Alison Monahan: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today, we have ex-BigLaw recruiter Sadie Jones here with us to talk about dealing with overwhelm in the job search process. 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 dealing with overwhelm in the job search process. Welcome, Sadie.

Sadie Jones: Thanks for having me back.

Alison Monahan: My pleasure. Well, this is something that we see a lot. Why do you think this becomes such an issue for people when they're looking for a job?

Sadie Jones: Well, I definitely think it's very common. I think the job search process is large and there's no set ending to it. It's sort of ambiguous, there're a lot of things about it that you can't control. And it could take a short amount of time, it could take a long amount of time. There're lots of different steps involved. So, I think it just feels overwhelming if you start at the beginning and start thinking about the end results specifically, and all the steps that are going to have to happen between now and then. And I think that's where a lot of students get stuck.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I agree. It's not like one of those things where you apply effort and you get results. I was thinking about this earlier today, and I was like, if I want to get stronger, I just lift weights at the gym and then I'll see results. There's a very linear sort of relationship. Whereas here, you might apply at one place and get that job, or you might apply a hundred places and not get a job. So, I think to figure out even where to start, I think can be really overwhelming for people. And that lack of control is just super tough.

Sadie Jones: I agree. And I just think that it can get confusing about all the different steps that you need to do. And I think students can get really caught up in, "Oh, I'm not doing the right thing and that's why it's not working out." And there isn't

just one way to do things. There're a lot of different ways that different students could get positive results out of a job search. So, I don't think there's just an answer. There're a lot of different options.

Alison Monahan: Right. And I think it can feel like an endless array of options, too, that maybe you could pursue. Do you want to do work in a firm? Should it be a big firm, a small firm, a medium sized firm? What city should it be in? Do you want to do government work, public interest? It's sort of like, there're so many options that it can be tough to narrow it down and really focus on one and get to that end result.

Sadie Jones: I totally agree. And I'm kind of the mindset with choices that, you make a choice, or you go in one direction. You can always go in a different direction later, that's just what worked out. I'm not a big believer in thinking about what could have been or the different paths you could have taken. I think you sort of make a different choice next time if that one isn't the right one, or maybe you end up somewhere that really works out that you wouldn't have expected. So, I don't think there's a right and wrong with this. I think it's just one or the other.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Sometimes people do think, "If I don't get exactly what I'm looking for right now, my career is over." And I always think you can pivot. Take something, figure it out, see what you like. You don't really know what you like until you've started working. So, it might be that something you thought you wouldn't like, you love; or something you thought you would love, you hate. So, you're not making sort of a final choice for the rest of your life, but I think it can feel that way.

Sadie Jones: Yeah. So, I think a lot of this is mindset and how you're viewing the process and the steps that you're taking.

Alison Monahan: Alright, well, let's start at the beginning. Wherever people are, whether you're very new to the search, you're in the middle of something that's been going on for a while, but you want to do kind of a reset if that's the case. You realize whatever you're doing is maybe not working and you're feeling really overwhelmed, or you're starting this for the first time. What can people do if they're just not sure where to get started?

Sadie Jones: Well, again, I don't think there's a necessarily right answer that this is the only place to start. But I always think that starting just with your job documents is a good place, because it's sort of a set task to do – whether you're starting because you didn't have a resume, or you're starting fresh, or you're adding

things, that's one place, or maybe you've been doing the job search for a while and things aren't panning out. So, I always think your job documents are a great starting point. And it kind of feels good if you either rework them or start fresh. Sometimes it feels like a reset, like, okay, this is the new part of the job search or something.

Alison Monahan: The new and improved me.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, and it's a set task that you can complete and see. I feel like that gives everyone a little bit of a win, or a boost.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. It's like you get a little lift, and also it is practical, because you will need these. So yeah, do your resume, maybe a cover letter draft, your LinkedIn. All these things do need to sort of correspond and go together, so that is a quick place that you could make some improvements, and possibly even see some results if you've already sent out some jobs and they're looking at your LinkedIn and it looks great. That could be a boost.

