were doing the on-campus interview because they're sort of like, "Well, why do we even bother going if we're just going to use their transcripts? Couldn't we just cut this out?" Actually, that firm later did cut out OCI. I think for most people who bother sending interviewers, there is a little bit of give and take, but you have to really blow someone out of the water and they might get one person they can kind of go to bat for. But again, like you said, it's not going to be a 2.6 – that's not happening.

Sadie Jones: Exactly, and it can be hard. There are schools that aren't really doing grades anymore, although usually there's some way to distinguish people – the places where it's like, high honors, honors, pass – there is still a way to see that you did better. There's nowhere where we can't see anything about how you did in school, and that's always going to be the most important factor.

Alison Monahan: Right. I think we technically weren't allowed to calculate a GPA, and we definitely were not allowed to put it on anything, but they had your transcript. It's like, if you're on Law Review and they got your transcript and it's showing pretty good grades, they can do that GPA if they want to. Nobody is stopping them.

Sadie Jones: I guess what I would say also is if you're in that situation and you want to get there, spending a ton of time on applying to all these BigLaw firms and that kind of thing – that's not a good use of your time. You should be working on getting your grades up. Your focus should always be the academics, because again, that's going to lead to the jobs.



- Alison Monahan: Right. I think that's one thing people can do if maybe the first year went okay but it wasn't really knocking it out of the park level, that wasn't guaranteeing you a BigLaw job type of situation. I think that is a case where you might get lucky with 3L hiring if you have a really big increase in grades your second year, because then you've got a stronger story. Three L hiring is hard, because they're not necessarily looking for people, but if someone is looking for people, you're going to be probably towards the top of their list, because you can show a really good increase your second year. Then there are like, "Okay, cool. Your grades are now in the range we're looking for."
- Sadie Jones: I agree completely. Showing a really big improvement says something as well, just like that you figured out how to do it, and maybe you sought help and you got resources.
- Alison Monahan: You picked some better classes.
- Sadie Jones: Exactly, but you kind of can make your story work.
- Alison Monahan: Oh yeah, my second year was definitely my best because I took a clinic, that was an easy A.
- Sadie Jones: Well, it's good, make some decisions that are kind of strategic if you're going to be at a job where grades are going to be super important.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. No, I definitely did. I kind of looked at my schedule and was like, "Maybe I'll put a couple of these harder classes with typically lower grades off until my third year since I'm busy doing Law Review and I have this clinic." That ended up working out pretty well, because I took more paper classes, go to writing papers with less pressure. So, I think you can definitely shape your 2L year to improve your grades if you want to.
- Sadie Jones: And again, that should be your focus. Focusing a ton of time on the job stuff is not a good idea if there's something you can do about the academics.
- Alison Monahan: Right, I agree with that. Alright, well, say someone who is accepted is like, "Even though I want to maybe do this, BigLaw is probably not realistic for right now." How can someone set themselves up on a career path to possibly do this later?
- Sadie Jones: So, one path that I always suggest to people is clerkships, which again, are hard to get, and grades are going to matter and all that stuff. But there are ways to potentially get clerkships and making the right connections. Some judges like to hire from certain schools, so that's a possibility. The clerkship route is sort of an alternate route to BigLaw, and I feel like you're sort of judged differently and it's coveted. It's sort of just a different path than OCI, so I think that's something to always consider and figure out if there's a way to get a clerkship.



- Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think that's kind of the classic one. I had a friend who managed to actually do this quite successfully, who went to a school that was sort of less known because they gave her a lot of scholarship money, which she needed for various reasons. And then when she got out, she wanted to come to the Bay Area and do a very specific type of work, and the Bay Area is very competitive. They were not really willing to hire this person, even though she'd done very well from the school they didn't really know, they'd never hired from before. It was really frustrating for her because she's like, "I'm equally good to all these other people, probably better, because I've had to struggle more to get where I am." But she made it work – she basically took a different job at a smaller place for a while and kind of shifted around and eventually did some contract work in BigLaw, and then eventually got hired at a firm and was actually very successful. There was nothing that should have prevented her from doing that from the start, but it took probably four or five years to actually make that happen in the end.
- Sadie Jones: I think that's a great strategy. It's not going to work for everyone, and like you said, it's sort of a longer term strategy. She had to kind of stick with it, but I do think it's an excellent route to get in. Clerkships are just really looked at highly in BigLaw, and I don't think all law students really know that – that just having that is a big deal.
- Alison Monahan: Right. It is a big deal that kind of follows you around forever.
- Sadie Jones: You also get a nice payout, like a bonus when you start at the firm from the clerkship, I don't know that all law students know that. And it depends, it's changed over time and not every firm pays the exact same amount, but it is quite a nice...
- Alison Monahan: It's a lot.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: It's always been a lot. I remember getting that check. I was like, "Sweet."
- Sadie Jones: Yeah, and it's right when you start.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, it was great. I remember the day I got that check. Yeah, and another thing people can do is maybe you start out at a smaller place that's not your ideal, and then you clerk because then you actually get paid more as a clerk, and then you use that to kind of leverage into a different bigger firm or something. I think that can work really well. I think people go a lot from government jobs into firms later, which I'm not sure people really get. If you have experience at a certain type of government work, we can argue on policy grounds whether there is a



good public policy, but a lot of people do move from government into firms, particularly regulatory type of stuff, so that's also a path. I think it just depends on what people want to do.

Sadie Jones: Or the DA's Office or the Public Defender's Office. The white collar team is always going to be interested in those people, stuff like that. Those positions are also coveted, so they're not easy to get either.

Alison Monahan: Right, none of these were easy.

Sadie Jones: I think people don't always know that. Yeah, they think that's the backup plan, and it's like, no, there's definitely top law students trying to get those jobs too, because they want to be in public interest. But those are definitely a great way in and I think get you good experience. I think that's probably actually a better route than a random law firm, especially a really small law firm, I think that can be sort of a harder route. If you're going through somewhere that's more like boutique and has a particular practice group that you're going to get experience in and then move to that practice group at BigLaw, I think that's another route. Pick a specialty where you're going to get really solid experience and kind of sell yourself as somebody who's learned a lot quickly.

Alison Monahan: Right. I think it has to be something pretty specific too. Just going in and being like, "Oh, I'm doing random litigation work at some random firm" is probably not ultimately going to position you to do litigation work in BigLaw, because that's just not really where they're coming from.

Sadie Jones: I was thinking employment law would be a good area, where kind of a smaller...

Alison Monahan: Something specific.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, exactly. Or IP. There're a few different areas I think would be good. But again, you need to be really strategic and stick with your plan.

Alison Monahan: Well, ideally it would also be an area of law that you actually find interesting.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, that's true.

Alison Monahan: You're listening to this and you're like, "Oh, I'm going to go do employment law because you told me that was going to get me in BigLaw in five years." It's like, that's not really what we're saying. You've got to be top of the top of wherever you are.

Sadie Jones: Definitely. And I think you're right that liking it, enjoying what you do is probably going to make you more successful at it also. But I would focus on getting as





good experience as you can during that time that you're not in BigLaw, to make sure you're really learning the skills.

Alison Monahan: Right, because I think that's really key. I think any time you're looking to move on – and we've talked about this before, whether it's to a different type of job or just to a different firm or pathway or whatever – people are looking in terms of the skills and experiences that you should have acquired in that timeframe. So, there are just certain things you're expected to do, and the reality is, actually get to do a lot more of these things often at a smaller firm. So I think you can. I think of my law school roommate who went and became a public defender and basically, on day one, gets 100 cases dropped into her lap and they were like, "You're due in court in 15 minutes." And she's like, "What?" So she basically got a lot more hands-on experience, I guarantee you, than I did sitting behind my desk and maybe occasionally doing part of a deposition.

