Alison Monahan: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today we're excited to have Emily Witt, a legal recruiter who was at Wachtell for many years, here with us to talk about BigLaw recruiting, summer programs, going in-house, and more. Your Law School toolbox host 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 get started.

Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today we're excited to have Emily Witt, a legal recruiter who was at Wachtell for many years, here with us to talk about BigLaw recruiting, summer programs, going in-house, and more. Welcome, Emily.

Emily Witt: Hi Alison. How are you doing today?

Alison Monahan: I'm good. Thank you so much for joining us. I'm super excited to talk with you.

Emily Witt: So excited to be here. Thank you again.

Alison Monahan: Oh, my pleasure. Well, to start us off, can you just give us a sense of your background and how it is that you ended up doing the work that you're doing?

Emily Witt: Sure. So, my background… I studied English literature in college, and I did not have any connections that worked in the law. I thought I wanted to go into journalism – that's where a lot of my families were at the time when I was considering careers. And I ended up in a book publishing job that did not go as expected. I was telling this story recently – I was very confused and I was waiting on line at the Port Authority Bus Terminal for a bus, and I met someone who I ended up traveling with throughout Europe, and she convinced me to quit my job and come back, and that's when I would deal with it. And when I came back to the States five weeks later – and we're still really great friends to this day, so it was a success story online – I was rock climbing at the rock climbing wall where I go, and my climbing partner happened to be an associate at Cravath. And so, as I was going through this exploratory process of job searching, thinking "Okay, book publishing didn't work out, maybe I want to do something HR related, recruiting related", her line to me was, "Emily, there's a million and one law firms in New York City. Have you ever considered legal recruiting?" And I didn't even know it was a thing – this was in the early 2000s. And she put me in touch with one of the legal recruiters at Cravath. There

wasn't an opening at Cravath, but it set the stage for my interest in going into legal recruitment. And I thought, "Wow, this is interesting work, I'd love to learn more about it." And I went on some interviews and each time I interviewed, I liked the role more and more. I reached out to a recruiter for recruiters, and also worked with her. Ultimately, I went to the Barnes and Noble and decided to do some of my own research, and probably emailed about 200 recruiting directors at different law firms saying, "Hi, my name is Emily, I'd love an entry-level assistance role. Here's my resume." And I got a few bites on my own. And one of them happened to be at Wachtell, and that's where I started my legal recruiting career on the law firm side.

Alison Monahan: Wow, that's quite a place to start. We'll talk about that a bit more in a minute, but what type of recruiting work are you focusing on these days?

Emily Witt: Yeah. So, it's been an organic process, but my main areas are in health and tech law. So, I work with a lot of in-house companies looking for lawyers. They might need to hire their first lawyer, or a general counsel will reach out to us and try to hire their number two. So, that is the work that I do on the in-house side. I also work on the law firm side – primarily, although not exclusively, with tech and startup law firms. And those are the law firms that service these startups. So, often these law firms want to hire attorneys that either have come from in-house that might want to be returning back, or they are looking to grow their emerging companies and venture capital practice, or other tech transactions practice. I specifically love healthcare, health tech, biotech, so I've gone even further with this niche in tech and startup law.

Alison Monahan: Nice. Well, that sounds interesting.

Emily Witt: Yeah, it's great.

Alison Monahan: And if people want to find out more about you or reach out to you, how can they do that?

Emily Witt: Sure. As a legal recruiter, I spend a lot of my time on LinkedIn. So, you can find me there on LinkedIn, you can look me up by my last name – and that's W-I-T-T. First name is Emily. And then I work for a search firm called Whistler Partners. I also have a website for a podcast that I host, called Beyond the Legal Lens. And that podcast has its own website. I also make connections, I also do career coaching and other services I offer on the website. So, all of those locations are where you can find me.

Alison Monahan: Nice. We can link to all of that in the show notes as well. Well, as we mentioned in the intro, you were a legal recruiter at Wachtell for many years, which is probably one of the most legendary, mysterious, I don't know what you want to

call it, BigLaw firms. Has a mystique, let's put it that way. What was that experience like?