Sadie Jones: I totally agree. And I think it just feels good, like I'm accomplishing something, I'm moving forward. Okay, what's next?

Alison Monahan: Yeah. And I think the "what's next" can go in a lot of different directions. Do you have any suggestions for tools to track these tasks? One of the things I think people need to do to deal with the overwhelm is break things down, have a plan, and really be tracking progress, because that makes you feel like you're doing something and that can motivate you to keep moving.

Sadie Jones: I'm just a general fan of lists. There're so many different ways that you could do it. I'm sure there're a million different apps that you could find that work differently for different people. I'm a big fan of calendaring things. I think it holds you accountable and it gives you a way to look at things like how your week's going to look, how your month's going to look, and you could have the different tasks there. You can use Trello that we've talked about, or an Excel spreadsheet. Might seem a little old school now, but I really like for keeping track of things. You can sort it in different ways, you can add columns, you can approve upon it. It's sort of a set place to keep everything in terms of tasks. But I think you just need to find a place to keep your list, even if it's your notes app, whatever you are most comfortable with. But I do think there needs to be a centralized place, because another place that I think people get overwhelmed is when everything's just in their head. It can be a jumble and you can't remember where you are in the process and what you need to do next.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, that's definitely a bad idea, because there's so much mental overhead if you're trying to remember things, that you've got to get them down in some way, whether it could be even a piece of paper. Or a lot of people like Notion now for things like this. I'm still a Trello fan. It's whatever works for you, really. There are lots of, like you said, list-creating apps and stuff, but I think something where you can kind of dump everything and then easily come back to it when it's time for you to do this work and pick up where you left off, is super critical.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely. And I like Trello because you can move things around too.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it's fun.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, exactly, and you add something. It keeps you engaged too. I think it can be fun. That might sound a little bit nerdy, but we are.

Alison Monahan: We are. But also fun in the sense of more fun than other ways you could track your job search. We're not talking about going to a club here.

Sadie Jones: Exactly. And I think anything where you're crossing things off a list is the best feeling. So, the other thing with overwhelm is, you feel like you're not getting anywhere sometimes. So, you need to show the progress you've made, as well as all the other things you need to do in the future.

Alison Monahan: I think that's true. That's what I like about my Trello board – I can go and be like, "Oh, look at all these things I moved to Finished." And it's like, "Okay, I did do that." And I just think it's great for reference. There're so many times I've needed to reference something and I'm like, "Oh, thank goodness I made notes on that card." So, when I come back to it three months later… That can happen in the job search – people might circle back around for something that you sent out a really long time ago. You might not even remember why you applied for this job or anything like that. So, I think anything you do upfront to create a little bit more of a record can be super helpful in the end.

Sadie Jones: I completely agree. And it can help you figure out if you need to go in a different direction, "Okay, this is where I've been. These are the different areas that I've already pursued. What would be next?"

Alison Monahan: Right. And I think it's great to have everything in one place, so that if you have a spreadsheet or you have a Trello board, you can just give someone access to that, if later you find that, "Okay, I need to go make an appointment with career

services" and they ask you, "Well, where have you applied?" And you're like, "Well, here you go."

Sadie Jones: Exactly. If you're like, "I don't have a list, I'm not sure"…

Alison Monahan: "I don't know" – that doesn't generally work out that well. They need something to start with. So, the more organized you can be and the more you can make it easy for yourself to be organized, the more likely you are. Some people are obviously more organized naturally, but I think we all can learn. I'm not a naturally organized person, and I love Trello.

Sadie Jones: And I think pick something that works for you, that's worked for you in the past, in some other process you've done. Don't recreate the wheel here. Pick something that you know is something you're comfortable with. It doesn't need to be complicated. It doesn't need to be the latest app that you hear everyone talking about, but you don't really understand how it works. Don't make this whole process more complicated.

Alison Monahan: Right. It could literally be a whiteboard with Post-it notes – that would be 100% fine. What about some tips for creating accountability, because I think that's another big piece for people? Maybe they're looking at this giant whiteboard and thinking, "Okay, I know that I need to do X, Y, and Z, but I'm really having trouble actually doing it."

