



Lee Burgess: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today, we're talking about how to get the most of your summer job, as part of our "Quick Tips" series. 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.

Lee Burgess: Today we are going to talk about how to get the most out of your summer job. In particular, we are going to cover tips for success in three key aspects of your summer work experience: [professionalism](#), substantive work, and [networking](#). We will also talk about goals you can set for yourself in each aspect. And we will hopefully dispel any misperceptions you have about the final aspect – networking, which does not have to be a cringeworthy experience! But before we jump to aspect three, let's start with the basics and our first aspect – professionalism.

Lee Burgess: By "professionalism" we mean having someone that a perspective client would trust with an important legal matter. And our tips for success in this aspect really are basic: be on time, dress for success, and be the co-worker you would want on your team.

Lee Burgess: Regarding tip number one, punctuality is something that comes very naturally to some and is seemingly impossible for others. Wherever you fall on this spectrum, you must – I repeat, MUST – train yourself to be on time in your legal career. Courts are often unforgiving when attorneys show up late. Busy corporate clients are as well. So, it is important to show any prospective legal employer that punctuality will never be an issue for you starting on day one. Really, starting with your interview, but if you have your summer job, you likely successfully made it through that step.

Lee Burgess: If you are not a morning person or otherwise have trouble getting places on time, it is time to reframe the importance of punctuality in your mind. Every morning when you hear your alarm clock, think of this as an opportunity to show a prospective legal employer that you will be on time for the most important court proceeding and client meetings of your career. To ensure that punctuality is never a problem, we recommend building cushion time into your morning plan. For example, if you anticipate that it will take you about 30 minutes to drive to work, park, and get into your office, give



yourself an hour to get there on the first day. That way, you have plenty of “cushion” if anything unexpected occurs. If possible, it is also helpful to do a “test drive” to work on a weekday morning before you actually start working. A weekday “test drive” will help you estimate your commute time more accurately, considering traffic and any other factors. It will also ensure that you know how to get to the office and know where to park.

Lee Burgess: Once you have a plan for making sure that you are on time your first day – and every day after that – it is time to think about what you are going to wear. This is professionalism tip number two – dress for success. Summer associates at BigLaw firms often dress in suits on their first day, even if all of the other attorneys are in normal business casual clothing. Try to find out what is typical for your employer. Reach out to former summer associates from your law school or talk to your career services department about what particular employers expect. When in doubt, always err on the side of being slightly overdressed. After all, you can always take off a suit jacket or tie, but it is hard to put one on if you do not have it with you!

Lee Burgess: That brings us to our last professionalism tip – be the co-worker you want on your team. It’s no secret that, in many cases, your law school summer job is really a 6 to 8-week job interview. And all of our tips for success will help ensure that you receive an offer at the end of the experience. But if you only want to remember one tip, let it be this one: Employers do care about your work product; however, they often care even more about what it’s like working with you as a person. Additionally, if you received the summer job, you are likely capable of intellectually doing the substantive work. And when summer associates do not receive an offer at the end of the summer, it is more often based on a personal issue than their substantive work. For example, you may hear horror stories about a previous summer associate who made an offensive comment to a co-worker or yelled at a legal assistant. Basically, don’t be that person. Instead, think about the kind of co-worker you would enjoy seeing in the office every day, and emulate that during your summer job experience.

Lee Burgess: With that, we have finished our professionalism tips. We will move forward into our next category – tips for getting the most out of the substantive work you do at your summer job: try new things, take advantage of practical experiences, and think about a [writing sample](#).

Lee Burgess: Our first tip on the topic of substantive work focuses on being open-minded. Some of you may go into your summer job positive that you know the exact practice area that is the best fit for you. Conversely, you may have no idea which practice areas you may prefer over others. Regardless, you will likely



get more out of your experience if you explore among practice groups or at least work with a variety of partners and associates during your summer job. Indeed, you may find out one week into the summer that appellate litigation is not for you because you love the idea of doing an oral argument; you do not like the idea of spending most of your working hours drafting appellate briefs. If you are someone who prefers factual investigation over making complicated legal arguments, maybe you would enjoy a factually complex area of law, such as products liability or construction litigation, in which you would be working on the pre-trial side of litigation, or even before litigation is commenced. Alternatively, you may find that you do not like litigation – which involves a lot of arguing – at all. If you enjoy the idea of working cooperatively towards a common goal, maybe corporate law or real estate will offer more opportunities to work with people to reach a deal on which everyone agrees. Remember, law school tends to be very litigation-focused, particularly your first year. But there are a lot of ways to practice law that do not involve litigating the issues discussed in your major doctrinal classes as a 1L. Use the summer to explore these areas if you have the chance.

Lee Burgess: Alternatively, if you work for a single employer like a judge or solo practitioner, explore as much as you can. For example, even though clerking for a judge will expose you mostly to litigation, you will likely be able to see a wide variety of cases in every practice area, from business litigation to criminal law. So, whatever the opportunities are to explore during your summer job, take full advantage. Think of this as a gathering information process that may meaningfully inform the course of your legal career.

Lee Burgess: That brings us to our second substantive job tip – take advantage of practical experiences. Most legal employers try to give their summer associates at least some opportunities to see the law “in practice”, whether this means attending a hearing with a partner or sitting in on a witness deposition. These opportunities may require you to take on additional responsibility or work on a project that is unfamiliar.

