



Lee Burgess: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today we are going to be talking about a very important topic - executive functioning skills. Your Law School Toolbox hosts are Alison Monahan and Lee Burgess, that's me. We're here to demystify the law school and early legal career experience, so you'll be the best law student and lawyer you can be. We're the co-creators of the [Law School Toolbox](#), the [Bar Exam Toolbox](#), and the career-related website [CareerDicta](#). Alison also runs [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 reach us via the [contact form](#) on LawSchoolToolBox.com, and we'd love to hear from you. And with that, let's get started.

Welcome back. Today we are talking about executive functioning skills, which is something we love to talk about, especially in relation to staying organized, managing one's time, and also studying and working smart. So Alison, how would you rate your executive functioning skills?

Alison Monahan: I feel like they're a lot better than they used to be. I would say I'm not a naturally super organized person, but I have become more organized over time. And I feel like now they're actually pretty strong in most cases. Not everything, I don't know. How about you?

Lee Burgess: Well, I shared this in our newsletter, about my maid of honor's wedding toast, where she, after a few cocktails, just kept talking about how responsible and organized and responsible I was as part of her wedding toast. So I guess I could say that I have a reputation for having good executive functioning skills, whether or not that's true or not. But I think as my life has become more and more complicated, my executive functioning skills have become really challenged, and I have to be better and constantly be reinventing what I need to manage, my big beautiful life and my kids' big beautiful lives, and all the things that come with having more responsibilities at work and also in life.

Alison Monahan: I do remember in the early days of our business, I did not pay something that needed to be paid to the state, I think, and at some point you were like, "You know what? I do this for my house. I'm just taking the checkbook away from you. I'll just take care of these things." So, I think I have improved, now I do run the finances for various other things that I'm involved in. But yeah, there was definitely the moment of like, "You are not a person who should be taking care of our finances. Okay, we know that now."

Lee Burgess: That's true. I do still pay the bills for our business after all these years.



Alison Monahan: Fair. Although many of them pay themselves automatically. Many, most of them.

Lee Burgess: Well, yes, because we've set up scaffolding to make sure that things get paid on time. So it's a very good executive functioning kind of workaround. So, I think this is the reality for most folks - we have strengths and weaknesses. And there's a lot more in this space of executive functioning skills than I think I even realized before I started diving into books. So, every time you and I want to talk about something new, we audit a bunch of books. That's what we like to do, I guess. I don't know what that says about us. So, I'm a couple books in. The first book that I read was called [Thriving with Adult ADHD](#), which was *Skills to Strengthen Executive Functioning*, by Phil... and I feel like I'm going to butcher his name. So, I'm going to try, but I apologize if he ever finds out about this podcast. Boissiere. And then the other one is called the [Smart but Scattered Guide to Success: How to Use Your Brain's Executive Skills to Keep Up, Stay Calm, and Get Organized at Work](#). And that is by Peg Dawson and Richard Guare. And they have written other books for teenagers and students about staying organized. So, what I thought was the most interesting about these books, because I started with the *Adult ADHD* book - and I do not believe I have adult ADHD - except as I'm reading this book, I said "I think we all have a little bit of adult ADHD because of our distracted world that we live in." And so, a lot of these techniques, although they can provide scaffolding for those who struggle with attention deficit issues, I think in our modern world, all of us are fighting against distraction. And so a lot of these techniques really can be applied to almost any of us, because of the tiny box that lives in our, hands that takes all of our attention away.

Alison Monahan: No, I think that's fair. If you have ADHD, then boy, we are all in trouble because, like you said, you're a person who actually gets stuff done, and seems like you have your whole life. So yeah, I feel like if you're struggling - boy, the rest of us are really in trouble. So, what are executive functioning skills? Do they define that for us?