Sadie Jones: I think this can be hard, and it depends. Is this a problem that you've had all the time? Maybe you need to talk to someone that this is an issue that you have, keeping yourself accountable. So, there could be people who need to delve into this really deeply. I think generally, though, most people can procrastinate – I think that's very natural. So, I do like calendaring for that also, because when you see it pop up, it does kind of make you feel like you need to do this. Or you missed it, you get a reminder this is overdue. With Trello, that also happens – you put a date on it and you might get these reminders, or it's red – which I find a little stressful and, "Okay, this is overdue. I need to do it." Now, you can bring in other people. I really do think though you need to hold yourself accountable, so you have to find a system where it's going to work for you. I don't think that this should be somebody else's responsibility, unless you're bringing an outside person that is working for you – that's different. But maybe there is a situation where you can have a partner and you're trying to keep each other on track, or maybe there's someone who wants to help. But ultimately, I think you need to find a system where you're going to be reminded, and in whatever form it works for, to keep yourself motivated. Maybe you say, "I'm going to give myself a treat

if I accomplish all these things." So, you give yourself a reward. Or you say, "If I haven't done it by the weekend, I'm not going to watch any Netflix this weekend. I'm going to sit down and do it all." So, I think you need to keep yourself on track with whichever system seems to work for you.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I remember when I was in law school and my roommate and I our first year decided that we were going to apply for firm jobs on December 1, which was the first day we could mail these things. And I remember the two of us sort of sitting in the living room, stuffing our envelopes together. And I think that really worked well in that case because it was like, "Okay, this is not a fun task, but let's do it together. We'll put on some TV, and then we'll mail them out and see what happens." So, I think other people can be helpful, even if it's just, you agree that you're going to meet at some point and spend an hour working on whatever it is that you agree to. I even have friends who do this virtually, mostly who are academics, and they have virtual sessions where they agree that they're just going to sit quietly and work on something. So, if you are feeling like you need something, I think there are ways to do it. But I agree that mostly this has to sort of be you creating accountability for yourself, really.

Sadie Jones: Only because I've noticed that sometimes when people say, "Well, I asked this person to check on me, or send me an email once a week or something" – then it's like they've given up responsibility themselves for it. And if somehow that person doesn't do it, then it's, "Oh well, I didn't know." Ultimately, you're the one who's going to get hurt if you don't keep doing it.

Alison Monahan: True. So, I think you can use other people's motivation, but ultimately this has to be an internal motivation situation, because no one's going to go out and search for your job for you. And I think sometimes students think that that might be the role of someone like career services. No, their job is not to send your resume out. Their role is to help you figure out where you want to send it. This is your project.

Sadie Jones: Exactly. I agree.

Alison Monahan: Well, sometimes I think people get overwhelmed because they get really fixated – as you mentioned a bit earlier – they get fixated on this end result. That can be really stressful and that can be really demotivating. So, what do you suggest that people do instead?

Sadie Jones: I think rather than looking at the whole big picture – so, "How am I going to get from the beginning to the final result of getting a job?" – I think you should

break it down into all the little tasks that you have to do to get there. If students ask, "How many applications do I need to send out?", I try to break it down: "What if you do X number this week" or, "Every week you do X number." Because I've noticed that if you say 200, people have a lot of trouble processing that. It sounds like, "Oh, I can't get 200 applications out", but it's going to be over a period of time. But I can do 15 this week, or I can do five this afternoon. So, I think breaking it down into steps and saying, "Okay, these are the different sort of buckets." So, we're going to do our documents, and then we're going to work on networking. We're going to put together a list of places that I'm going to apply to. So, you know when you get done with this portion, then there's this portion, because I think people do better when they sort of know, "Okay, this is the next thing I'm going to do. Nothing's hopeless, there's always a next step, and all these things will lead to the end. But I don't need to look at the end yet."

