



Alison Monahan: Hello, and welcome to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today, we're going to be talking about professionalism – a very important topic if you want to succeed in any law job. Your Law School Toolbox hosts are Alison Monahan – that's me, and Lee Burgess. 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. Together, we're the co-creators of the [Law School Toolbox](#), the [Bar Exam Toolbox](#), the Catapult career conference, and the Trebuchet Legal career site. I also run [The Girl's Guide to Law School](#). If you enjoy the show, please leave a review on iTunes. 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 would love to hear from you. With that, let's get started.

Lee Burgess: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today we're talking about a very important topic, which is how to behave like a professional in the legal workplace. Now, you might be thinking this is kind of obvious, but the reality is that many law students haven't worked in a similar environment before getting their first legal jobs. Either they've got limited work experience in general, or the experience is much more casual than a law firm or a government law job. The legal world is actually pretty formal, even in California, and it's important to understand the expectations so you can avoid faux pas that make it seem like you don't belong.

Alison Monahan: Absolutely. And first off, let's talk a little bit about our prior experience, because I know, Lee, you had really worked in a similar environment, but I hadn't had much experience in a professional type of environment. So, tell me about what you did before law school.

Lee Burgess: So, for about a year outside of my undergraduate, I worked in political public relations, which basically meant that I worked near government agencies and we worked with small governments in Sacramento. And Sacramento is actually quite a formal environment – everybody wears suits to work at the Capitol and things like that. So, that was my first introduction to kind of a more formal environment. And then after that, I worked as a high-tech consultant, where I did a lot of client-facing work. And although my clients' office wasn't necessarily very formal, I worked in a lot of government agency offices. There was still a lot of formality because they were paying us a lot of money to be their consultants, and so they expected a certain amount of professionalism, even though most of us were quite young. I mean, management was older, but most of us were 22-23 that were working at these clients' sites.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, that's interesting because I worked as a programmer before I went to law school where the clients were also paying a lot of money per hour, like lawyer rates, basically, for me to work on their projects. But the idea that I would wear a suit to a meeting with them would just be laughable, I mean, I would never. If a programmer showed up in a suit, it would be like, "Woah."



Lee Burgess: That is true, which is probably why the programmers stayed back at the site where they were actually building the programs that we were implementing.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it's just interesting because the tech environment has the whole culture, and the perception of it is so focused on this idea of not being a formal sort of professional environment. It's actually very interesting when as a lawyer, you have high-tech clients, because you have to walk a very fine line. If you, say, go to Yahoo and pitch for new business, the lawyers can't show up in a bunch of suits because then they look like the suits. But they also can't dress like programmers. It was interesting, I would go on these pitches to high-tech companies, and an email would go out the day before saying, "Do not wear a suit. This is the dress code, don't wear jeans." Although I have seen the managing partner go to a pitch in jeans at a tech company, that's rare. But I guess the point is, all workplaces have sort of their own environment, and part of the goal as a young employee is to figure out what the norms are. And then to the extent that you feel comfortable with that, to basically comply with those norms. This is something we can talk about in a minute, what values we are imposing on people here. I guess for me, the only real experience I'd had in sort of a more professional environment was, I guess before I went to architecture school, actually. Right out of college, I worked as a temp in LA in various office environments, like I worked at Nestle's corporate headquarters for a while. And I remember going to Ann Taylor and buying this suit and having a briefcase, and I thought it was so cool. I would march across this lobby every day with my click-clack heels, with my briefcase and my suit. I was like 22 or something, 21. I loved it. I was like, "Man, this is so cool." I felt like I was playing a role, but it was really fun. It was like I get to dress up and pretend to be a grownup.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, it is totally fascinating. At one point, I was an intern at a production company in Hollywood, at Universal Studios, in college, and that is a completely different work environment. I think one of the things I have learned from all of the different places I have worked is that you really have to be aware of how everyone's acting around you. And you might come with your own ideas of what professionalism means, what it means to be part of a corporate culture or an office culture, but you also need to be very observant and take cues from other folks, especially about things like dress or even email formality or things like that, because that's almost how you're going to learn what is really the best thing to do in that given environment.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and work hours and expectations as well. If everyone's showing up at 10:00 AM and you're there at 8:00 but you're leaving early, that might not be the best thing for your career.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.



