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 realistic in your law school job search. 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 get started.

Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today, we're excited to have ex-BigLaw recruiter Sadie Jones here with us to talk about being realistic in your law school job search. Welcome, Sadie.

Sadie Jones: Thanks for having me back.

Alison Monahan: My pleasure. Well, this is a topic that we decided to talk about because I think it's a real balance here. On the one hand, you don't want to sell yourself short and shoot low and take the first job you're ever offered if it's pretty clear you could get something that was better and more suitable if you kept trying. But at the same time, you don't want to pass up perfectly good options by shooting too high and then ending up with nothing. So, we're kind of looking for that "just-right" option, right?

Sadie Jones: Exactly. And I think a lot of this will depend on your specific situation, and your school, and your grades, and what time of year it is, and the specific year it is. So, it's definitely not a one-size-fits-all approach, but it's sort of figuring out how all those factors are going to go into where you're applying and what kind of job you should take.

Alison Monahan: Alright, so let's drill down into that a little bit, because I think that's right. So, where do you see people really going wrong here, generally speaking?

Sadie Jones: Well, I think that a lot of people don't take the time to self-reflect and see what kind of candidate they are and what types of jobs they really can get, versus just what they want to get in a dream world. Or they went into law school wanting to be in BigLaw, and so that's all they're talking about, even if they've gotten through one year of school and they're not a super strong candidate, just on

paper – let's say grades-wise or what school they're at. So I think that where people go wrong is just being able to kind of look at themselves from the outside and say, "What kind of candidate am I going to look like to an employer?"

Alison Monahan: Right. And so, how can people start to make that analysis to figure out what's realistic? Because I think it can be hard if you want something, but maybe it's not in the cards for you immediately.

Sadie Jones: I agree. I think this is really difficult, so I don't want to downplay how hard it is to do this process. I think you have to look at your grades and you have to say if you're a middle-of-the-road to lower-tier student. And not every school ranks their students, not every school gives grades now, but you probably see where you are; there's some way to measure you. And so you have to say, "Okay, maybe I can't look at the top firms", or maybe they're not realistic, let's say the top 100 law firms. Not everyone even measures BigLaw in the exact same way, so I think grades are a good way to look at it. Obviously, what your school ranking is does matter. Some of that can be kind of market-dependent, so there can be schools that are ranked a little lower but do pretty well in their own market. But maybe you wouldn't get a job in a different city that doesn't know the school as well. Also, your connections, like do you know anyone in any of these places? Do you have any personal connections there? Do you have an in? And I think, really, the way to objectively look at this is to ask people outside of yourself for advice who know about this. That doesn't mean ask everybody. I think people make the mistake of asking people who don't know about the legal industry, "How do I look?" And they're not going to be able to give you an educated answer to that. So, I think that means Career Services, somebody else at your school, maybe an outside career counselor. Maybe you do have somebody in your life who's a lawyer or has been to law school or has knowledge of this. But I think getting an outside opinion and being able to take that in is really important. And listen without getting defensive about it.

Alison Monahan: Right, I think that's true. You probably don't want to ask your parents what your chances are, because they either are going to be too pessimistic or too optimistic. And I think looking at how people at your school have done in these jobs that you're considering can also be enlightening. Obviously, you don't know that necessarily, but I think there are often ways to get that information. Has anyone ever gotten a job at the place you're looking at applying and that kind of thing? But it can definitely be hard, because a lot of this information is not necessarily public.

Sadie Jones: Exactly. Actually, the NALP forum does have some information about the type of people they hire. Not all of it's going to be exact, and people might put a GPA cutoff and like, "Do we know how strictly they stick with that?" But it's just good for kind of gaining information. And some of it you just hear by talking to people, you know, that certain places are pickier than others. But let's say your GPA is below a 3.0 – it's probably not going to get you into BigLaw.

Alison Monahan: Right. And obviously that's super school-dependent. Certain schools you can be like, "Oh, absolutely not." And then other schools, it's like, "Okay, most people here could probably get a BigLaw job if they really want, even with not-great grades." But that's a very small handful of places.

Sadie Jones: Exactly.

Alison Monahan: Alright. Well, what if you determine, "Okay, maybe I need to be thinking outside of what I thought I might need to do"? How do you cast a wide net if you're not sure what you're going to get back?

