



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 making good decisions in law school to prepare for your legal career. 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 making good decisions in law school to prepare for your legal career. Welcome, Sadie!

Sadie Jones: Thanks for having me back.

Alison Monahan: Thanks for joining us. First off, let's talk about the single most important thing you can do right in law school to set yourself up for legal career success, which is get solid grades. We're not going to belabor this, but why is this helpful?

Sadie Jones: Ultimately, that is the number one thing that employers are looking at. So, you can have a great resume, a great cover letter, even be at a good school, have a great background. But ultimately, the reality is that grades really do matter. And that's why I always say to my students I don't want them doing career-related activities that they don't have time for, and their grades are going to suffer, because it's all kind of tied up together, and it's not going to help your career if you don't do as well as you can in school. Ultimately, there's no question that's the most important thing that you can show an employer.

Alison Monahan: That is true. And I think this is really critical, particularly in the first semester, in the first year. And this is where sometimes people just don't understand, I think, what they're getting into, how they're going to be tested. So, I think it's really important to get all of that in your head, and also get accommodations early if you need them. Sometimes people don't think they need to do that and they bomb first semester. And the problem is it's just really hard to come back from that. So you really want to try not to end up in that position if at all possible. Get help if you don't think by mid-semester things are going well. And the one thing I would just say on this whole topic is, you've got to force yourself to do the practice, even when it feels uncomfortable. So, we have lots of podcasts on



getting good grades in law school, so we're not going to talk about that on this one. But I did just want to get that out of the way, because I do think that should be people's focus their first semester and first year. Do you agree?

Sadie Jones: I agree. And I do say once the grades are in, if they're not the best, we can work with it and we can spin it the best we can, but we can't change them. They are what they are, and you may be more limited. So, we can't work miracles; your transcript is what it is. And I will say, like you said about the first semester, if it really didn't go well, there is a lot of pressure to improve a lot the second semester, because that's really the way you're going to at least have a better story to tell. So, it does become doubly important second semester, and sort of a reminder that when you're going into 2L recruiting, they only have your 1L grades, because it's the summer after your 1L. So, 1L grades are most of what employers are seeing, whether you're applying as a 1L or a 2L.

Alison Monahan: That's absolutely true. So, not to put too much pressure on you, but your first-year grades do really matter, and just keep that in mind from the start. Alright, well, switching focus a little bit. I think people can go one of two ways on this topic – either they can get really obsessed with finding sort of the absolute perfect job and making all the correct decisions and get really stressed out about it, or they can just do nothing and think it doesn't matter. I think both of those are wrong. But I do want to get your opinion on this idea that I think most of the job-related decisions you're making as a law student are not actually permanent. Do you agree with that?

Sadie Jones: I absolutely agree to that. I think most decisions in life aren't very permanent. There're a few that are permanent, but very few. So I think there's always a way to change your mind and make different decisions down the road. And sometimes, you just make a decision and you go with it. It leads you in a direction and you go with it. So you might get back to where you originally wanted to go, or you might go in a different direction. And I think either of those can work. But I think that putting too much pressure on it, especially as a 1L, is completely counterproductive and not important. And obviously, you want to at least have applied for the best options and put effort into it. So, I think there is a middle ground.

Alison Monahan: For example, people understandably get really obsessed about where they're going to summer, if they're going to be a summer associate, like, "I'm deciding my whole career right now. I have to go back to this place." I didn't go back to any of the places I summered. I made a habit of being a summer associate. I summered three different places, I think, at least. Some of them more than once. Some of them were fine; it just didn't work out for various reasons. In one



case, my 2L summer was a terrible fit. I didn't get a job at any of those places in the end. So, I think keeping in mind this is not a permanent option is really important. And also, if you don't get that exact job that you want your 1L or 2L summer, you actually have a lot of options because you're still in school. What can people do in school to get experience they maybe didn't get the first time they tried?

Sadie Jones:

Well, and I think that's an example of, let's say you got a job that was more litigation-focused and you're actually interested in corporate. It doesn't mean all is lost. You got good legal experience, so that's great. And you learned about something you don't want to do, so that's also helpful. So, I think there are lots of ways to get experience outside of the summer job experience. And it's important to keep your eye on that, because I think if you put too much on the summer job, that you're not looking at the other options of things to do. So there are internships, externships. You can do a clinic. You can take certain classes, talk to certain professors that are in areas that you want to practice in, get involved in organizations. There are so many things you can do if there is an area you want to focus on, and it doesn't necessarily need to be the summer job.