- Alison Monahan: You know?
- Lee Burgess: Exactly.
- Alison Monahan: You don't get credit for those two hours you were in the office when no one else was. So, let's unpack this a little bit. What does it mean to be a professional, anyway? Is this just some way to impose snooty upper class values on everyone, or is there something here that's actually valuable?
- Lee Burgess: I think this is a really loaded question that's probably maybe its own podcast topic.
- Alison Monahan: Good point.
- Lee Burgess: To start kind of unpacking this, to me in the law, especially, I think professionalism means something special because you are representing someone else. You are providing a client service, but it's not even just a client service. Maybe when you were programming something for somebody else, you are often standing in someone else's shoes and guiding them and making decisions and recommendations for them – sometimes they're companies, sometimes they're individuals, or maybe they're even government agencies.
- Alison Monahan: You might literally stand up in court and represent them.
- Lee Burgess: Right, exactly. And so when you are really playing that role, to me, I think you owe those folks that you're standing up for this duty of professionalism, because you're taking the responsibility of someone else's, sometimes life, sometimes money, their freedom.
- Alison Monahan: Their freedom, their kids.
- Lee Burgess: Or even a company's well-being into your hands, and I think that requires a lot of professionalism. If I get very sappy about the importance of lawyers, it's that we have the power to guide people through the twists and turns in life that they might not have the knowledge or the ability to guide themselves, or it's impractical for them to guide themselves. And that's very important, so I think professionalism is a big part of that.
- Alison Monahan: No, I agree. I think, as you said, we could have a whole conversation about particularly the norms and certain legal organizations and things, and people who don't necessarily fit those norms and that kind of thing, but that's probably a different topic. But I do agree with you. I think people, if you take seriously the idea of being a lawyer and you're representing, as you said, a client, but oftentimes you're an officer of the court, you've sworn to uphold certain things. And I think if you take that seriously, you can talk about things like client service



taking responsibility, really owning your decisions and your work, which means you've got to consistently do really your best work. You can't just dial it in and decide that someone else is going to deal with it. Oftentimes, even as a young lawyer, you're actually the last person to touch something. You might even – I mean, hopefully not, as a summer associate – but...

Lee Burgess: Since you're not licensed.

Alison Monahan: I do have a story where I got a call as a first-year summer associated after my first year of law school from an older associate who was getting ready to file something, and he says, "How sure are you that this is right?" And I said, "Well, probably not that sure because I've had one year of law school, why?" He says, "Because I don't really have time to review it and we have to file it." And there's this moment of "Holy sh*t." In the end, he did not actually file it without looking at it, because I was like, "No, I really think this is actually your responsibility." I think also you've got to look at being a decent co-worker. Are you someone who's easy to work with, or are you that person who's just causing all kinds of drama in the office and making everyone's lives miserable? That's not really a way to be a professional. You've got to think of your co-workers as your colleagues – they're your team. And I think making an effort to be a reasonable person to work with is always a good option.

Lee Burgess: I think we talked about this in our authenticity podcast from a while ago, but I think it can be a struggle for some folks to really feel like they know what it means for themselves to be a professional, what is the professional version of yourself. Alison and I've been working together for a long time. We've become really good friends, we talk about way more stuff than work, but our relationship is much broader than just our professional relationship. If you meet me out for coffee to talk about business, what I share about my life, what I talk about, how I represent my business and things like that, it might be slightly different. That doesn't mean that it's inauthentic, that that's still not me or you're not getting the true version of me, but that's my professional self. And so, one of the things I think if you're still in law school and you're listening to this to start kind of slow-burning for yourself is, what is this professional version of yourself going to look like? Taking into consideration all of these things that are important about professionalism.

Alison Monahan: No, I think that's a great point. I think it can be very hard, particularly if you're younger in the workplace or a woman or a minority or whatever, to kind of feel like, do you have to fit this sort of dominant paradigm role? And I think one of the things that is interesting is, people can sort of figure out "Okay, this is a version of myself that I'm willing to put out there and it feels authentic to me, even if maybe it's not the exact same person I would be when I'm hanging out with my best friend from college."