Alison Monahan: That reminds me of a book I just got for my nephew. He's four, he's very into big numbers, and the book is teaching kids about going from 10 to a million, and it's about jellybeans. But on one of the pages they have a thousand jellybeans – it sounds like so many jellybeans, but then they break it up on a calendar and show them that it can be two or three jellybeans a day to get to a thousand over the course of a year. So, I think it's the same thing here.

Sadie Jones: I agree. And a lot of these things can apply to little kids too. Like I said, about giving yourself a treat – that works for, I think, all humans.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think immediately of an ice cream cone. There's an ice cream shop down the street from me, it's by the park. And if I really, really need to get motivated, that's what I do – I say, "Okay, I'll do this thing and then I'll walk down to the ice cream shop. I know exactly which ice cream I'm going to get. I'll walk around the park and then I'll go home." And it actually does work.

Sadie Jones: I know I'm going to get a fancy latte in the afternoon if I'm having a rough morning, and that will get me to the next thing that I don't want to do. So, I think those things do work. And it could be, obviously, whatever works for you.

Alison Monahan: Right. It could be, take the night off if you get your resume done. Sometimes people, I think, don't want to do those things because they are very, very driven and they just want to do everything all at once. But I think you do have to celebrate the small wins, give yourself credit for what you're doing, and that's going to help you stay motivated.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely. Also, hold yourself accountable for the things you're not doing, because I think some people do get a little overconfident. They have a really good week, and then they sort of lose two weeks thereafter, because they felt so good about what they do. So, keep it up! That feeling felt good. I think that's a common sort of human nature issue too.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, you're like, "I did such a great job. Now I get to take a break for the next month."

Sadie Jones: Yeah, exactly.

Alison Monahan: So yeah, I think the small and steady wins the race is kind of the key here. The things that you're doing on a regular basis, you're really committing to them, you're getting them done. And then it doesn't have to feel as overwhelming, because it's not that suddenly you're months behind on this project and you're in a rush and you're panicked. It's that you've been doing this stuff, maybe you're getting an occasional interview here and there to keep you motivated. But eventually you know that it'll probably work out. Versus someone who's procrastinating and getting really close to the deadline, and then having to panic and try to… I mean, I say this as somebody who wrote their undergraduate honors thesis literally in three weeks from start to finish. It was supposed to be a yearlong project. So, I get it. But that was also probably one of the most stressful times in my entire life.

Sadie Jones: So, you learned something from the experience, and I'm guessing that you don't like saving things to the last minute anymore.

Alison Monahan: I don't. But I also realized if I have to get stuff done, I can. I always get back to that one when I'm in trouble. I'm like, "You know what? You picked your undergraduate honors thesis topic on spring break and you got highest honors, so you can do this."

Sadie Jones: Actually, I think that's great too – sort of referencing other experiences that you've had, that have worked out, and saying, "I did this." You got into law school – I bet the application process for that was difficult for everybody, but you got there. You did all these standardized tests. There're lots of things you've done to get to this point, so just remember that. You can get there.

Alison Monahan: I think that's true. Staying positive, even if you're in not a great situation, even if you created that situation, always better than getting really depressed about it. Well, what if people have lots of worthy activities that are seemingly competing

for attention? So, you might be able to do networking, maybe you could send out more apps, maybe you could work more on LinkedIn. How should people decide what to do first?

Sadie Jones: Well, this is where you kind of have to triage. You have a set amount of time and you have lots of different things that you could do. You have to say to yourself, "Okay, what's the highest-value task? I'm going to do that first." And then, I think you make a list of the things. And then I always say, you can have some optional things at the end. If I have enough time, I'm going to try to reach out to an attorney at all the firms I applied to, or the firms that were most important to me, and try to do some networking. But obviously, that's after you've sent your applications out, and you've applied, and you've figured out all the places you need to apply to. So, I think you need to say to yourself, "What are the highest- value things I can do?" Obviously, there're things you have to do – you have to have a resume, a cover letter, you have to have your LinkedIn updated, you have to have a list of places you're going to apply to, you have to start sending those applications out. This is the step I find that students have the most trouble with for some reason. They'll spend all this time getting to the point where the applications have to go out, and then over a period of weeks they still haven't sent anything out because they feel like, "Well, I need to get so many out." And I just say, "You just have to start. Even if you send one, it's better than none." So, you have to get that out. And I do think networking is very key, and I hope that everybody can find the time for it. But obviously, that can be optional because ultimately, that's extra. So, you kind of have to see how much time you have. And maybe you have more time than you thought. I think that it depends how much you want to put into this – that's your decision.