Sadie Jones: And I think the BigLaw firms totally know that. You've had a trial experience as a very junior associate, and that's a really big deal for them. So, you should think about that. That's going to go a long way.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think just wherever you land, be looking for opportunities to do things, a) because you'll learn something from it and you'll actually improve your own skills, but also because other people that are looking to hire you later want to know, what can you actually do? The reality is, I think a lot of people who start as associates in BigLaw kind of struggle with this because they get to the end of three to four years and they're looking for other jobs and people are like, "Well, what have you done?" There's often not a really clear answer, because what you do is sort of amorphous. You're not like, "Oh, I've been running a trial team" or, "I've done 15 cases to a jury on my own", which is totally realistic in a few years, I think, at a lot of places.

Sadie Jones: Well, and we've talked about how you can potentially get that experience doing pro bono work, which I think is sort of a similar concept, right?

Alison Monahan: Right.

Sadie Jones: You have more chance to jump into things.

Alison Monahan: But you're not doing that full-time.

Sadie Jones: Right, for sure. Don't tell them that that's what you want.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. Alright, let's shift gears a little bit and talk about other jobs sort of coming out of law school. If you want to do something in public interest or government, what do you think is important in law school at that entry-level point? And I know we just said these jobs can actually be really competitive.





- Sadie Jones: Yeah, I was going to say grades matter here too.
- Alison Monahan: Sorry!
- Sadie Jones: Yeah. But it depends on the job and how exciting it is to people. Obviously, these jobs pay less, so there's that. Although, I will say that some of these jobs do pay quite well in big markets, which people are surprised about. That's another reason that they're sort of coveted. So they are still looking at your grades, the school you went to. I think in these jobs, they're looking for more of a commitment to that area, so you've done public interest work before, and it's on your resume. They don't want it to be the launching off point for your career in BigLaw either. So, they want you to want to do that.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think everything you've talked about matters, but then also it matters a lot what you've been doing in law school, during the summers, during externship, maybe in some type of clinic, and also your relationships. So, those jobs are much more relationship-based, somebody is probably going to call up someone they know and say, "Oh, you've worked with this person, what do you think of them?" It's just a little more personal, I think.
- Sadie Jones: Definitely. And I think you want to kind of sell your commitment to it, that you care about it, that this is the career you want, that kind of thing.
- Alison Monahan: Right, I think you have to show that too. Sometimes I think people take whatever random job they get first year summer, or summer associate, and then they think they're going to go work for the ACLU. And it's like, that's probably not really what they're looking for, actually.
- Sadie Jones: Exactly. I agree completely.
- Alison Monahan: It's like, you don't get to just sort of up and decide you're going to do that. You need to tell that story through your classes and things. As with anything, I think the more of a plan you have, probably the better it's going to work out. I always think of someone I knew in law school who knew coming in she wanted to be a federal public defender, which is a very specific type of role, and there aren't that many of them. And then that's what she does now, because she spent her entire law school experience basically building her resume to the point at which she was the perfect candidate for that job. So not surprisingly, she got hired.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah, and most people I know in those situations are exactly the same. I would say if you sort of realize halfway through that you're going this route or you're trying to go this route, then you want to put together a story as best you can at that point to tell that. And I think it's still possible; it's just that you want it to all



make sense and not look like, "Oh, I just switched gears because I wasn't going to be able to do the thing I really wanted to do."

Alison Monahan: Right. And I think you can edit your resume strategically as well on that.

Sadie Jones: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: How realistic do you think it is to go in-house right out of law school?

Sadie Jones: Historically, I'd say not very. That was always the way it was. But I do think it's more common now that there are more of these entry-level jobs, and with tech being so big right now, I think there are more opportunities. It's sort of a different path. And I'm not saying that just because that's what you want to do, you're going to get it. Again, you need to set yourself up for that and tell that story. But I know they're hiring more summer associates, so that's definitely, again, the way to go with that. And I think it is a possibility, but you need to show that that's the route you're going to take.

Alison Monahan: I agree. I think it used to be just sort of like, yeah, that doesn't happen. But I think now, it is becoming more common as businesses build out their in-house legal teams more. I definitely have heard, at least anecdotally, a lot more stories about people going in-house straight out of school and things like that. So I think it's worth researching. But I wouldn't go to law school and start thinking that was the only thing I wanted to do when I got out, because I still don't think it's that common.