- Lee Burgess: Right, exactly.
- Alison Monahan: We all contain multitudes. I might not have gone into a law firm interview and decided to start talking about my Burning Man camp. It's not to say that I would hide that necessarily if it came up, but I'm not going to bring it up either. And I think this element of judgment is also an aspect of the legal profession. Do you want to be that person in the organization who's getting completely hammered at every event? Maybe not.
- Lee Burgess: It's just something to continue to think about, because I think that journey to find comfort with your professional self is not an overnight thing. I think it's something that you kind of work on, especially by going to networking events and getting to know more people and participate in professional outings or meetings and things like that. And then it starts to feel authentic once you can kind of see where you fit. But it can take a while.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think oftentimes people sort of feel, just like I did in my first professional job – I felt like I was dressing up and pretending to be this grownup. Which kind of I was, I didn't know what I was doing.
- Lee Burgess: And I think the other thing that's been interesting, I felt this way since becoming a mom, and I've had other professional mommas say the same thing to me is, you almost... As your life changes and you as yourself, your true authentic self goes through some critical life changes, that may influence your professional self.
- Alison Monahan: Right, it's not a static thing.
- Lee Burgess: I had a momma friend tell me at a momma meetup, she was actually a landscape designer that she had gone to her first... It was like a show or some large meeting of landscape designers since she had had her baby and she left her baby at home. And she said, "I felt like a fraud. Nobody knew that I had gone through this crazy thing that had totally uprooted my life and I was just wandering around like I was the same person, that I totally wasn't." And it was just interesting to me because I hadn't thought that these milestones in our lives – it could be something like having a child or a change in your family situation, or a loss in your life – it can be a struggle; you have to re-evaluate what is authentic to you. And so, it's an ongoing journey, and I think you have to look at it that way.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. Well, let's talk about the fun part here. What are some places that law students and new lawyers really tend to go wrong in this one? I'm just going to go with the first one, that really, I think the millennial generation particularly gets a bad rap on this, but I think there is lot of truth to it, having worked with a number of these people in law firms and in other legal



environments. And it's a sense of entitlement. I think for people who have not had a lot of work experience, but they've always been rewarded throughout their lives like, "Oh, you're so brilliant, you're so good at this, you're so great at school", blah, blah, blah – it's easy to walk into a legal work environment and think, "Man, I am totally bad ass. I have so much to offer, and these people are lucky to have me here." Let me tell you, that is not going to go down very well.

Lee Burgess: No, because it's likely your secretary knows more about practicing law than you do.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. Your secretary might have been there 25 years, they know how to file things. You've never even been to court. So, if you start coming in and bossing around your secretary and telling them how you want something filed for, blah, blah, blah, and they're like, "You realize there is electronic filing that's required", and you're like, "Yeah, but I don't want to do that", and they're like, "Oh, okay." So, the reality is, as a young lawyer, basically your job is really to make the people above you look good and to make their lives easier. I had the managing partner of the firm I was working at tell me this, and I was like, "God, what an ass." He's basically like, "You do not understand your job. Your job is to make sure I do not look like an idiot and that I look good." And I was like, "Wow, that is so obnoxious", but it's true.

Lee Burgess: It is true. And I think I was lucky that I had a temp job once where I was filling in as somebody's assistant, and she was a recruiter for a large healthcare company out here on the West Coast – high-level executive recruiting, not recruiting for all jobs. And one of my jobs was to put together these files, so when she talked to people, she had everything in the order in which she needed it, etcetera, etcetera. And I screwed something up, and she instead of yelling at me, sat me down... I don't even remember her name, because I didn't work there very long, but she sat me down and said, "I know you're young, but I need to tell you why this small mistake made a big difference into how I conducted myself in this interview, and it put me at risk of not looking good and this organization look good." It was a really kind of important moment for me, fresh out of college, to realize that that attention to detail of something that you might be rolling your eyes at, like putting together a file folder for a recruiter, actually could have a really big impact. Even though your role might change, that role of putting things together for somebody else really is something that happens for a long, long, long, long time in your career.