Emily Witt: It was such a great entryway into the legal field. Quick, funny story about it being mysterious and unique. I didn't know much about law firms at the time when I was interviewing. To me, they just were all a lot of long last names. So, I was starting from scratch in my journey as well. And I had a friend who had graduated from NYU Law School and was now at one of the other BigLaw firms in the city. And I would often ask him sort of word on the street if he could tell me about certain places. And when the conversation about Wachtell came up, he said, "Well, we don't really know anything about what goes on there. Have you ever read the book *The Firm* or seen that movie?" And he said, "It's a very mysterious place." So, even back then – and this was pre-Internet – there was not a lot of information, and there still isn't a ton out there. And his line to me was so funny – he said, "I don't know how it's going to be for you there, but it's a great place to put on your resume, stay for two years, and then go on to something else." And I went in and interviewed on a Friday; on Monday, I was offered the job, and Tuesday I started. And that first summer at Wachtell was hands down the best summer of my working life ever. I was so mesmerized by the people, by the vibrancy of the firm, by the summer class. It was a pretty exciting time too, because summer had just started. So I'm this early 20-year-old person pretending to be a summer associate, even though I'm not. I thought it was such a great place to start my legal career, and it taught me how to be a professional, which is such invaluable experience. They have such a well-run operation, and it taught me what it looks like to work for a successful company. And it was amazing that it ran like clockwork. All of the employees at whatever level were expected to operate in this way. And I am forever grateful for the experience I had there. I ended up staying 15 years and have very strong connections and ties to the firm. And I highly recommend it as a place to practice law. For me, I was just looking to do something completely different, but it was one of the best places I've ever worked in my life and have very fond memories from working there.

Alison Monahan: Nice. Yeah, definitely. I don't know what it is, it's just that particular firm everyone's like, "Ooh, Wachtell. Ooh, I don't know." I've worked at a lot of other large firms, but definitely it has a mystique. So, I'm happy to hear that it's very well-run; that's not the case everywhere. But yeah, thanks a lot for sharing this, I know people will be curious. Let's switch gears a little bit. We are recording this as the OCI process is just starting, or about to start at many law schools. What do you think are some of the top things that students should be doing or thinking about to position themselves for a successful OCI?

Emily Witt: I think number one is to do your homework. And what that means is not just the external homework about what the firm does or who they represent or the types of matters that they work on, but some internal homework as well, in

terms of why you want to, number one, be a lawyer, and number two, why the firm that you're interviewing at is the best platform for you. I think preparation is so important, whether that means informal LinkedIn messages to attorneys that are already working there, asking people for 5 or 10 minutes of their time to share what they do, I think is really good. The more prepared you are, in terms of yourself and also the law firm, is a way to succeed throughout the process. I also think it's important to know the cities that the law firms practice in, and also the reasons why you specifically want to practice in that city.

Alison Monahan: I'm laughing because I accidentally once walked into an interview for a D.C. firm thinking I'd signed up for their New York office. And things were going pretty well, and then they turned and said, "Oh, why do you want to be in D.C.?" And there was this pause and I'm like, "D.C.? There's lots of work for the government?" Yeah, it was not a great interview after that.

Emily Witt: No, a 100%. And not only do firms have different cities, but some of their practice areas are not in every city, or some of their practice areas are not as robust. So, all of the research that you do in advance, in addition to the firm, you can try to the extent possible, look up your interviewer. You can also find out, to the extent possible, what types of pro bono practices they have, what types of clients they represent. So, know your firm and do that work is really, really important.

Alison Monahan: I agree. I think people definitely need to have an answer to, "Why do you think this firm is the firm for you?" Even just, "Why are you interested in being here?" And you need to make sure you're not talking about, "Well, I really want to go into bankruptcy" if they don't have a bankruptcy practice.

Emily Witt: Exactly. And the other thing too is to be mindful when you're interviewing that law firms want to evaluate your long-term interest. So, if you are talking to, let's say, a firm who does a lot of work with the government, you really want to focus on the government work that they do at the firm, and not accidentally let it slip so soon in the process that your end game is to actually go to government. I'm not saying there aren't exceptions to the rule, but firms are making a serious investment in you. And so, to think of what is coming out of your mouth that aligns with a long-term interest, regardless of whether or not you plan to stay there for the rest of your life.