Lee Burgess: They do. Different authors kind of have some different lists, but here are some of the basics. Really, the idea is that executive functioning is the cognitive regulation and management skills that help us accomplish tasks. And they could be work tasks or life tasks. And this includes basic time management, organization and planning, something called "working memory", which was a term that I had maybe heard but I hadn't really read much about in a long time. That's basically the memory of what you're working on so you can keep moving it forward. Emotional control, task initiation, and flexible thinking. So, it's a really broad array. And some books let you kind of test your aptitude in each of these skillset areas. But when you really start reading about all of these skills, I



think it's pretty easy to see, where our strengths and weaknesses are as an individual. But it's a pretty broad scope of something called "executive functioning skills". I mean, these are really like how you move within the world skills.

Alison Monahan:

Right. And I think the point that people have strengths and weaknesses is a really good one. I know for me, for example - and I know this is actually a characteristic of ADHD, which I also don't think I have - but I can hyper focus on things. So, if I need to really focus on something and I tune out the distractions, I can do that very successfully. But then I tend to procrastinate at other times. So, it's kind of the balance and the scales. I'm not a person who can sit down and work for eight hours straight, but I might be able to really focus for two hours and get something done, and then kind of blow off the rest of the day. So I think we all do have those strengths and weaknesses within this kind of sphere of executive functioning - just things that are more natural, and then things that we can learn.

Lee Burgess:

I think that's one of the interesting messages in the reading that I've been doing, is that these are skills and that you can, practice these skills and get better at them, and that if you are a procrastinator, there are things that you can do to help your procrastination. If you do struggle with some of the, let's say, emotional control when you get frustrated - there are things that you can do to practice that. We come to our life with these strengths and weaknesses, but we can all be better. We are almost always working on ourselves, and so you can work out these different skills and hopefully get better at them. I also think it's interesting to think about why so many of us feel that our executive functioning skills are suffering. And it seems pretty consistent through a lot of the stuff that I've been reading that information overload, constant digital distractions, all of this content is making our brains a little mushy, and it's making it harder for us to use these executive functioning skills. And we've talked about this a lot on the podcast. Very recently I did an [interview with Jessica Elefante](#) on her new book called [Raising Hell, Living Well](#), where she talks a lot about digital distraction and influence and how it changes our brains. There're things called, I think it's digital dementia, was a term that I heard about in her book for the first time - that our brains can't remember things because we're so distracted. That was maybe the most frightening phrase I have read in a book in a long time. And so, it's just harder in our modern life to practice these skills of focus. So, some of it's modern life and you have to figure out how to manage it. We also have less opportunity to develop some of these skills at young ages. That's not how we're educating our kids, to really work on these executive functioning skills. And newsflash - high stress lifestyles are not very good for a lot of these executive functioning skills, because when our brains are living in a constant state of



stress, we have diminished cognitive resources. So, all of that's kind of depressing. I know, I'm a bum today.

Alison Monahan: It is. I think of my nephew. And I know you have small kids around the same age, but man, if you try to give them a phone and take it away - woof! That's a very addictive sort of thing. And that's not something that we would've been dealing with as children. So, I do think that there are different challenges, and I think particularly for law students, there can be some really big challenges here because suddenly you're in this very demanding educational system. You have really heavy cognitive load, just of doing reading, and sitting down and doing reading that's fairly dry for three or four hours a day. I think it's a really big shock to a lot of people, and it may be something that most people really have to get trained up for. It's basically like, that's your marathon. It's not a sprint, so you're doing that every day. You've got to keep track at this deep level of a lot of details. You have a lot of competing demands. There're some really new demands on most people's executive functioning skills, I think, when they come to law school, and then later, certainly, when they become a lawyer.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, task management really gets challenged in law school, sometimes for folks for the first time, depending on if you have worked professionally before or just came straight through school. You all of a sudden have a lot more to do and maybe the stakes feel a lot higher. So it really is a unique kind of pressure cooker that's going to test a lot of these skills. It also shouldn't be surprising that because of that, a lot of law students get diagnosed with ADHD during law school, because it is the first time that their executive functioning skills are so challenged that they really feel that. And one of our interviews that we've done on this topic, one of the explanations for that is that often law students can just over-function and kind of not feel the effects of it until they get to law school, because law school itself is such a big challenge. So if you're starting to feel a strain, whether or not it's to the extent that you feel like you need to go get diagnosed with something, but if you are feeling a strain on your executive functioning skills, I think that that's pretty normal as a law student.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I agree. I think for everybody it's going to be a tested environment. This is kind of ramping up from what most people have had to do before. And then I think for some people it does illustrate, "Okay, there is a real problem here, and I need to get some extra support." But I think everybody, like you said, can benefit from taking the time and being thoughtful about ways to strengthen these skills. What are some things that you've learned about?