Alison Monahan: Absolutely. If you're working on depositions, somebody's going to put these deposition binders together that basically are like dossiers on the people that you're talking about, whether it's your client, representative or the person you're interviewing or whatever. Somebody is going to sit down and pull every single document that this person has been mentioned in that you've produced and these kinds of things. And you might be like, "God, this is so beneath me. I



went to an Ivy League law school and I'm getting paid to collate." But that's the reality of what you're getting paid for.

Lee Burgess: Yep, exactly.

Alison Monahan: You need to know how to make the copies, you need to know how to operate the fax machine at 2:00 in the morning when no one else is there to help you. And I think it can be easy to be lulled into this false sense of someone else will take care of it, but there's going to come a time where there's nobody else there and this has to happen. And if it doesn't happen, you're the one on the line.

Lee Burgess: Alison, I think this is an interesting point, because something I was thinking about when you were just saying this is, how does this relate to women getting pigeon-holed into doing some of these jobs? We've read all these articles that there will be a bunch of men and women in the room and they tell the woman to make copies. So, should women say, "I will not make copies", or do you just have to be aware that there is a time and a place for that? And there's a time when it doesn't matter who is making the copies, the copies just need to get done. How do you think that you kind of feel your way through that?

Alison Monahan: No, I think that's a great question, and I think it's a really hard thing to balance. I think it's one of those things, I think there is a danger... The joke at the firm I worked at was, the worst thing that you could be called in a victory email – which they sent out thanking everyone on the team for their victory – was to be called "hardworking", because basically it meant that you were doing all the grunt work that no one else wanted to do. And inevitably usually that was a woman, who was like "Thanks for her hard work." It's sort of condescending. It basically means they're taking care of the crap; they're doing the office house work. It's basically the way that people put it. I think it's a hard line. I think you have to pay attention and if you start to notice that there are two or three people at your level on the same team, and you're the one who's always being asked to take notes or you're the one who's always being asked to make copies or to make sure this and that's happening. I think it's totally fair at some point to either go to a person above you or even in a meeting and say, "Hey, basically, it's John's turn to take notes this time." I think it's okay to call it out, and I think you should call it out. If that involves going to a partner that you're working for and you say, "I've noticed that this is a situation that's happening, and this is why I'm concerned about it. I want to be a productive member of the team, but I also think we should spread this around" – I think that's a fair point to make.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think the key is though, if you're going to have those hard discussions, which should be had if they are necessary, you still need to come at them with professionalism and respect for those above you, and below you, and your peers, because if you conduct yourself in that way, then you have a higher



likelihood of success from those meetings than if you kind of go in – circling back to Alison's first point of this idea of entitlement – it's not that you are not willing to take notes; it's that you have noticed a pattern about who's taking notes. Those are two very different things.

Alison Monahan: Right, and you don't think that's productive for the team, and here's why. There's a difference between just randomly complaining about something and making a proposal that's actually, arguably, to everyone's benefit. I had a situation where I was being made to do this horrible document review from this jerk of a lawyer in a completely different office, who just basically had a list of people and he was like, "You're on my list, I get 20 hours of your time this week." I basically went to the partner who I worked for, and I was like, "This is not a productive use of my time. Here are the other things I could be doing instead. I cannot be writing this motion for a summary judgment because I'm doing 20 hours a week of document review. Do you really think this is the best use of my time?" And she was like, "No, no, this is not a good use of your time." Because the point was supposed to be, I can make your life easier if you get me off of this ridiculous thing that is completely fungible and any warm body could be doing. But sometimes as a professional, you have to have those hard conversations. You can't just shy away from them, but you have to think about it strategically and think about, "How am I making my boss's life easier?"

Lee Burgess: For sure. And then there's always the issues of how we dress – another probably topic we could do podcast after podcast after podcast on. We're not saying that you need to go out and blow a whole bunch of money on a brand new professional wardrobe. That's not really the issue. It's about, again, thinking about how you're presenting yourself. From my perspective, it's really trying to present yourself in the way that your peers that you respect are presenting themselves, and the idea that you never want to be either way more formally dressed than everyone around you, or way more casually dressed than everyone around you.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Basically, you don't want your dress to be a distraction, whatever that means in the environment that you're working in. If you're working at Cravath, that means basically you're going to wear a suit every day, because that's what they expect, and if you don't do that, you're a distraction. In San Francisco, if you wore a suit every day, you'd be that freak who always wears a suit.