Sadie Jones: I'd also be concerned about the training, because most of these teams are going to be a lot smaller. And if they're not used to having a legal team, they may not know how to train an entry-level person. Maybe you'll get thrown into it and you'll learn a lot that way, but you also may miss out on some of the things you'd get at a firm, or even a government job or something like that. So, I'd think about that also.

Alison Monahan: Well, and I think traditionally, the teams of lawyers in-house have done different types of work. So, if people aren't familiar, oftentimes they'll have in-house team that kind of handles the day-to-day. They're drafting the contracts for the new hires and maybe doing some HR stuff, although even then, anything complicated for HR, they would probably have a firm they talk to that does it. And if it's a complicated case, they're probably farming it out to their outside counsel. So, it's just a different type of work, it's not better or worse, but I think it's worth understanding what you're getting into.

Sadie Jones: I agree completely.



Alison Monahan: Alright. Well, before we wrap up, do you have any ideas for someone who wants to kind of map out a longer term plan, maybe say five years or so? How can you do that? You're like, "Okay, I realize I'm probably not going to be able to do this thing I want to do immediately, but I want to work my way into it. How do I figure out that path?"

Sadie Jones: So, I think it's advice I give to law students about a lot of this type of thing, which is, it's great to find people who have the career path you're interested in and talk to them about how they got there. And it could be people that you have a personal relationship with, or it could be sort of cold call, emailing, based on looking at people's bios. Maybe it's through your LinkedIn, or maybe it's at a specific place and you've looked up the bios of different people. But I would reach out proactively and try to talk to them and tell them that you're interested in this area and you want to hear more about their career path. So, I think that's great. And then maybe you could find some sort of mentors that way, or people you can stay in touch with. And not necessarily that they're going to find you a job, but you can actually ask them questions about how they got there and ask for their advice and take it. Actually do what they say.

Alison Monahan: True.

Sadie Jones: So, I think that's a great idea. And sort of looking at your own network and making sure that your LinkedIn is always updated, you're keeping up with things, you're reading and being current about topics and the areas you're interested in, being involved in the bar associations, and they have particularly like sort of junior lawyer areas. So basically, my advice is to get involved and be proactive and network, which I always tell people to do. You really need to take ownership and make sure that you're always moving yourself forward, towards the goal.

Alison Monahan: And I think it goes back to what we were saying earlier about the skill development. You want to be evaluating at different points along this plan like, "Okay, I'm two years in. Is this where I thought I was going to be? Am I getting the experiences I wanted to get? Do I have enough skills that maybe I can start shifting someplace else?" I think you just want to be constantly evaluating how this is going, and are you moving closer? Or maybe your goals have changed. Maybe you realize from talking to your friends who are law firm associates, you don't actually want to do this. And that's also completely fine.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely. I also think it's great if you know someone in BigLaw to find out if that place has a document that has their benchmarks or things they're supposed to have hit at certain points, so you can find out specifically if you're getting the right skills, because everyone kind of has that.



- Alison Monahan: That's true. Yeah, they all have that these days. Alright, well, we're pretty much out of time. Any final thoughts on this?
- Sadie Jones: Kind of what you just said, which is that I think some people have a goal in mind, or they've always heard BigLaw is the thing, or being a partner or being a general counsel or whatever it is. Make sure that you're not just pushing yourself towards it because that's what you'd always done or thought you were going to do. And just make sure you're re-evaluating what it is that would make you happy and keep you engaged and is a good idea, versus just like what you kept going towards, because maybe there's also a reason that you didn't qualify for it, maybe it wasn't the right path for you. So, it's great to have a goal and if that's what you want, go for it, but just make sure that you're continuing to re-evaluate what you want and what would make you happy.
- Alison Monahan: I think that's true. I think as people's lives change, also your work-life desires may change. And yes, sometimes you do see people who just get fixated on this idea, and at some point it's just like, "This is probably not leading you towards greater happiness. Maybe you should just drop this and appreciate what you have."
- Sadie Jones: Absolutely.
- Alison Monahan: Alright. Well, on that note, thank you so much for joining us.
- Sadie Jones: Thanks for having me.
- Alison Monahan: My pleasure. 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 or 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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