Lee Burgess: Well, I have a whole list - that shouldn't surprise anybody. And so, I had a lot of fun reading some of these books, and I'm still in some of them. So, this is just



the first of many podcasts. Everybody be super excited because I love talking about this stuff. Alright, one thing to think about is being intentional when you switch between tasks. So I thought this was kind of interesting - that it can be very hard for us to go back and forth, to get interrupted and leave a task, and then come back and remember what we did. We've all done this, right? We're in the middle of something, the phone rings, we come back and we're like, "What was I doing? I have no idea what I was doing." And so, even things so simple as like the phone rings and you say to yourself, "I am working on XYZ right now, and when I come back, I'm going to start ABC." And just defining it for yourself. You could write it down as well, but really, that definition kind of moves it into your brain that you are tracking what you are doing. Sometimes if I leave a document, I will write a little note to myself that is like, "This is where I have stopped" or, "This is what I need to come back to." But I think even just internalizing that in your brain and doing that little exercise can increase that retention. Another thing that came up in some of the reading that I was doing was this idea of positive self-talk and what we do with negative self-talk": "I can't do this. I'm terrible at this. I am such a procrastinator. I could never get anything done. I could never pay the bills no matter how hard I tried." That sort of negative self-talk doesn't get us anywhere, and really does hurt our ability to work on these executive functioning skills. So, I think that's another really important thing to keep in mind, is you're trying to work on these things and get better and better.

Alison Monahan: Right. I always remind myself, "Really, if this is falling apart, I probably just need a better system." So if I figure out the system, I can solve the problem or at least make the problem better. So, for me, I'm the queen of note cards, I like to make notes to myself. And if I don't have a note card around for a few days, I do find that things start getting harder and harder, because that is just what helps me with coming back to things and be like, "Oh yes, right. I need to do this thing." And I think whatever works for you, lean into it. But a lot of it, I think it's a process issue more than anything.

Lee Burgess: I agree. Another interesting thing that was discussed in one of these books was about this idea of how to make your overall memory better, this idea of the digital dementia. It becomes harder to learn when we're so distracted. So, one thing that we talk about with our students all the time, especially those who are studying for the bar exam, is this idea of breathing, because breathing calms the nervous system. And if your nervous system is calm, you can retain more information. So, even something as simple as box breathing or doing some sort of exercise while you are getting ready to try and learn material, I think is going to be very effective to get your brain flooded with oxygen and out of fight or flight, to be able to retain information. Another thing that you want to focus on



is rehearsing or repeating things over and over. This shouldn't be a big surprise, but if it's really important and you don't want to forget it, you can just rehearse it. You can create kind of instructions for yourself, which I loved this idea, because I thought about exam taking. We oftentimes talk about a pre-writing approach, but pretty much coming up with your own instructions of like, "This is how I'm going to do this", and you either write yourself a note on your scratch paper or you practice it so much that you have this very defined approach to follow, so you don't have to lean on like, "What was the first thing I do? What do I do if I don't know the answer immediately? How many times should I read the question?" The more you can kind of set up the scaffolding, the better. So, those are some of the ideas that I had to work on overall memory. Alison, do you think any of those sound like they would be helpful for a law student?

Alison Monahan: Oh, absolutely. And I've even read things, you can practice your working memory by something like going to the grocery store, and maybe you write the list, but you don't actually consult the list. What that's basically doing is making you go over and over in your head like, "Okay, I need broccoli, I need milk, I need eggs." And even something as simple as that can be a great, very low impact, low cost way - because you can always look at the list before you leave the store of improving your memory. And I think that is going to help you ultimately in the long run.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Or I was at an event with folks that I didn't know and I was trying to memorize names. I'm not great with names, but really looking at someone and being like, "I know your name is Anne, and I am going to put that into my brain." And I might have a mnemonic or some reason that I can remember that, but also just being really intentional and saying, "I don't want to forget your name."