Lee Burgess: Unless you work in government, and then that's the cruel joke. Most of my government friends, attorneys, they do have to wear suits every day and they say that's incredibly unfair, as they can practice law in Sacramento or San Francisco and they still have to wear suits every day.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, but the point is, suck it up, you're a lawyer. If you take a job that you know requires you to wear a suit, don't complain about wearing a suit.



- Lee Burgess: Right. And again, watch what your superiors are doing. When I did a summer at the U.S. Attorney's office in Oakland, it was just a criminal division and they not every single day were necessarily as formal as other government offices, if you knew you weren't going to be in court, but everybody had a suit in their office, everyone.
- Alison Monahan: Every lawyer, frankly, should have a suit in their office – that was one of the pieces of advice we got as first day summer associates. It's like, you don't have to wear a suit every day, but you need to be ready to be wearing a suit within 10 minutes, meaning you need a suit hanging on the back of your door, pressed, ready to go, with shoes, with jewelry, whatever. So if someone calls you and says, "We need you to be in court in half an hour", you can put that suit on, jump in a taxi and be there. That's just a basic expectation of working as a litigator. It's like you are ready to go to court at any moment.
- Lee Burgess: It's very true. Casual Friday, doesn't matter. You always have to have a suit, either in your car or in your office.
- Alison Monahan: Sometimes people will tell you these things and sometimes they won't. And it's like, the first time you get a call that's like, "Hey, we need you to be in court" and you're like, "Oh, I'm wearing jeans." It's like, "You're doing what?"
- Lee Burgess: And I think that, again, finding your professional persona is not inauthentic. We've heard all sorts of terrible advice given to law students about especially things like dress. I've heard some career services offices really tell students to wipe any personality from their physical appearance that they can, and I don't necessarily think it has to be that way. I like Alison's suggestion of it just not being a distraction, but you still to be yourself. And if you don't feel like yourself, then that's probably not going to lead you to performing at your best.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think, like we said earlier, there is this process of sort of negotiating your place in this probably more formal profession. And it's not like at every moment you have to be like, "Oh, I'm so comfortable, I'm as comfortable as I would be at home wearing my sweat pants." It's like, you're a grownup, it's time to put on grownup clothes and go out in the world and behave like an adult. And maybe that's not as comfortable as sitting in your pajamas – I'm sorry, but that's kind of the way things work. But at the same time, if you feel like you have to conform and tamp down every aspect of the things that you care about and the person that you are, that can be a sign that this is really maybe not the right work environment for you to be in.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, if that's not going to make you happy, then time to take a step back.



Alison Monahan: The reality is, it's much harder to fit in if you're not the standard lawyer type. You just have to understand what you're getting into. It's not that there's not a place for you in the profession; it's just that the reality is, it will be harder.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, and you just have to evaluate the pros and cons of all of that.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. Just know what you're getting into. A couple of other places that people tend to go wrong – number one... Well, number two, I guess, after a sense of entitlement – or maybe these are tied together – is being mean to people, whether it's the underlings in the office... Even thinking of people as "underlings" or somehow less than you because they didn't go to law school... I think you will quickly find out in most cases, the paralegals and the legal secretaries are typically far more competent at this point in your career than you are.

Lee Burgess: For sure.

Alison Monahan: I've even heard of young lawyers being rude to partners.

Lee Burgess: Oh my gosh.

Alison Monahan: Which really causes you to question what in the world they're thinking.

Lee Burgess: Terrible idea, by the way. Terrible idea.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, these are the people who pay you. Not that you have to suck up to them, but being openly rude for no reason – not a great idea.

Lee Burgess: No, terrible idea.

Alison Monahan: Also, I think a large part of it comes down to the work. Unfortunately, in a lot of law practices, the reality is if you get your work done competently and you get it done on time, you can actually get away with a lot of other things. But if your work is not done competently and it is not done on time, you will get away with nothing, you will be fired.