Alison Monahan:

Right. I think clinics are a great opportunity that sometimes people don't think about. And oftentimes, the reason those exist is because they are in an area that's tough to break into. If I think about the clinics that I could have done in law school – things like environmental law, human rights – those aren't things that I can necessarily just get a job doing. But it gave people a great opportunity to get their foot wet and get in the door and see, A) is this something I actually would want to do? Because those are areas that kind of sound sexy, but maybe you don't really want to do them. And then also, if you have that clinic experience, you can say, "Well, I worked on a brief and this is what it was about." That's going to give you a huge leg up if you're applying in these areas that might be more competitive. And the same thing with, most law schools have internships with all kinds of different organizations. You have externships with judges. If you didn't get, say, a summer job with a judge, you can work for them in school. It's depending on where your law school is. But a lot of them, it's not a big deal; it's a very common thing to do. So I think just looking around and seeing what opportunities exist is really, really important.

Sadie Jones:

I also think that all of these things show initiative that not all law students have. So, you can spin it and tell a story that can even kind of talk it up more than what it was and can work on that story later. But I think just doing these activities and different things also just kind of helps your resume, helps you



have more things to talk about, and shows the employer that you sought things out.

Alison Monahan: Right. I think journal notes are another good opportunity. If there's something of interest, a topic that you would like to work in, write about that and become an expert on that. And then that's also a great opportunity to work with a professor in that area of interest, because they can supervise your notes. They're usually pretty flattered to be asked. So, I feel like all these things tie together, but I agree with you. I think people really just have to take that initiative and maybe think a little creatively about what's going to make you look like a good candidate for the job that you think you want.

Sadie Jones: And a lot of times, these specialty areas have a bar association or a certain group that they're in, and they'll have student sections and things like that. Just Google it and look around and see if there's anything in your area or online. I just think it can be really easy to just get so focused on law school. You are still part of the legal profession outside of that. And sometimes there are ways for students to get involved, and I think that always looks really good.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I agree. I think the bar associations or something. I went to the one in New York a couple of times for some events, but I don't think I realized until later all the different options that you have actually to get involved as a law student with your local or even your national bar association. And like you said, they have specialty organizations for different areas. I think this is a really overlooked opportunity for a lot of people.

Sadie Jones: Yeah. I always really encourage this, especially if... I think law school can be really litigation-focused. So, if you are looking for something outside of that, you have to seek it out. And if that's the direction you want to go, that's on you to make sure that you're getting some experience before you hit the job market after school.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Even if you don't do much, just having a few things that you can talk about or you can put on your resume. And also you're probably going to meet people if you're involved in something. It's like a win-win-win here. It's not a huge investment of time probably, you'll meet some people, you'll have something to talk about. It just makes you look like you are taking that initiative and have an idea what you want to do.

Sadie Jones: And we've talked about this before – I am such a big proponent of networking, I really believe in it. And it's hard to do cold calls and emails, but people are



flattered. They want to mentor you. They actually really like it. It will pay off in the end, especially if there's an area you want to get into and you see someone who has the career you're interested in. Reach out, see their career path. I at least think it's worth trying.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. And I think conferences can be a really great opportunity that your school will actually oftentimes pay for you to attend, where they'll have a very low student rate. And that's a couple of days. Usually, they're two or three days, but you can get huge amounts of networking in and meet tons of people. And everybody is there for the same reasons. And again, I don't think that ever occurred to me in law school, but would have been a great thing to do probably.

Sadie Jones: And I think actually people enjoy it.

Alison Monahan: Well, it's kind of easy networking, because everybody's there for the same reason. You don't have to approach somebody to be like, "Oh, I'd really love to talk to you randomly." You're all at the same conference. You can open the conversation with, "Oh, have you gone to any interesting talks recently? How was dinner last night?" It's just very easy.

Sadie Jones: And it's not like on-campus recruiting, where you're there for a job, so I think it's a little less pressure.

Alison Monahan: Totally. Totally. So, I think that's something people ought to really think about as well. And also, I think it can be fun. And if somebody's going to pay for you to go be wined and dined and learn something, why not?