Alison Monahan: Right. And I think this can be a particular issue for people whose background kind of points more towards public interest or something like that. There, you've really got to be able to sell that story of, "Yes, I have this long background of public interest work, but I'm really interested in being at this BigLaw firm." You've got to sell that. And how about the actual summer program? How do you suggest people approach that? Do you think this is all fun and games, or do people need to take this a little more seriously?

Emily Witt: Yeah, I think there is a component, where summer associates start at the firm and they're thrown into these elaborate orientation programs with a lot of different lunches, evening events, social events, meetups, mentorship events. And it can be confusing to the summer associate as to the purpose of the summer program. But I recommend to all summer associates going into the summer program, to view the summer program as a long extended interview. You are always being evaluated, and that is not just in relation to how you're interacting with the attorneys, but also be mindful of how you are treating the support staff, how you are engaging with your summer class, how you are engaging with other colleagues. These are all things that you want to think about. And that most of the time you are doing important work on top of that, I think that can come as a shock to the system to summer associates. But a lot of firms will hire you because they believe that you are smart and can do the work. So, often summer associates are quite shocked at what they get involved in early on. Now, I'm not saying that there is no fun to be had at all. Absolutely. I just mentioned my first summer at Wachtell was one of the best summers of my life. There are a lot of ways to have fun and do work and learn, but to always remember that the way you are interacting with the program is constantly being monitored and watched. And I think that's really important advice.

Alison Monahan: I agree. I summered multiple places, and I now have friends who have been in-house or law firm recruiters and things and they're like, "Oh yeah, everybody is filling out reports, and everything you do and everything you go to, someone's paying attention." Well, on that topic, what if somebody thinks the program is going poorly? Maybe they got some feedback that this wasn't quite what they were looking for, or they're kind of getting a sense that this is not going well midway through the summer. Do you have any tips to kind of start to salvage that?

Emily Witt: Absolutely. And I think this is relatable for students, because the advice I would give would be the way I handled my college career, when I wasn't doing well in a course. You have to ask for help and know who to ask help of. For example, if you're a student and you are struggling in a class, or it's not going so well, what's the first thing you often do? It's that you would ask the professor to meet with them for office hours, to the extent that they have open office hours for you. That could translate to being at a law firm. You might have the assigning partner, who is most likely assigning the work, and you would want to get yourself in front of the people who are able to provide you with feedback, because there are always learning curves. And most importantly, in terms of the evaluations, if an attorney associate or a partner is reviewing you, they want to see also the initiative for being proactive and creating a better experience and better workflow. So, maybe you're struggling with your writing. Consult with some of the associates, "Hey, do you mind looking at this? What are some of my target points that do need help?" The other thing is, most firms – I can't speak

for all of them – offer mentors. Be proactive, seek out your mentors, ask them what you can do to change things around. Don't wait until the end of your summer program, and don't feel like you're being a pest asking your mentor. Sometimes it can get a little confusing, because the mentor might be some big department head or something like that, and you might feel that you're getting in the way of their time. But ultimately, that's why they offered to be a mentor, right? If there's any attorney at the firm that is not your mentor, that is usually a choice. So, start from the very beginning to connect with them and repeatedly ask them for feedback. Do not be afraid to speak up and say that you need help. They'd rather see you ask for help and see a most improved, versus not showing any interest at all.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think that's totally key. And it gets so hard to do, for people to say, "Okay, maybe I got some negative feedback on that first thing I did. Okay, I'm just going to try to forget that happened." I think that's the absolute worst thing you can do. You want to go in and say, "Look, I hear you on this. Is there any way we could work together again?", or whatever it is that they gave you the feedback. But you have to kind of deal with that, or it's just not going to end well at the end. Alright, well, looking a bit longer term, let's talk about the post-law firm options for litigators versus corporate people, because I don't think this is something a lot of students actually really give a lot of thought to upfront. I never really thought, "Oh, I'll be a litigator." Never really thought about how that might go after I was ready to leave the firm. So how does this work? What are the options, and is one kind of preferable when you're looking at things like in-house?