Alison Monahan: Right. And some of it is really that focus of, if you make a point of... Because, let's face it, a lot of times when people introduce themselves, we're not really paying attention. We might be worried about what we'd look like, or are we going to shake their hand or not shake their hand, or "Is that somebody I know over in the other side of the room that should say hi to?" And then Anne introduces herself, and you two seconds later have no idea what her name was. So, names are also something that you definitely can get better at. But again, I think that type of practice is going to be helpful in a lot of different capacities, because before you can remember something, you have to actually pay attention and learn it.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, it's so true. As I mentioned, one of my favorite things to talk about is managing distractions. And one of the things that came out of some of this reading that I was doing was this framing of internal distractions versus external



distractions, and having strategies for both. So, an internal distraction could be your chattering mind, your busy mind. You could be working on something and you're worried about what is on that grocery list, or you're working on something and all you can think about is a hard phone call that you had with a parent the night before. It's kind of these incessant thoughts - they pop in and they distract us. I don't have this problem as much when I'm working, but when I listen to podcasts or audiobooks or things like that, my mind can start to wander. And then you realize there is noise in the background, but you have decided you are focused on something else. And it can take a few minutes to realize that you are gone and that you've got to kind of bring your mind back. So, you want to be aware of this. And then external distractions are all the interruptions, the notifications, the emails, the phone calls, the text messages. And it's really hard to turn off these notifications. I'm pretty good at doing that and I still got text message notifications on my computer while we were recording this podcast. It drives me crazy. But I can't turn off my Internet because I need the Internet to make this recording with you. So, it becomes really tricky and every time that "ding" goes off, we get a dopamine response. And then we open up the phone, and the whole world's in the phone, and next thing you know, you've lost 20 minutes reading your email, checking Instagram, doing whatever it is that you do on your phone. And it's just really hard to manage. These internal and external distractions, I think are one of the biggest issues for most of us in our daily lives.

Alison Monahan:

Right. And I think sometimes it's like as soon as you turn the tap on, you're down the rabbit hole. That'll happen to me, like, "Oh, I've got some Slack notification I should respond to", when I'm in the middle of something, and then before I know it, I've spent 20 minutes looking at bread pictures on Instagram and I'm like, "Oh, I wonder what's happening on the New York Times in the last half hour." Nothing is happening in the last half hour that I absolutely need to know. And then, yeah, maybe it's an hour later and you're going back to something and saying, "Hmm, what was I doing before I got that notification? Oh, I have no idea. I'll just, go do something else." So, I think it's just so easy, as soon as you go down that rabbit hole, to just be in it. I've even heard it described as people are disassociating. It's almost like you're driving down the road on a long car trip, and then two hours later you look up and you're like, "Wow, I have no idea what just happened."

Lee Burgess:

I did a drive down I-5 in California in the fall, and that is one of those experiences, because it's so monotonous and you're like, "What have I been doing for an hour?" Yeah, it's crazy. One of the ideas that came out of some of these books was the idea to keep a distraction log, which I thought was really interesting, especially for those who are struggling with distractions while



studying. And the idea of this is to keep a blank piece of paper, a notebook or a legal pad next to your workspace. And as these thoughts interrupt you, that you write them down. So, what if it's that things pop into your mind for your to-do list? Well, you could write down things onto your to-do list right next to you. Or let's say you're going through a crummy breakup with a significant other, and it is drama, drama, drama all the time, right? And then you have these incessant thoughts that are popping into your brain about how mad you are or how sad you are. And if you deposit them on a piece of paper, cognitively, it is easier to set it aside for a period of time. I think this is a really interesting idea. It is even something you could do in an exam situation if you are really having trouble focusing because there's some nagging thought. You could just write it down on your scratch paper and just give it a place to live that is not at the forefront of your brain.