Sadie Jones: I agree.

Alison Monahan: Well, now we've been talking about people who think, "Okay, this is what I want to do. I know I want this type of job. I'm going to target all my networking with that." But I think law school is also a time to be flexible. What do you think about that?

Sadie Jones: Especially because I think that being really rigid in this situation is only going to lead to disappointment and it's going to end up being really counterproductive, because you might overlook things that would be good but don't seem like they're perfect. And so, you don't want to miss out on something because you were really focused on something else that isn't coming. So, I would have an open mind to things as they come along and evaluate how the whole process is



going and what's the point where it doesn't look like you're getting that exact thing. And just remember, that exact thing you thought you wanted might not be the one that leads to the career that would make you happy. So, I think just kind of being open minded and seeing what comes along matters in this situation.

Alison Monahan: I agree. And I think it's important to keep in mind that most people, at a minimum, are probably going to shift jobs several times in their legal career, if not more. Some people shift entire practice areas. You might move to a different city, you might move to a different organization, you might go from a firm to government work. There are all these different options. So you don't need that perfect first job to end up in a place that you like. And I think, honestly, most people who say, "Oh, I got the dream summer associate position" – we all know they're not going to be there in five years, because that's what the statistics tell us – most people leave in less than five years.

Sadie Jones: Even these days, you look at partners that had been somewhere for 20 years, and all of a sudden they're moving around now. They've been at three other firms in the last eight years. So, it's just a different world.

Alison Monahan: That used to not happen. It used to be, you got your job, and then if you stayed in that job, say, eight to 10 years and you were pretty okay at it and everybody kind of liked you – you became a partner, you stayed there until you retired. That doesn't really happen that much anymore.

Sadie Jones: Almost never. And I bet if you ask some of these people who have been practicing, let's say for 15 years, they'll tell you that, so far, they haven't had the exact career they thought they were going to have, but they might have gotten a lot out of it. So, I think it's great to have focus, but being flexible is really key, because there're also just world events and the economy and lots of other things outside of your control that are going to be going on always, and you just don't know how that's going to affect what you want to do.

Alison Monahan: Absolutely. And I think any law job you get can teach you a lot. So, my advice is always just throw yourself into whatever job you get, even if you didn't think it was exactly what you wanted. Because getting that experience is the key thing, not the exact details of, did you get to do this exact thing? Just every opportunity that comes in the job, take advantage of it.

Sadie Jones: But what you just said that's important is that it needs to be a legal job, because I have had this conversation with various people and there might be a point



where things aren't working out. And so, you need to find something that's legal-related, even on the periphery. But it should be as legal-focused as possible, even if it has nothing to do with what you think you want to practice, because you want to be talking about what legal skills you got. It's also just important to know what it means to be a lawyer, because you're not really going to learn that in law school necessarily. So I think that's part of the reason it's important to have these jobs.

Alison Monahan: Another thing in that scenario – someone might even need, say, to consider getting a job to make some money, but then doing, say, pro bono work on the side and focusing on that on their resume, rather than the fact that they were working as a barista or as a wait person. Not that there's anything wrong with that, but you want to focus on the legal work that you were doing, whatever form that ended up taking.

Sadie Jones: I totally agree. And I know that there are people in life situations where they can't have the traditional job. But it is important, like you said, to have something to balance it out, even if it wasn't that much of a time commitment. There's always a way to play it up.

Alison Monahan: Right. And I do think for people who are going to school part time, for example, this can become an issue as they go through school, that you need to be developing more and more legal work experience. And at some point, that may be in conflict with what you're doing on the day-to-day to make money. So, I think that's definitely something to think about from the beginning, and also to be talking with your school and people ahead of you who are in the same program about what they did, because you do need to somehow make that transition.

Sadie Jones: I've had that conversation with a lot of part-time students, and they all come to that point. And a lot of them decide, "Okay, I'm going to give up my other career and focus on this, at least for the last year." Or maybe they say, "I'm going to wing it, and I'm going to try to make this work till the end and hope that I get the legal job after." But usually, you do have to make a decision. Are you committed to this being a lawyer, making a career change? And so, that is something to think about.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. And typically, I've seen people do two to three years of the part-time, and then by the fourth year of the program, they do really need to pull the trigger on it.



Sadie Jones: Absolutely.