Lee Burgess: Yep. I remember working on a litigation team. I was in my first litigation team and the supervising attorney who I was working for, who's probably like a sixth or a seventh year, sent me a very nice email after the litigation was done. And he said, "I really appreciated that whenever I read one of your response motions..." Because of course, I was responding to all of the crazy wackadoodle motions that had been filed.

Alison Monahan: Right, and writing discovery responses and all that crap.



- Lee Burgess: Right, exactly, the crazy motions in limine and stuff like that. I would read them and I didn't have to edit them. And he's like, "That was a huge help to me in this process, and thank you for your attention to detail." It was a nice moment of basically being able to say, because I proofread it that extra time, because I was careful to make sure my citations were right, I actually really did make his job easier and he appreciated it and would probably put me on his next trial team. And I think just something little like that, you sometimes forget how important that is.
- Alison Monahan: It is, and I think sometimes people get confused about the idea of, "Oh, you're turning in a draft." It's like, "No, this is not a draft like you would turn in to your teacher in college to get feedback on." A draft in a legal situation should be something that in theory could be filed with the court. You might have comments or questions or whatever, and that's totally fine, but it should not be just half done. The citation should be done and things like that, because you never know – someone might just be like, "I don't have time to deal with this. We're just going to have to file it."
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly. And get stuff done when you say it's going to get done, or when they've told you it has to get done.
- Alison Monahan: Right. If you're not going to, that needs to be an immediate, immediate heads up.
- Lee Burgess: Yes.
- Alison Monahan: You cannot wait until the last minute and be like, "Oh, by the way, this is not happening."
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, no. I think that goes for everything. If life happens and you have a family tragedy or... Once my cat got super sick when my husband was out of town and I was working at the firm. Luckily, we didn't have anything super, super time sensitive, but I had to Black Berry the supervising attorney and be like, "I'm at the vet with my cat and I'm at home alone. I'm sorry, I will send you updates, but I'm probably going to miss this meeting." But I did it the minute I realized I couldn't be there, and that's different than emailing during the meeting.
- Alison Monahan: Or just not showing up to it.
- Lee Burgess: Or not showing up.
- Alison Monahan: And then letting them wonder, "Well, wait. Why wasn't Lee there? Now it's my problem to track her down and figure out why she wasn't there." That is not professional.



- Lee Burgess: Right. And so, just open communication in a professional way. I think for me, one area where all of us can get a bit sloppy is the professionalism of email communications as well.
- Alison Monahan: Oh yes.
- Lee Burgess: Because I think now that we all text so much, the lines between a text and an email and even a voice mail and things like that are all getting very blurred. But at work, I think you really want to check yourself with emails. Proofread them before you send them, especially to somebody higher up than you. Remember that those emails are now permanent records of things and are searchable.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. After you do one set of reviewing discovery or document review, you will never look at email the same way again, because you're like, "Oh my God, someone might be reading this five or 10 years from now. What am I saying?" And it's amazing what people say in emails.
- Lee Burgess: It is amazing what people say. And you just want to remember that somebody is just reading it, and I think sometimes you can come off as being very curt when maybe you're not trying to be very curt just based on the email. It's just good to be thoughtful and find your voice with the email too. I actually have a friend that I worked with at a non-profit. She's from Russia, and she is very dry. And she always said that it annoyed her that all of my emails would start with, "I hope you're doing well." It was like, "Hi, so-and-so, I hope you're doing well", blah, blah, blah. She's like, "Just get to the point, I don't have time to read your welcome." I was like, "Okay."
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, you just have to think about it.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, because you have to think about it and of course, tailor the message to the person. Once she told me that...
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. If someone tells you that, you're like, "Great, you'll get the curt version."
- Lee Burgess: Right, exactly.
- Alison Monahan: It doesn't take that much longer to put someone's name in, and it just is a little bit more friendly.
- Lee Burgess: Exactly.
- Alison Monahan: I can't even tell you the number of conversations I've had with people in legal practice about what the best sign-off is.
- Lee Burgess: I know, I know.



Alison Monahan: It's like, is "Best" too passive-aggressive if I'm writing to opposing counsel? But these things actually do have an impact. We're lawyers – the words that you choose, they have meaning.