Sadie Jones: I use this term all the time. And I kind of think everybody should cast a wide net to some degree. And to me that just means thinking in different areas, thinking in different buckets, thinking outside of the thing you maybe came in very focused on. So, it might mean that you apply to some reaches, BigLaw, you apply to some middle-tier firms, you apply to some smaller firms, you apply to maybe some government jobs. Maybe even there could be something in-house. You just kind of keep an open mind and don't pin everything down to one area, and also not all of the same thing. If you're just applying to BigLaw, even if you apply to every single BigLaw firm, that's not casting a wide net, necessarily. I guess it is, in terms of amount maybe, but I find that people do this a lot. They think because of the number of applications they sent out, that means they did all of it. But if it's the same place and you're getting lots of rejections, that's probably not the right fit. You're not someone that they're particularly going to look at, so you should look in other areas, other types of firms.

Alison Monahan: Right, and I think this can come into play too after the first-year job, where sometimes people work a certain type of job that maybe they were really excited about and they thought was what they wanted to do, and then for whatever reason don't like it or it doesn't go well. And I think at that point you really have to take that step back and say, "Okay, I thought I was going to do X, and X doesn't really seem like it's going to pan out for me for whatever reason, or I don't want it anymore." Now you really need to look at what are the other options realistically.

Sadie Jones: I totally agree. So, what I would do is look at the things you think are realistic that you have a chance of getting, and then say, out of that group, what would you like the best? I think it does you a disservice to get really stuck on one thing that you thought going into law school, or law school tends to push you towards, which is, law school really pushes people towards litigation and the law firm thing. And I think a lot of law students just don't look outside of that, because that's all they're hearing about. But it's always okay to take a step back and think about, "With where I am now, what kind of job can I get and what kind of job would I actually like, or I think I would like, or would be a good start?" So, don't just keep going in the same direction that isn't working for you.

Alison Monahan: Right, definitely look at other options. But it's true that some of them are certainly just a clearer path. It's easier in some ways just to apply for the jobs that are sort of put in front of you, particularly at certain schools, even if it might not be the case that you really want to end up in that situation. What about the economy? What impact does that have here? I'm assuming I've got to also consider the overall market, right?

Sadie Jones: Absolutely, and I think that's key. Now, most years the economy isn't extreme one way or the other. Most years it can be kind of middle-of-the-road. I think if we're talking about right now, we're in a transitional time. I think people aren't really sure what direction… Are there going to be layoffs, or are things going to turn around? So, in an economy that's tougher, they're going to be hiring fewer people, and therefore expectations are going to be higher. In that situation, I would say I wouldn't spend too much time on the reaches, just because everyone has a limited amount of time and a limited amount of applications they can realistically get out. To me, in that situation, I would say, "Okay, the job market is going to be harder, so I should focus on the places that I think are more within my reach", which may not be your dream jobs. So you really need to look at that in terms of the types of jobs you're applying to, and then in a tougher economy, you might be more likely to take the first job that's offered to you or not to wait out for something else, not to try and negotiate something. You may just say, "I'm lucky to have a job. I'm going to take it." So I think that's another thing to think about if the economy is more shaky.

Alison Monahan: Right, I think that's totally true. And also, I would say consider what areas of the economy may be countercyclical. So, when the financial crisis hits, for example – we have them not infrequently – things like bankruptcy suddenly become more popular areas to practice in. And things like M&A typically aren't, because the market has dried up for that. So, you've got to be aware of the market trends and who is able to capitalize on those as well. Where do you suggest people look for some of this information? If you're a law student, you may not be

keeping tabs on things like The Wall Street Journal or something. Maybe you should be. I've had partners when I was a student be like, "Oh, you should definitely read The Wall Street Journal daily." Probably good advice. Maybe you could have an AI summarize it for you or something at this point. But where should people be looking for this information?

Sadie Jones: Yeah, I think there're different places. Like you said, I think The Wall Street Journal is the number one reading place of older law firm partners. I think they love it. So, hearing about some of the top stories there I think is a good idea, just because they may want to talk about it. And any of the major news publications, I think it's good to keep an eye on just the general economy, stock market, the jobs reports. A lot of that is readily available now. How interest rates are doing is going to matter, so all of that stuff. And I also think Above the Law and some other kind of inside law firm places do have information. Now, you can take it with a grain of salt; not everything that people say is true, and a lot of it's opinion, but I still think it's good to hear what's going on. And a lot of them do have inside information on places that are doing well, or not doing well, or going to have layoffs, or are overleveraged, or not in a good position. Like you said also, in terms of the areas that do well in different economic times, you can see what are the major practice areas of this firm or that firm, to get an idea of whether they may be hurting or not in a certain economic situation.