Alison Monahan: Alright. Well, you're going to be asked about your experiences later in interviews. So, what if it was that kind of scenario, where it wasn't quite the right fit, maybe it wasn't exactly what you wanted, but you stuck it out, you did the summer? What should you say in an interview?

Sadie Jones: Let's say it wasn't an enjoyable experience, or you did all this work that you're not interested in. Get that out of your system. Talk it out with somebody else, because I have noticed that human nature has a tendency to talk too much about things that bother you or that you want to hide, and then you end up spending the whole time talking about them. So, I think we've talked about this before, whether it's therapy or friend or family – get that out of your system. It wasn't great. What you want to do in the job interview is pull out the good experience you had in terms of legal work or the team. There's always something. There is no summer job where I feel like I couldn't talk to you and come up with some things that went well. Or just that you got experience on, that you wrote, that you participated in, whatever it was. It has to be positive. You have to talk up the best parts of it, the most substantive parts of it, that kind of thing. And really, you should be thinking about that going into the job. So you're thinking about it while you're there: "What am I going to say in an interview?" Because, for example, the 1L job, a lot of the point of the 1L job is to have something to talk about in your 2L job interviews, which sounds strange, but it's true.

Alison Monahan: Right. I think you have to find something nice to say. And you have to be, at minimum, neutral or better on pretty much the whole experience. What did you work on? You need an answer to that question. What did you learn? You need an answer to that question. What did you like about this experience? You need an answer to that question. And I think the trickiest question here, if you really are switching direction, is: Why do you want to do something else now? Because with that, you need, again, an answer that's positive and focuses on your strengths and your interests, not on what you didn't like. So, a good answer is not, "Well, I hated everything about this job." That's not going to make me want to hire you.

Sadie Jones: And I think there's a really nice way to say, "I'm really glad that I got the experience in that area of the law. I realized that I might be better suited for Y." So, there's a nice way to say that. Or, "This seemed like a really great 1L opportunity. I know that long term, I want to go in this other direction." For example, a lot of 1L jobs can be working with a judge. And let's say you don't have any interest in litigation, or you don't want to go court or whatever – you



still would get a lot out of working with a judge. So, it doesn't have to have anything to do with what you want to do long term. That's like a standard 1L job.

Alison Monahan: I think the answer to that one is, "I got to really work on my writing experience. It was really interesting to see behind the scene how the wheels of justice are turning." To be fair, I was a clerk for a judge. I think anybody would have benefited from that mostly, just because we were reading so much legal writing. And then we were working with a judge to hone the arguments and understand the arguments. That's an experience that would be beneficial to anyone. Actually, I was looking on LinkedIn the other day and saw that someone who interned with us is now a politician. And I was like, "Oh, that's so interesting." I'm sure what she was doing with us doesn't really have that much bearing on it, but she could probably still find something nice to say.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely. And I think all of this is true – you really would get good experience out of any of this. I don't think it's really making anything up. It's your perspective.

Alison Monahan: I really think anybody should go work for a judge because it's super interesting behind the curtain. If you've ever watched Law and Order, you're the person in the back of the room. Again, how could anyone not like that job? It would just be mystifying to me. And if somebody came into an interview and said, "Oh, I hated that job", I feel like any lawyer would be like, "Are you crazy? We're not hiring you."

Sadie Jones: I totally agree. But I'm surprised that I think law students sometimes get this idea in their head, like, "Oh, I would only work for a judge if I wanted to have a legal career that was in court." That's just seems so silly to me.

Alison Monahan: No, because ultimately, when I was a litigator, most of what we were working on were contracts gone bad. So, if you're going to be on the contract side of writing the contract on the corporate side, I think it would be really good for you to go to court and see how these things go bad, so that you know how to avoid that.

Sadie Jones: Yeah. I always think it's not good if somebody says, "I have no idea what these other lawyers do." That doesn't seem great, especially if you had the opportunity to find out more.



Alison Monahan: You just never know. When I was working as a summer, they were like, "Oh, do you want to go to a corporate assignment?" I'm like, "Sure, why not?" And the reality is, there are things in my life that have involved contracts and things like that – buying property and all this different stuff that I think it's good to have exposure to those things.

Sadie Jones: I totally agree.