Emily Witt: Yeah. Most people, particularly litigators, find out, like you, later on that it can be a tougher road to go in-house as a litigator. And I often think that students particularly wish they had that knowledge going in. And yes, if you look statistically, there are more options for corporate attorneys to go in-house. However – and I always say this – there are exceptions to every rule, and there are ways to make your experience as a litigator. There are ways for you to market yourself as being able and ready to go in-house. Just because you've chosen a particular path, there are ways to go in on both sides. And particularly now what we're seeing in this startup world and we're seeing a lot of things like crypto and AI, and a lot of need for regulatory expertise – often that will fall along more of the litigation side. So, I think we're at an exciting time for a litigator to go in-house, particularly if they get exposure to these types of tech companies, startup companies. For example, privacy is really big right now, and so there are a lot of opportunities for litigators to also do privacy and cybersecurity work that will align them for an in-house job.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I had an interesting series on The Girl's Guide to Law School, written by a friend of mine who I worked with in our litigation capacity, who then ended up going in-house at a very small startup. And kind of how she did that transition

and how she found that job, it was very random. It was like her uncle talked to someone at a dinner type of thing. But yeah, she's super happy doing that. But obviously, if you're looking to optimize your exit strategy, probably corporate is more the way to go.

Emily Witt: Yeah. And I would also be mindful if you are at firms that service the type of companies that you want to do the work in. For example, if you are really interested in going in-house, but potentially working for a bank, then when you're in BigLaw you would stick with some of the top banking groups.

Alison Monahan: It's like you might want to go to Cravath or something.

Emily Witt: Right, exactly. Exactly. If you're interested in startup law or working with some of these smaller, newer companies, try to educate yourself on what firms are offering these practice areas. Interestingly enough – and for the better, for everyone's sake – a lot of these large law firms are building out their startup practices. So, what is very common right now, we'll probably see even more and more of some of these larger firms, even the ones that are known for their banking practices – just start offering more startup work.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I'm in the Bay Area, so that's very, very common out here. Everybody does it. But let's talk a little bit about actually working either in-house, or you've worked obviously with a lot of partners in law firms. What kind of mindset or skills do you think people actually need to be successful? These are pretty demanding roles.

Emily Witt: Yeah. I think at the end of the day – and I've said this numerous times – a lot of what makes a partner or a general counsel successful in all of the positions that will lead up to this role is, number one, how you leverage relationships. And then also number two is knowing who to ask. Because particularly at the general counsel level, often you are thrown into a generalist role. So, let's say you are a corporate lawyer and you are now in an in-house position – you might not be the expert on employment law, but if you know who to ask and how to get the information so that you can deliver this to your client in a succinct way, then it doesn't matter that you didn't necessarily have this information yourself. So, knowing where to go and who to ask is also in line with the first piece of it, which is the relationship-building piece. And I think particularly at both law firms and in-house, how you are navigating relationships at the firm and for companies is really important, whether it be as an associate, knowing which people to get the work from, if they're doing the work that you want to do. And then on the in-house side, do you know how to talk to management? One of the biggest reasons why general counsels often reach out to me because they are no longer satisfied with their role is because there is some level of disconnect between their ideas and the management's ideas. So, to the extent that you can

become the bridge builder, you have to actively know and keep learning tools to improve that.

Alison Monahan: That makes sense. Well, before we wrap up, let's shift gears, because one of the things you and I talked about a little bit was how to leverage a clerkship in the job market. And this is something I think a lot of people are really not super clear on. What's acceptable? What can people do? How can they kind of make the most of this?

Emily Witt: Absolutely. So, clerkships I always say are a great way to start over. For example, if you ended up at a law firm as a first-year and you wish you might have applied to other firms throughout the OCI practice, it could even be a firm in another city. We're seeing a little bit less of that now from the pandemic, because firms are being a little more open-minded about being in different offices. However, it's still something that firms can get very strict about. So, the idea of applying for clerkships… And you can even apply for a clerkship as a corporate lawyer. I think people assume, "Why should I do a clerkship? I want to be corporate, I want to go in-house." That experience you have working for a judge is invaluable, and it also allows you to start over. A lot of firms in BigLaw do not use recruiters to find candidates coming off of clerkships. They often have to do a lot of their own internal outreach. In fact, we also have clerkship opportunities. Sometimes it takes place in a party or at dinner. So, if there are any firms that are on your radar screen that you want to apply to and you are a clerk, I would reach out to them and ask them if they are accepting applications from clerks, because there will probably be no other time in your career where you have this ability to really start from scratch and do what you couldn't achieve during OCI.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I basically did that when I was clerking. I decided halfway through, I was like, "I don't think I want a job in New York. Why don't I get a job in San Francisco?" And there weren't a ton of options, but there were enough. And I did just send them a resume and be like, "Hey, I'm going to be finishing up my clerkship in six months. Are you guys interested?" And some of them were like, "Sure, come and talk to us." So I think you can definitely leverage that in a different way. Particularly people who did well their third year that maybe wasn't reflected in the 2L OCI, just gives you the opportunity, like you said, to just reposition. Alright, well, before we wrap up, let me ask you a few questions about working with a recruiter. How does that generally work?