Alison Monahan: Right. And I think if you're interested in doing public interest work or government work, those also have their own funding cycles, and places get more funding depending on what's going on in the world and what we're favoring for trying to make better for public interest-type stuff at any point. So, I think just being aware of that and kind of looking at, "Oh, okay, it seems like right now this is the type of work that is getting a lot of attention and probably a lot of money, so maybe there are more opportunities there than in something that I might be interested in that is not quite so popular right now."

Sadie Jones: I totally agree. And that's where I do think you should be flexible. The same way I talk about casting a wide net, I think you should be somewhat flexible in what type of law you want to practice. If you're set on transactional, I think that's fine, but I don't think you should be too specific, like you said, that you are only interested in M&A if it's a time where for the next few years that's not going to be as big. So I think it is smart to at least be open and see what opportunities are going to be bigger. Sometimes you just end up where you end up because of when you graduated and when you had to start out, and you can make a change down the road, or maybe it works out. But I think just be flexible.

Alison Monahan: I agree with that. I mean, it's always better to have a job than not have a job.

Sadie Jones: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: On that note, what are your thoughts on taking a job that you're offered that maybe is "okay". It's not terrible, but it may not be exactly what you want, versus holding out for something bigger, better, more perfect?

Sadie Jones: Well, I think this depends on how risk-averse you are. Lawyers and law students tend to not tolerate a lot of risk, I would say generally. So, I think you have to look at what time of year it is. Is it very early and it seems like you're doing really well in the interview season and you just got this first job offer? Then maybe you're like, "I'm willing to risk it for something else down the road." But if you're in a situation where you've sent out a ton of materials and you're not really hearing back, or this is the only job offer and it's well into the fall, then I think you have to just go with it. Like you said, it's better to have a job than to not have a job. Some of this is personally how much you're willing to tolerate, but this is where I do think you have to be realistic about what kind of candidate you are and not be defensive. I think students sometimes want to blame all these other outside factors for why things aren't working out, and ultimately it doesn't really matter. Maybe a bunch of things did just go wrong, but if you need a job, maybe you just need to take it. Let's say it's your 2L job, and let's say that you end up there as a first-year. That's just your first job. This is not a lifelong commitment. So, I would say you do have to look at where you are in the process, but I think a lot of times it does make sense to take a set job that's at least okay, versus the uncertainty of not knowing.

Alison Monahan: Right. I think if you're in, say, a process of OCI and you have a bunch of other callbacks lined up and they're firms that you would rather work for – sure, try to collect some offers. And you should be able to keep those offers open for at least a little while. And I think it's totally fair to say, just because it's the first firm that offered you a job, to say to them, "Hey, I have some other things I'm looking at. I'm not going to answer you immediately." But yeah, to your point that if you've been interviewing and interviewing and interviewing, or just sending out resumes and not even getting interviews and then suddenly something pops up on your radar – I would say you should be happy about that. Thank your lucky stars, take the offer and move on.

Sadie Jones: Exactly. I think people also have this unrealistic idea that they can turn somewhere down, and then if somehow they don't get another job they can come back to them and say, "Oh, I really want it." That's not a thing. You can't do that. On the other hand, people say, "Should I just take the offer but keep looking for something better?" I also can't recommend that in good conscience. I don't think that's a good way to be. I tell people, "Things happen." If your

absolute perfect job falls in your lap later… I'm not saying there's no way you can ever go back on accepting the offer, but you should not be doing an active job search and looking once you've committed to something, I think.

Alison Monahan: No. And honestly, I think even if it's your perfect job, if that job is in the same city, in the same industry – even then I would be very, very reluctant to go back on an offer.

Sadie Jones: Yes. I say this to people all the time, how small the legal industry is. Students do not realize. There are even partners that can talk about some student from 18 years ago who did something bad, like reneged on an offer and really offended them. So I agree, they will talk. And I was also saying to someone, even if you're interviewing, they could hear that you've met with someone they know. You never know. It's very hard to hide those things. Don't get in that situation.

Alison Monahan: Right. I think it's justifiable if there's truly a situation where, say that your partner finds out they have to move for a job or something, like you have to go and be in this other city, and then you find a job there. That's not amazing, it's not perfect, but it is at least understandable and justifiable. But just doing it because you get a better offer in the same city and the same type of job, I think is really just a no-go.

Sadie Jones: I totally agree. I feel like once you've accepted, that's where you're going to be working.