Alison Monahan: Right. I think the high-value stuff is sometimes the stuff that makes people uncomfortable. So, I think at some point there can be this tendency to do more research, do more nitpicking on your already basically perfect resume. So, you do have to start putting yourself out there. Another technique I like is to table things, but not forever. So, if I'm looking at my schedule and saying, "Okay, I really would like to do some networking, but I've got all these other things I need to do first" – okay, maybe I'll make a commitment for two weeks from now, I'm going to go to this particular thing, whether it's an event or whatever it is, or a week from now, I'm going to put something on my schedule where I'm going to commit to setting up or trying to set up at least, a couple of informational interviews. So that you're not committing to doing it right that second, but you're also not letting it ride forever.

Sadie Jones: I think that's such a great idea. And I think people get down about the things that they're not doing, and then it creates this cycle of still not doing it. Like I

said, I'll check in and they haven't sent any applications out, and then I'll check in in a week and they still haven't sent any applications out. And I think they're feeling really bad and sort of embarrassed, but my answer is just, "Okay, send one out tomorrow."

Alison Monahan: Do it today.

Sadie Jones: I don't need to talk about why you didn't do it. Yeah, exactly, do it today. Do one right now.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think getting over that initial hurdle also can be a good thing, because you send one out and you realize the world didn't end. You didn't collapse in shame from having sent an application out. Things are fine. So, it can help people build some confidence moving forward that, "Okay, I did this thing." And even if, say, you go to a networking event and it's totally pointless and you realize it's a waste of time and you leave after 20 minutes – well, at least you went. You can feel good about that.

Sadie Jones: I think that people can get something out of any of these tasks. I think it's how you look at it. I think if you're too results-oriented, the whole point of every single thing you're doing is to get a job. I think that can really backfire. I always say, you can be just, like you said, doing an informational interview with someone who's not hiring. But maybe you talk to them, they like you, and they know someone else that's hiring. You should be able to get something out of each of the things that you're doing. And like you said, the networking event seemed pointless, but you know what? You got out of the house, you went, you practiced, you tried to talk to people, maybe you evaluated things that you need to work on. So, I really think that nothing is a waste in these situations, and everything will get you something, and you never know what's going to lead to a job.

Alison Monahan: I agree. And even if you do an informational interview, you hate the person, you hate the environment – hey, at least you know you don't want to work there.

Sadie Jones: Exactly, so you learned that out of it.

Alison Monahan: That is valuable information. You saved yourself applying to a place that would have been a total waste of time and you would have hated anyway, but you found in 30 minutes at coffee that this was not the place for you.

Sadie Jones: You also got practice talking to someone you didn't like, because you're going to talk to other people you didn't like.

Alison Monahan: For sure.

Sadie Jones: I think you can always find something positive.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, even if on initial glance doesn't seem like the best use of your time, exactly – you found somebody, you learned how to talk to somebody who was a little bit hostile or having a bad day, and you survived the experience. And you can say, "You know what? That wasn't the most fun thing ever, but if I'm in that situation again, at least it's not going to be a shock when somebody is having a bad day and they're doing an interview", because that does happen.

Sadie Jones: Exactly. And you're not going to get anything out of just procrastinating. There will be nothing accomplished – that part, I can promise.

Alison Monahan: Right. If you're just sitting in your room doing nothing, then you're definitely not learning. You're not moving things forward, you're not putting yourself out there, and what do you think is going to happen? A magic job fairy is going to drop a job in your lap?

Sadie Jones: I think some people do think, "Oh, things just work out without me doing that much." And that's just not the case.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Alright, before we wrap up, let's talk a little bit about what if things just really are not going well and people are starting to feel hopeless. What do you suggest?