Alison Monahan: Right. And I think that's so effective in so many scenarios. I even know a friend who apparently keeps a whiteboard in her shower with waterproof pens, because she says that's always where she gets her ideas and she wants to capture them without having to get out of the shower. That might be an extreme version of it, but this idea of just write it down. If you have to put it on a note on your phone or put it on a piece of paper, but whatever it is, once you've written it down, your brain can forget about it and you've captured it for later, because maybe it's a great idea.

Lee Burgess: I think it was the *Adult ADHD* book that he said if it's written down, it's real. It becomes something different when you write it down. A to-do list becomes different, a distraction becomes different. But if you give it a permanent existence on some sort of piece of paper, I think, or a whiteboard... I didn't even know there were waterproof whiteboards, that's kind of fascinating to me. But I guess to each their own. Amazon has everything.

Alison Monahan: I know, these are the things you learn in life. Yeah, I find it interesting how many times I have a thought and then I think to myself, "Oh, I'll definitely remember that." And then I walk out of the room and I'm like, "What was it I was thinking about? I have absolutely no idea." And then I have to kind of rewind the whole scenario until something triggers the same thought. And that maybe happens like 80% of the time I get back. But it is amazing how quickly we can get distracted. Someone I know describes it like a squirrel - it's like "Nut, nut, nut. Over there, over there, over there." It's like, next shiny object. But I think we all do that.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, absolutely. Another suggestion was for studying or for working, some people find that music can be really helpful, especially music with a consistent



beat pattern. I think especially if you're distracted by loud noises that might be happening outside, let's say there's a construction project near where you're working or living - like where I'm sitting in my office right now - and you're trying to ignore it. You can kind of replace that distraction with another noise that maybe you can ignore. I think the problem with this for students is that you're not going to be able to have music in the exam room, and so you have to be careful about this, but it is something to explore. I know my husband almost always likes to work with music on, and I do not. I like to work in silence. I find music on typically very distracting.

Alison Monahan: No, I'm the opposite. I feel like it helps me focus, and it's the same thing. I realized one time that when I'm in a cafe or something like that, it actually helps me focus if I can see other people walking by and that kind of thing, which is definitely not for everyone, but somehow for me, all the stuff that'll be running through my brain, having some sort of visual or auditory stimulation kind of calms that down and then I can focus. I don't know, it's a little weird.

Lee Burgess: Hey, whatever works. But a lot of people don't like to study... I could not really study in cafes. That was not my best self, because I would get too distracted by people-watching, which is one of my favorite activities. So I just couldn't go dive into the case. I had to go be somewhere boring to do that. And linked to this is really setting up your physical space to be conducive to focus. So this is something that I think a lot of folks discredit, about if your desk is a mess, it can be very hard to focus if your living space is a mess. This even goes back to the idea of why people say you should make your bed in the morning, although I'm not very good at doing that. But physical space can actually lead to distractions. That is something that you want to keep in mind. Another thing that I think is interesting is this idea of how to sustain your attention. So not just not get distracted, but actually keep your attention. And I think it was in the *Adult ADHD* book, he says that most people cannot focus for more than 90 minutes. And I think that for some of us, it's even shorter than that. Or morning time could be 90 minutes, and then as the day goes on, for some people it gets shorter as the day goes on. He really talked about the importance of breaks, and what I thought was interesting is not just taking a break, but what you do during that break is really important. So, you should not take a break from work or study and then just check your phone and social media, because that's not really a cognitive break. A cognitive break is getting up, moving your body, looking outside, getting some fresh air, getting a snack - something where you are giving your brain a bit of a rest, and then it can come back and focus again. These are really important, and even when we coach folks for the bar exam, if somebody's having a lot of trouble focusing, we'll encourage folks to take micro breaks of 30 seconds, to just look around, do a breathing exercise, walk back to the



bathroom and walk right back to your seat. Whatever needs to happen. Sometimes you need to give your mind a moment to come back and get that focus. But I do think that so often we don't talk about what you do during those breaks.

Alison Monahan: Right. I think that's critical. It has to be something else. So, if you've been sitting and reading, then sitting in the same place and reading on your phone is not a break. But if you walk around the house, you do some jumping jacks, maybe you even go outside, you walk around the lock - anything that kind of gives your brain something else is going to feel much more like a real break.