Lee Burgess: For example, if you are asked to sit in on a deposition or witness interview, you may be asked to review a case and draft a preliminary list of questions that you recommend including in the deposition or interview script. This likely involves quickly digesting the facts of the case and taking into consideration litigation strategy points that you may not have been required to consider during law school, such as whether this is a cooperative witness. You may also be asked to consider the story that the attorney wants to build for the client in the case and think of what facts you need from this witness to help tell that story. Law school clinics offer some opportunities for these practical experiences. However, most doctrinal law school classes focus



primarily on learning substantive law with the goal of doing well on a final exam. Having limited practical experience may make it intimidating to jump on practical law opportunities during your summer job. After all, if you've never done anything like this before, how will you know what to do or if what you are doing is right? Do not let self-doubt deter you from jumping on practical experiences! They can be some of the most fun and rewarding summer job experiences you have during law school.

Lee Burgess: Additionally, remember that most of the summer associates are just as inexperienced in drafting deposition scripts as you. Moreover, the attorneys for whom you are working likely know this. So, if you are unsure how to start a project but still really want to take it on, check with the assigning attorney or a project manager regarding getting guidance from a junior associate at the firm. Of course, feel free to reach out to other associates with whom you have a connection, such as alumni from your law school, to ask for help as well. Legal employers generally want their summer associates to succeed and are likely to point you towards the guidance you need if you take the initiative to ask.

Lee Burgess: Now that we have covered exploring different areas of the law and taking advantage of practical experiences, let's move on to our final substantive work tip – think about a writing sample. You will likely be asked to draft several different kinds of legal documents during your summer job, especially working in litigation. These may include letters to opposing counsel, memos to a partner or client, or sections of a brief. As you work on these projects, remember that future job postings are likely to ask you to submit at least one writing sample. And something that you write over your summer associateship may be a great place to start. To be clear, you may need to amend and redact anything you take from your summer job before you can use it for future job applications. So always check your employer's policy on this and ensure that you are not violating any ethical rules. But if you are able to rework one of your summer assignments into a great writing sample, you will walk into any future job search one step ahead.

Lee Burgess: That brings us to our final topic – our tips for networking during your summer job. You may think of networking as fancy lunches and cocktail parties with partners at the firm, and love the idea. Or the very word may make you cringe. Regardless of your preconceived notion of the topic, we are confident that everyone can learn to be a successful “networker” using their personal strengths. That brings us to our networking tips, which we will address together: use your strengths, keep it honest, and focus on building genuine connections.



Lee Burgess: If the idea of schmoozing partners in a swanky lounge does not appeal to you, you are likely not the only one who feels that way. Robust summer associate programs usually account for this. For example, if you work at a large law firm, you will probably have a packed schedule of post-work social events throughout the summer. And these social events will likely include a wide variety of gatherings – from bike tours of the city, to themed parties, to trivia nights. It is a good idea to attend as many as possible, but it is okay if every gathering is not exactly your favorite way to meet new people. Focus on your strengths and opportunities to build genuine connections with others at the law firm. Maybe a themed party with a chance to talk to 20 partners is your idea of a fun night. On the other hand, if you are more of an introvert, you may shine more during trivia night or a more low-key event. Remember, the partners and associates at a large law firm are all unique people as well. So find people with whom you genuinely connect and start building your network from there. Connecting with others who share a common demeanor or interest may even lead you to your area of practice long-term.

Lee Burgess: If you are working for a single employer or smaller firm, your summer social calendar may be a little less hectic. However, this does not mean that you have no opportunity to network. In these smaller settings, the same tip applies – use your strengths, keep it honest, and focus on building genuine connections. Additionally, look for potential connections outside of your specific employer. For example, if you are clerking for a specific judge, try to organize a law clerk outing for all of the summer and term clerks in the courthouse. Or if you are working for a solo practitioner, ask your employer to introduce you to other attorneys whom he or she regularly works in their area of practice. Seeking out opportunities to meet new people and find out more about what they do is all part of the summer job experience investigation process.

Lee Burgess: With that, we have finished our list of tips for making the most out of your summer job experience. We hope that this list gives you some things to focus on and get excited about as you prepare for your summer jobs! If you have questions about any of the tips we discussed today, please reach out to us via the [contact form](#) on LawSchoolToolbox.com. We would love to help you find additional resources or put you in touch with a legal career advisor on our team. And check out LawSchoolToolbox.com/CareerDicta for more information on best practices around your job search and legal career.

RESOURCES:



[CareerDicta](#)

[Law School Toolbox Podcast: Careers](#)

[Podcast Episode 255: The Dos and Don'ts of Writing Samples \(w/Sadie Jones\)](#)

[Podcast Episode 287: Learning From a Non-Ideal Summer Job Experience \(w/Sadie Jones\)](#)

[Podcast Episode 291: People You Should Get to Know at Any Legal Job \(w/Sadie Jones\)](#)

[Podcast Episode 320: Goals for Your 1L Summer Job \(w/Sadie Jones\)](#)

[Podcast Episode 342: Real World Summer Job Situations \(w/Sadie Jones\)](#)

[5 Things You Should Do Throughout Your Summer Job or Internship](#)

[Professionalism in the Legal Workplace](#)