Lee Burgess: And I think it's great to pay attention to how the other attorneys are signing emails. You can always look around and see what other people are doing, and then copy them.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, this is part of finding your own voice as you look for people who you admire as attorneys. Not that you have to mimic them, but what is it that you admire about them? You can completely take bits and pieces and turn it into your own professional persona.

Lee Burgess: For sure. One though side note – especially, you will learn this the first time you do a document review – please do not talk about personal things over work email. It's a terrible, terrible idea.

Alison Monahan: And also double, triple check, maybe even using technology, who you are sending these emails to.

Lee Burgess: Yes, yes.

Alison Monahan: This happens with everyone in legal practice. I have a story from a managing partner who accidentally CCed a judge about what an idiot she was. And you want to talk about somebody who had call Chambers and grovel. This was a managing partner. It doesn't matter; you do not do that.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly. There was someone I worked with once, who told me that her firm had ended up becoming part of litigation, and so, her computer and emails were part of discovery. And their own team of document review folks was going through the first pass, and she had gone through a very messy divorce while working there and all of her emails with her ex-husband were on her work computer. And she's like, "The associates of the firm read all of the emails with my... "

Alison Monahan: They have to. I mean...

Lee Burgess: They have to. This is just not necessary. You just keep that on your Gmail and keep it out of the workplace.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. At this point, with everyone having their own devices, there's literally no excuse for you to be using your work email for public purposes.

Lee Burgess: No. But people still do, so please just don't do that. Just don't do it.



- Alison Monahan: Keep it separate.
- Lee Burgess: Keep it separate, keep it separate. You will be thankful for it. But definitely just remember that email is forever, and that's the way it is. Okay.
- Alison Monahan: Alright. Well, we're unfortunately getting about out of the time. But let's summarize, what do you need to do, really, to be perceived as a professional? I mean, it's all the things we've really talked about above, right? We don't need to belabor the point, but show up on time, be prepared. This is your word. Your reputation as a lawyer is your word. If you're someone who's not showing up to things, who's not getting things done, that doesn't look good.
- Lee Burgess: No, it does not. And it can be little things, but this is one thing that you must do really when work anywhere, is every time you walk into a meeting with a supervisor, you better be there with a notebook and a pen to take notes about what they're going to tell you.
- Alison Monahan: Absolutely, because they're not going to want to tell it to you again.
- Lee Burgess: No, and they're not going to send you an email summarizing what happened in the meeting.
- Alison Monahan: No. In fact, it's nice if you send them an email summarizing what happened in the meeting, because that makes their life easier.
- Lee Burgess: It does, yes.
- Alison Monahan: Even people who work for us, occasionally, we'll have a meeting and 10 minutes later I get an email being like, "Okay, so here's what we talked about, here are the action items, here's what you're doing, and here what I'm doing." And I'm like, "Perfect. I love you."
- Lee Burgess: Yes, great. We're all on the same page. Exactly. And be polite to everyone, both the people above you on the totem pole and the people below you. Nothing bad comes from being a nice person.
- Alison Monahan: Well, and you never know when you're going to need to call in a favor. It's like, if you've been the person who's always friendly to the people who do the word processing, and suddenly you have a rush document and they're going to have to drop someone else's work to get it done, who do you think they're going to help? Someone who's always been friendly and occasionally brought them like chocolate, or someone who's been a jerk to them or never talked to them?
- Lee Burgess: For sure.



Alison Monahan: I don't think they're going to pull any favors for the person that hasn't made an effort.

Lee Burgess: No. And the legal community can be fairly small. Even within San Francisco, everybody talks about what a small town it is. You run into the same people professionally over and over again.

Alison Monahan: Well, and your reputation follows you.

Lee Burgess: It's true. When I worked in Hollywood, when I was in college, all of the assistants would keep lists of people who had wronged them when they were assistants, because it was very much a "climb the ladder" type thing. Everybody was an assistant at some point, and then you were assistant producer or whatever, whatever. But they kept these lists.

Alison Monahan: Oh yeah, people remember.