Lee Burgess: I agree. Another recommendation was to look at procrastination, but confront it head on and be honest about what you're procrastinating about. And look for patterns. Do you procrastinate at certain times of the day? Do you procrastinate on certain types of projects? Procrastinate on just personal tasks but not professional tasks? The idea is to track it. We talk about time tracking a lot on this podcast and with students, and I think tracking procrastination is another thing to look at. Look for the patterns. Patterns can be very powerful when you are trying to make change.

Alison Monahan: And if you find that you're consistently procrastinating on certain things, then you have to look at, "Is this something I don't really fundamentally want to be doing? Is it something that's not aligned with my preferences or my values or whatever?" And if the answer really is, "Yeah, I actually just don't ever want to be doing this" - then you might have to reevaluate the path that you're on, even if that's challenging.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. The other thing, I think, to keep in mind is really tracking even what you're doing, when it comes to sustaining attention. So, what are you spending your 90 minutes on? And reflect about that. You don't have to do this every day - that may be a little bit intense. But you could track it for a week and get a lot of valuable information. And those patterns are going to be powerful when you're trying to make certain decisions. The other thing that I think can be valuable is taking time at the end of the day to plan for your next day. And I had a boss my very first big person job, at a real fancy place. I shared a cubicle with my boss and she kept the neatest cubicle I've ever seen in my entire life, in all my years of working. But she had this to-do list pad, and every day before she left, she stacked everything that she needed to, and then she made her to-do list for the next morning. And then when she came in, she was incredibly productive first thing in the morning. And one of the things that they were talking about in this book was that oftentimes when you struggle with executive functioning skills, every day feels like an emergency, like you are just in chaos from the moment



you start. And the whole day is basically triaging chaos. And if you plan your day out before you show up, then you can avoid that feeling of chaos. And I think this can be a really effective strategy, especially for people who are studying for something, because oftentimes you show up to study and there's that moment of like paralyzation, "What am I supposed to do now? How do I get started?" And if you've got a plan, you can just hit the ground running.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. And I think figuring out what is actually realistic to get done in a day can also be helpful if you're not doing it while you're trying to also do things. So you might be a little more objective. If there's a time separation and you're looking at your to-do list saying, "Okay, I have 10 things on it and I probably can only really accomplish like three. What is my highest priority, versus what is the nice to do?" And shifting that around. That's a completely separate skill set from actually executing the work itself.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. And it's almost like you knew my next thing I wanted to talk about, which was just basic time management. When making to-do lists, one of the recommendations was doing a prioritized to-do list - so, the things that have to get done in a given day, the things that are nice to get done, and then the things that are just a long-term nice to do that almost never get done. So, that idea of having to make those choices on your to-do list, so there is no question about what you have to get done in a day, and then you're just going through it. And breaking things down into manageable tasks. Your to-do list shouldn't just be like one project that's going to take eight hours, because that's too out there. You should take that eight-hour task and break it into more manageable chunks, so you can track how you're doing on a project. And that is going to make you much more effective.

Alison Monahan: Right. I mean, eight hours is not a to-do list item. It could be, "Outline section one of my syllabus." Sure. Or then do practice hypo on Civ Pro, or go to study group. Whatever it might be, but there needs to be small tasks. And after reading more about this, I've been revamping my to-do list, because I just love to try a new good technique to make me more effective. And really, the prioritization part is something that I had not been doing as much. And sometimes I would find myself looking at my very long to-do list and being like, "What shall I pick today?", which is not an efficient use of my time. But today for instance, I had a pocket of 45 minutes between taking my kids to school and something I had to be at. And I had my prioritized to-do list set up from last night, and I just sat down and I knocked out. I'm just crossing things off, because I didn't sit down and try and gather my thoughts or decide what I wanted to do or read the New York Times or whatever else, start texting people. I just said, "I'm going to see how much stuff I can get done in 45 minutes", and it was a



super productive 45 minutes. And I'm not sure it would've been if I hadn't taken all of the five minutes I took last night and started this to-do list with priorities for the day, and then nice to do things if I have time. But let's be honest, I almost never have extra time. So, it is what it is. Well, I did something that took literally five minutes or less that had been hanging out on my to-do list for several days, because I was like, "I feel like I have time to just sit down and knock this out right now." And sure enough, it took five minutes.