Emily Witt: Sure. So, usually law firms and in-house companies don't start using recruiters until after your first year. And recruiters are wonderful if you are interested in pivoting to another law firm, if you are interested in generally just hearing what's out there. And then there are also other in-house opportunities that recruiters can expose you to as well. It is never too early to go in-house. Particularly, we saw a lot of companies hiring first and second-years right after

the pandemic, when there was a hiring frenzy. I anticipate we will see that again after we come out of whatever it is that we're going through right now.

Alison Monahan: Right, which is an open question. I just did another episode on this recently, about what is going on in the legal economy right now.

Emily Witt: Yeah. I do foresee things slowly but surely picking up again. And so, I think a recruiter is a great person to speak with as a resource if you're curious to hear what's out there. And there's no time to not be curious about what's out there, right?

Alison Monahan: Yeah.

Emily Witt: Everything is an opportunity to learn.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. What I've heard is if you're at a firm, by the time you're sort of a third-year, you basically need to be looking at what your next step is likely to be. It sounds like you're saying kind of the same thing – pretty early on. You might want to make some connections, you might want to at least be open to hearing about other opportunities.

Emily Witt: Absolutely. The other thing I do want to add though – and I get this question a lot – is, "Do I have this window? Do I have an expiry date?"

Alison Monahan: Right.

Emily Witt: And the answer I always say is "No". And I think lawyers get nervous around year two, year three, "Oh my gosh, I haven't made a move yet" or, "I haven't gone in-house." It's never a bad look to have stayed at your firm five or six years.

Alison Monahan: Right. I think like seven or eight though, and maybe you're not making partners, starts to be like, "Ooh, you might have missed that window a little bit."

Emily Witt: Absolutely. But then there are firms that will hire, particularly at these boutiques, that will provide you with the growth opportunities that you might not necessarily have seen at the firm that you've been at for a while. I think the landscape has changed recently, particularly because in-house clients will look at candidates seven to eight years out. And then there are also firm options, whether it be in BigLaw or also at these boutiques, that will have you come in and sort of elevate you very quickly. And so, that would be a next step. But I think an attorney should never feel like they are too senior to do anything. I always feel that, as my grandmother used to say, "There is a cover for every pot, and it's a matter of finding it."

Alison Monahan: Well, we could probably do a whole other episode on this, and also getting the most out of these experiences, making sure you're hitting what you want to be doing. But that's probably for another day, because unfortunately, we are today out of time. Any final thoughts you want to share with people?

Emily Witt: Yeah. I think one of the biggest things when going about your legal career that will help you is to have an open mind. If someone makes a suggestion to you about trying something, they're telling you for a reason. And the more pigeonholed you are in your thinking, the less opportunity will present itself to you. Trust your instincts and talk to as many people as possible.

Alison Monahan: I think that's a great point. If you told me in law school I'd be running a business… I don't think podcasts even existed. So, I definitely did some pivoting. Well, before we wrap up, remind people how they can find out more about you and the best way to connect.

Emily Witt: Sure. As always, where recruiters socialize the most would be on LinkedIn. And then also I have a website, Beyond the Legal Lens. And we also have a Whistler Partners website as well. And you can find me in all three of those places. Oh, and I also have an Instagram handle that I'm just starting to build up – it's called @emilyinrecruiting.

Alison Monahan: Nice.

Emily Witt: So, I do fun videos there and would love to see you.

Alison Monahan: Well, awesome. We will all check that out and put that all in the show notes. Thank you so much for joining us. This has been really great.

Emily Witt: Thanks, Alison. I hope to do this again.

Alison Monahan: Yes, definitely. 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 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 soon!

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