Lee Burgess: People remember. And they would look for an opportunity to hand back some of the attitude that they got many, many moons before. So, you just want to remember that it only behooves you to try not to be mean to people in every occasion. Just try and be nice.

Alison Monahan: It will definitely... It can come back to bite you. I personally have either gotten people jobs or not gotten people jobs because of the way that they've behaved in the past.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly.

Alison Monahan: And everyone does it.

Lee Burgess: Yep, everybody does it. And as we said, get your work done and on time. Not to be crazy and kill yourself pulling all-nighters all the time, but if you're supposed to deliver something, either deliver it on time, or as soon as you know that something's not going right, talk to your supervisor. Don't keep them in the dark.

Alison Monahan: I think the point here is, don't over-extend yourself either. Sometimes – this is probably a different podcast – but this can require learning how to say "No". And that's an important skill in a professional environment, particularly one that's as ours, demanding as the legal profession is. You have to be able to tactfully tell someone that you just don't have the bandwidth to work on their project.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, for sure. Any other final stories that you want to share? Warning stories?



Alison Monahan: Well, I've got a couple, I'll make them brief. There was one the second year, who was assigned to make copies and didn't make them properly and almost got fired by the partner on the spot. I think the exact quote was, "I'm paying you \$200,000 dollars a year and you can't be bothered to make 12 copies?"

Lee Burgess: Ouch.

Alison Monahan: "Who else do you think is going to do this? It's Sunday afternoon. Seriously, make the freaking copies and get it right." Yeah, then there's another one a friend of mine told me about recently about this horrible associate they work with, who there was some situation where they needed to take some emergency depositions, everybody's busy, literally every person on the team was assigned to drop everything, go take this deposition on a weekend. Literally, the lowest person on their totem pole sent an email to the entire team saying he would only change his personal schedule to take a deposition on a Sunday if a managing partner of the firm personally asked him in person to do it.

Lee Burgess: Wow.

Alison Monahan: At which point I was like, "Is that person still working with you?" Because if I was the partner, I would literally fire them in a response email.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that's amazing.

Alison Monahan: I mean, totally unbelievable.

Lee Burgess: Oh my gosh.

Alison Monahan: You're just like, "What are you thinking?" So, don't be that person.

Lee Burgess: I guess the last thing I would say for people listening is, what if you're just scratching your head at the end of this podcast and being like, "I've never worked in a professional environment, I didn't grow up in a family where people worked in these kinds of environments, members of my family worked in these kinds of environments? How do you start to navigate? Where do people go to ask for help? Or who are the people that you should talk to, to kind of feel out what the rules are in your given workplace?"

Alison Monahan: Well, I think if this is a point where if somebody's making a BigLaw salary, I would say you actually probably should hire a career coach. Get that external perspective. You can't trust people at your firm, frankly, or your work environment necessarily. I mean, maybe you can, but you can talk to people... It's hard because you're a lawyer, there're confidentiality issues. I could say you could talk to people like other lawyers that you know, who are sort of outside of



the process. I would be really careful about kvetching with people at your firm or at your other legal organization about this, because I think things get back to people.

Lee Burgess: Do you think if you're in law school, maybe Career Services is a place you can go to at least talk about them to...

Alison Monahan: Maybe, depending if you trust them.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I know when you're interviewing for jobs, sometimes they would connect us with people who'd worked at the firm before, so we could ask some questions about how the office works.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think you just have to be judicious about who you're talking to and who you're taking advice from. I think it's a hard question.

Lee Burgess: It is a hard question, but looking for mentors, looking for people you can trust, but being thoughtful about choosing those people wisely.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely, because these can be kind of backstabbing environments, a lot of them. That is the reality, right?

Lee Burgess: I know. And on that note, we are out of time.

Alison Monahan: With that, we are out of time.

Lee Burgess: If you enjoyed this episode of the Law School Toolbox podcast, please take a second to leave a review and rating on iTunes. We'd really appreciate it. And be sure to subscribe so you don't miss anything in the future. If you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to reach out to myself or Alison at lee@lawschooltoolbox.com or alison@lawschooltoolbox.com. Or you can always contact us via our website [contact form](#) at LawSchoolToolbox.com. Thanks for listening, and we'll talk to you soon!