Lee Burgess:

Yeah. I follow this organizer, who's based out of Oakland, and she talks about, I think it's 15-minute solutions or 15-minute projects. She has a very catchy phrase that I cannot remember off the top of my head, but she always says that there are so many projects that you could do part of it in 15 minutes and be highly successful. So she's like, don't clean out your entire bathroom; just do one drawer. One drawer in your bathroom will probably only take 15 minutes. And I just think that idea of these manageable bites of tasks, so we can get them done and they don't feel so intimidating, can be absolutely powerful. And if you feel like studying for 60 minutes is too hard, what can you get done in 15 minutes? Could you be using spaced repetition to memorize some law? Could you do two multiple choice questions and review them? What can you do that feels more manageable? I think that if you start to get more comfortable with that, you just may find that you don't have as many barriers to getting stuff done.

Alison Monahan:

Right. And you're going to get that feeling, the little dopamine hit of success. And so if you start small and start making it a habit to fill these extra little spaces with something that's productive, then it's also like a muscle. Fifteen minutes turns into 30 minutes, and maybe 30 minutes turns into 45 minutes, but you have to work up to it.

Lee Burgess:

We've talked about [habits](#), this is linked to habits. All of this stuff is really intertwined, and I think that's what's interesting when you read books on habits, which of course I do, when you read books on executive functioning. I know, I'm like the most fun to hang out with. My husband is like, "What are you working on?" I'm like, "I read this great book about executive functioning skills." And he's like, "Great. Can't wait to hear all about it." But you start to see the crossover. Having intention with how we spend our time and minimizing the distractions, especially our digital worlds, our key to us showing up as being our best selves. And I think that so much of what I try to do as a person is to, when I show up as a parent, I try and be a parent who's my best self and present with my kids, when I'm in that role. When I'm at work, I want to be present and focused and deliver the best thing that I can there. When I'm having fun, I also want to be present and enjoying myself and having fun. And these executive



functioning skills really allow you to make the most of the time that you have. And time is like diamonds - it is not infinite. And you want to make the most of the time that you do allocate to things.

Alison Monahan: Absolutely. Well, Lee, this has been super interesting. I'm happy that you've read these. I know you're going to pass them along to me and then we can even talk about them in more detail. But I think this has been super interesting.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, well, stay tuned because I still have at least one more book on my desk to read. So, more content to come. But I hope you can try to incorporate some of these suggestions into your life, because even if you are someone who has great executive functioning skills, I think we can all work on them, and implement techniques to make us more organized and more effective.

So, with that, I could probably stop talking about one of my favorite topics and say, we are out of time. 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'd 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 myself or Alison at lee@lawschooltoolbox.com or alison@lawschooltoolbox.com. Or you can always contact us via our website [contact form](#) at LawSchoolToolBox.com. Thanks for listening, and we'll talk soon!

RESOURCES:

[Tutoring for Law School Success](#)

[Thriving with Adult ADHD: Skills to Strengthen Executive Functioning, by Phil Boissiere](#)

[The Smart but Scattered Guide to Success: How to Use Your Brain's Executive Skills to Keep Up, Stay Calm, and Get Organized at Work and at Home, by Peg Dawson and Richard Guare](#)

[Raising Hell, Living Well: Freedom from Influence in a World Where Everyone Wants Something from You, by Jessica Elefante](#)

[Podcast Episode 71: Soft Skills You Need to Develop To Be a Successful Attorney](#)

[Podcast Episode 219: Mastering People Skills for Success as an Attorney \(w/Stephanie Hanna\)](#)

[Podcast Episode 427: A Discussion with Author Jessica Elefante on the Power of Influence in the Digital Age](#)

[Podcast Episode 432: Creating New Habits and Optimizing Time Management](#)

[Working on Your Executive Functioning Skills](#)

[4 Steps to Managing Your Time Effectively](#)