Sadie Jones: This is a situation where maybe you want to seek outside resources, or you want to really take stock of what you've done. So, you might go back and do some of the things we talked about. Maybe you were too focused on the results and you're not doing all the interim steps. But maybe you need to bring someone else onto your team, or meet with career services, or there's somebody that you know that can take a fresh eye. But especially if you really have sent out a lot of applications – let's say you've sent out 200 resumes and cover letters and you haven't gotten any responses at all, you haven't had any interviews – then you need to think about, "Okay, what's not going right here?" Or maybe you've gotten a lot of interviews and you haven't gotten one offer. You have to look at it, maybe it has to do with where you're applying. And

outside resources can mean different things for different people. I think it depends on your personal situation, whether you need a career counselor, a therapist, a coach. Maybe there are personal things going on that you need to deal with, that are sort of a block to actually doing the job search. And like I said, I think everybody procrastinates to some degree. I think there are people where it's just very deep and it's a bigger problem that you have to work on. So, I think there're a lot of things that you can do. But ignoring it is never going to help, and that's not going to lead to a job. So, you have to figure out, "Okay, what do I need here?"

Alison Monahan: Yeah. You might need somebody to help with executive functioning. If you have issues with ADHD and things like that, there are coaches for that. If you can't stay motivated unless you have outside accountability – well, figure out how to get that accountability. And definitely, if you're just not seeing any results and/or this is leading to really major mental health issues – you've got serious anxiety around this, you're getting really depressed – you've got to get help at that point because things are not going to probably magically resolve themselves, unfortunately.

Sadie Jones: I agree, and I think that you can get a gauge, just in terms of… I don't think that we should compare ourselves too much, but if you kind of see there are a lot of common issues that a lot of students have, where they're getting down about the job search when it's not working out. But I think you can tell when things are more extreme and you need more help.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, there's the normal stress of this, and then there's next level, like this is majorly impacting your life – you're not eating, you're not sleeping, and things like that. It's not worth that.

Sadie Jones: Exactly. You have to take care of yourself.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it's just a job. You'll eventually get a job one way or another.

Sadie Jones: And I think that's really important too, actually, is just keeping it in perspective. I think that the overwhelm can also come from just taking it so seriously and clinging so tightly to this working out. Letting go a little and telling yourself, "This will work out one way or the other", I think can take some pressure off.

Alison Monahan: Right, and people may be getting serious pressure from their family and things like that, like, "We need you to get this" or, "You need to get it." Or your parents may be undermining you. I mean, my mother was convinced I'd never get a job

when I was top of my class at Columbia, and I'm like, "Yeah, I don't think that's accurate, actually. You don't understand how this works. I will find a job, it's fine." I think there can be a lot of different factors, but if you are really feeling extreme amounts of pressure, that's something to get help with.

Sadie Jones: I agree. And there're lots of resources.

Alison Monahan: Absolutely. Alright, well, any final thoughts before we wrap up on this?

Sadie Jones: My final thought is that I really believe there's a job for everybody. So, if you don't do any of these steps, then no, you're not going to find it. You have to actually put the work in. But I do believe that, and I've seen it, and there are people who are convinced they are just not going to get anything, and they do. So, you follow the steps, you keep going. There's always somewhere else you can apply, there's always another option. I do believe it will work out if you keep at it.

Alison Monahan: Alright, well, I like that ending. Thank you so much for joining us.

Sadie Jones: Thanks for having me.

Alison Monahan: My pleasure. With that, we're out of time. For more career help and the opportunity to work one-on-one with us, you can check out CareerDicta.com. If you enjoyed this episode of the Law School Toolbox podcast, please take a second to leave a review and rating on your favorite listening app. We would really appreciate it. And be sure to subscribe so you don't miss anything. If you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to reach out to Lee or Alison at lee@lawschooltoolbox.com or alison@lawschooltoolbox.com. Or you can always contact us via our website contact form at LawSchoolToolBox.com. Thanks for listening, and we'll talk soon!

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