Alison Monahan: Right, because if somebody comes back to you two weeks later and says, "Oh, actually we'd love to hire you" – well, sorry, you should have followed up earlier.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, exactly. Well, I also was thinking once you've accepted a job offer, I'm guessing you wouldn't want the employer to keep interviewing people. I was just saying that to someone. I think that sometimes students don't see the employer in the same way they see themselves. They're just this nameless, faceless employer, but it's not. It's people also who are making a decision they want to work with you. They're making a commitment to you in the same way you're making a commitment to them.

Alison Monahan: Right. And they've spent time and energy interviewing you, getting to know you, debating whether to hire you, making an offer, all of these things. I just think it's really bad form to just suddenly say, "Oh, actually I got a better offer. Screw you."

Sadie Jones: Yeah. No, it is, and I think it's good we're talking about it because I think a lot of people don't realize how bad form that is. So it's just important that you understand, and just how small the legal world is.

Alison Monahan: Right. And I understand it can be frustrating, but like you said, after you've accepted an offer, you should not be out actively interviewing. The idea that something's just going to magically fall into your lap anyway is a little unrealistic. I mean, it could happen. I have friends outside of the legal industry, who, people find their resume and call them months after they posted it on a job board or something. It could happen.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely.

Alison Monahan: And there are very rare circumstances where I think it's justifiable, but those are very rare.

Sadie Jones: I totally agree. I didn't want to say "never", because I'm sure someone could give me an example and I would say, "Well, that makes sense." But generally, 99% of the time, once you've accepted, that's where you're going to work.

Alison Monahan: Right. And similarly, it would be very, very bad form, but does occasionally happen for a firm to come back and say, "Oops, sorry, we're not having a program this summer" or something like that, "because we are in financial difficulties." And again, that's terrible, and that should generally not happen, and they should do everything in their power to avoid it, but it could in very rare circumstances happen.

Sadie Jones: Exactly. But that wouldn't be the norm, and they I'm sure would try to do everything they can to help you find something else. I know that I've seen that happen before, and I think they take their commitment pretty seriously to the people that were going to work for them also, and it would only happen in circumstances where there was no other option.

Alison Monahan: Right, exactly. It's like, they would recognize that this is a very, very bad thing to do to somebody and do everything in their power to ameliorate that.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely. So I think you just want to handle yourself in a way that you feel good about throughout this process, really.

Alison Monahan: Right. It's your reputation, ultimately.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, exactly.

Alison Monahan: Alright. Well, let's talk a little bit before we wrap up – and you kind of mentioned this a little bit earlier – what about listening to people who maybe know more than you do, even if they're telling you things you don't want to be true? Or in some cases, what if people are telling you different things? If one party's in your ear saying, "Oh, it's totally fine to turn down a job or to renege on your job offer and get something better. That happens all the time in my industry." Who should you listen to and how can you figure that out?

Sadie Jones: That's a hard question. I would see what experience that person has. So, for example, the difference between somebody who's a hiring professional and, let's say, has spent years doing that exact job, versus, let's say that it's a lawyer – so they've been in the industry but they don't have any experience at their firm in the hiring process. By the way, experience in the hiring process is not that the person's done interviews of candidates; that doesn't give them any inside information about how the candidates are hired. That just means they've done the basic – every lawyer has to interview people. So, I would put more weight on the person who has experience in that area. So you can listen to the lawyer, maybe what they would look for in a resume, for example, or what they would look for if they were interviewing somebody. But I don't think they would know as much about how the process works, how you get in the door, what the right thing to do is in that situation. So to me, I would want the person with the most direct experience in the area of hiring.

Alison Monahan: Right, and I think Career Services can be a bit of a mixed bag. In some cases, I think it's absolutely important that you listen to them. And then sometimes I've had the experience where I'm like, "This does not resonate at all with my version of reality, so I'm not going to listen to you." But it's at least a starting point. If nothing else, they are tapped into the local market, typically, and can give you at least some advice on what your odds are different places, if they're willing to do that.