Alison Monahan: Alright. Well, before we wrap up, let's talk a little bit, we were talking earlier about networking, and easy networking. And I think this is another easy networking thing, which is try to build relationships in every job or job-like experience – internship, externship, clinic. And actually keep up with people, because I feel like people don't necessarily do that and I just feel like that is not a great idea.

Sadie Jones: Yeah. And I think this is something, again, that you should think about going into the job, because it can be really easy to get wrapped up in the whole summer and not really think about what you want to get out of it. So, make a plan for how you are going to build these relationships and maybe try to find a mentor. In some jobs, it's very defined and there are easy ways to build relationships, and they have set lunches and activities and stuff like that. And some summer jobs are not like that, and you have to take it on yourself. So I would say, this is something you can go in with a plan and implement it and make sure that you come out with a few people who you can use as references, who can be mentors, and like you said, follow up with them after. Just check in and see how things are going and see if they want to catch up. That is something that is so great to build from, let's say 1L summer, because you're going to have to keep doing this for your entire career over and over again. So, I think it's really important, and a lot of law students kind of miss that.

Alison Monahan: And I think if you are in school, you might be reading cases that might be relevant to them, and you can shoot them a quick email being like, "Oh, I came across this case while I was researching my note, and I thought it might be relevant to that thing you worked on last summer." Or even, "I was reading this article in the newspaper and it made me think of you." That type of thing every now and then, there's really no downside.

Sadie Jones: Exactly. And obviously, not all the time.

Alison Monahan: No, every now and then. Once every couple of months or something is probably sufficient.



- Sadie Jones: Exactly. But I think the best way to do it is find an in and reach out.
- Alison Monahan: Alright. Well, before we wrap up, I just kind of want to recap. I think the key here, if you're in school, is this balance of trying not to be too rigid and thinking there's one perfect job out there for you. But I think that can make you pass up these kind of good enough opportunities and end up without any options at all, which is a disaster scenario, right?
- Sadie Jones: Exactly, and I think you have to look at the big picture. I do talk to people about having their A plan, B plan, C plan, backup plan. So, maybe see how things are going, but there is something to be said for taking, let's say, the first job offer that seems pretty good but not perfect, so that you don't have to continue the process also. And you feel like you can get something out of that summer job, and that might be worth it to you. And maybe there're other people who are like, "No, I want to try it for a little while." But just passing up job after job that isn't perfect is definitely going to lead to disaster.
- Alison Monahan: At this point, you're still learning about the law, you're still learning about yourself, and getting some experience that's basically on point is really the most critical thing. Sometimes I feel like students are disappointed if they feel like they had to take a job that maybe wasn't their dream job. But I honestly just don't really think that's that big of a problem if you take advantage of it and you make the most of it.
- Sadie Jones: Especially, I want to emphasize, as a 1L, it needs to be a 1L job. They're usually in certain buckets, and there are jobs set aside for 1Ls, and so, most of them are going to be pretty good.
- Alison Monahan: Right. You don't know anything at this point. Just take something.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah, exactly.
- Alison Monahan: Alright. Any final thoughts before we wrap up here?
- Sadie Jones: My final thought kind of goes back to the beginning, which is, we gave lots of things you can do, but your grades are the most important. Your grades still have to be the number one, and so, you have to have the summer job, but in terms of these extra activities during the school year, that only works if you can keep up with your schoolwork, your studying, everything like that, because I have seen people make that mistake. They want to get all this experience, but



again, the employers are going to look at your grades, most important. So please, don't take on too much extra stuff, unless you feel like you can balance it.

Alison Monahan: I think that's a good point. Nobody is going to really care if you say, "Well, my second semester 1L grades tanked because I was spending too much time doing pro bono work." Well, that was great that you were doing that, but you tanked your grades. So, sorry, maybe you shouldn't have done that.

Sadie Jones: Exactly. And I even say that about the job application process. Same thing – ultimately, your schoolwork is still going to be the most important. So, I wouldn't want you spending all your time applying to jobs. You need to focus.

Alison Monahan: Definitely. Alright, well, on that, we're out of time. Thank you so much for joining us.

Sadie Jones: Thanks for having me.

Alison Monahan: For more career help and the opportunity to work one-on-one with us, you can check out [CareerDicta.com](https://www.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](https://www.lawschooltoolbox.com/contact-form) at LawSchoolToolBox.com. Thanks for listening, and we'll talk soon!

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