Sadie Jones: I would definitely start with them, and I totally agree. I hear all over the place about Career Services being super helpful or totally unavailable. I mean, their job should be for you to get a job. It doesn't reflect well on them if their students aren't getting hired. So, you would think that they would want that for you, and they would want it to be realistic, because they want you to actually get the job. There are things where people just have different opinions. I know I've seen resumes where someone says, "Well, Career Services told me to do it this way, something that I would do differently." And basically, I would just say, "Well, here's my suggestion, and here's why." I would always ask why. If they're

asking you to change something or do something in a certain way – well, why do you think that? Because the person should be able to explain it. And then ultimately it's up to you. Who's the person you trust? Who's the person you think has the best advice, the best judgment? But I think it is hard to look at yourself objectively, no matter what, so I think it is good to find some outside person who can give you some advice. And not too many, because definitely there can be too many cooks in the kitchen. I've seen documents where someone leaves all the track changes and I can see that 10 people have been working on this, and it looks like 10 people have been working on it, which is usually a mess. So, I don't think you want to just constantly be asking somebody else, especially if you're not hearing what you want, so you're just going to someone else – "Well, what do you think?" – until you try to get the right answer. That's not a good approach.

Alison Monahan: Right. I do think it's important to understand sometimes the incentive of the school too. Their incentives may not be directly aligned with what your incentives are. You see this oftentimes in the clerkship process. I remember when I was applying for clerkships and I had professors who said, "Oh, you should definitely be doing an appellate clerkship. You have a great shot with this judge", and blah, blah, blah. And I was like, "Well, I don't want to do that."

Sadie Jones: Totally. But it's more prestigious for them.

Alison Monahan: Right, exactly. It's really prestigious for the school. They might be a feeder judge, and they're thinking, "Oh, what if this person ends up on the Supreme Court clerkship? That'd be amazing." And I'm thinking, "I want the experience of being in a district court." So I think sometimes you have to make those decisions for yourself and do what you want. But I do think listening to people who know more than you is generally a good idea here.

Sadie Jones: And I think even if, let's say there's some firm that's trying to recruit you, but you're not sure about; hopefully they want to make the right fit. There are people that I thought shouldn't go to where I was at. So I think you see who seems like they also have your best interests, versus they're selling you something. I think that you can tell a lot of times. So, I agree; Career Services sometimes does have other motivations. The thing I do like, though, is I feel like they'll be realistic about whether you can get that position. It doesn't mean they know 100%, but they don't want to put you up for a bunch of stuff that they think you have no chance at. So, that's the good part of it. I think that they'll tell you the truth about that.

Alison Monahan: Right. It doesn't do anyone any good if you're just wasting a lot of time. Also, I think people should keep in mind what you alluded to earlier – that this is really just a job, whether it's a summer job, whether it's your post-grad. The most critical thing is that you get some experience, you do your best, you learn some things, you meet people. You can always move on to bigger, better things later if you're patient. That's kind of my approach: You've got to get something to get started, and then at that point, you can work your way into maybe your dream job in a few years. You might just not be able to start out there.

Sadie Jones: I totally agree. And I can see why people get very caught up in this process, because it feels like a lot of pressure, and it's your whole law school class all at once trying to get these jobs, and they seem like the most important, the only thing. But ultimately, I think in a lot of ways It's hardest to get the first one, because you're coming in with no experience. You're just offering that you went to law school and graduated. Once you go from there and you have actual experience, you have more things that you can use to get the next job. So, I think it is just about getting your foot in the door and getting some legal experience, and making the most out of whatever it is, even if it's not your dream job, because you absolutely can find something different and a better fit later on, and you don't need to stay there that long, really.

Alison Monahan: Right. And you can network outside of the place you're working once you have that job; it becomes a lot easier. So, if you want to position yourself for something different, then you start making connections with people who might be able to help you get to that point. And that can open a lot of doors. Alright, well, we're about out of time here. Any final thoughts?

Sadie Jones: My final thought is just to have an open mind throughout this process. So, whoever you're talking to, to listen to someone who might suggest something you hadn't thought about, or to apply to a place that you hadn't considered. Just don't get too stuck in the thing you thought you wanted going into law school.

Alison Monahan: I think that's great advice. Well, on that note, thank you so much for joining us.

Sadie Jones: Thanks for having me back.

Alison Monahan: My pleasure. With that, we're out of time. For more career help and the opportunity to work one-on-one with us, you can check out CareerDicta.com. 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!

RESOURCES:

CareerDicta
NALP: National Association for Law Placement
The Wall Street Journal
Above the Law
Podcast Episode 126: How to Get People to Help with Your Job Search
Podcast Episode 132: What's BigLaw Really Like? (w/Sadie Jones)
Podcast Episode 140: OCI Strategy (w/Sadie Jones)
Podcast Episode 183: Changing Course in the Job Hunt (w/ex-BigLaw Recruiter Sadie Jones)
Podcast Episode 316: Being Smart About Your Career Goals (w/Sadie Jones)
Podcast Episode 385: Career Planning Resources for Law Students (w/Sadie Jones)
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