



Lee Burgess: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today we are excited to have Steve Schwartz from [LSAT Unplugged](#) joining us again on the podcast. 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 to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today we are excited to have Steve Schwartz from LSAT Unplugged joining us again on the podcast. It's been a bit since we've had a chat, and today we're going to be talking about 10 things to think about when you are applying to law school. So Steve, thanks so much for sharing your time today and coming back to the podcast.

Steve Schwartz: Of course, Lee. Thanks so much for having me back. Always a pleasure.

Lee Burgess: So, for folks who have not heard our previous episodes, could you take a few minutes and just share a little bit about yourself and what you do?

Steve Schwartz: Of course, sure. So I've been teaching the LSAT for a very long time now. I started teaching the LSAT back in 2005. It's been a very long journey. I love to share as much as I can out there for free via my own YouTube channel – LSAT Unplugged, as well as my podcast of the same name. I also have live online classes via Zoom, small group coaching, one-on-one coaching, on-demand video courses. So I'm looking to really just support students however I can through what can be a difficult process, but I aim to just ease the way as much as possible.

Lee Burgess: Excellent. It's scary how those years that you do something start to add up. I know I'm getting a little freaked by that. I've noticed on my phone, my Google Photos now sends me like, "12 years ago today", and that's not making me feel better about my age or where I am in life.

Steve Schwartz: No, no, technology is not always helpful in that way.

Lee Burgess: No, I'm like, "Please, I don't really want to see what I was doing 12 years ago, before I had kids and all of that stuff." I really don't. Okay, so, focusing on future



law students who are starting this journey, it starts with the LSAT, right? That's a big piece of what they need to take on first. And so, our top thing, our number one thing to think about is probably starting your LSAT preparation early. But how early is early? What does that really mean for students?

Steve Schwartz: Of course. So, occasionally I'll hear from a student who's a freshman in college, very rarely someone in high school – and they're like, "I want to go to law school. I know this is for me. What should I do?" And I say, "Enjoy life. Enjoy being young. You're only young once. Enjoy college. And also, from a practical perspective as well, just keep your GPA up." Law school admissions is primarily LSAT and GPA, but if you're on the younger side – freshman, sophomore – focus on your GPA exclusively. You don't need to even think about studying for the LSAT yet. Keep a high GPA, enjoy college, enjoy socializing. And then, junior, senior year – that's when you could start thinking about the LSAT. And you don't even have to think about it then. You could take a couple of years in between college and law school, and that's fine too.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I know. I took, I think it was four years, or five years. No, I think it was four. I see the year starts to run together at a certain point. And I really thought that that was a benefit actually, to take a bit of time. I had a professional life and I had some fun, which is also part of life, is making sure that you get to have some fun. It doesn't all have to be practical all of the time.

Steve Schwartz: Exactly, I couldn't agree more. For students who really want to know, "When can I finally start studying?", if they're really eager to get into this, I would say max one year is probably enough. Six months is sufficient for a lot of folks, but there are some gunners who are fully dedicated to getting the highest score possible – they want the 175, they want the 180. In those cases, I'd say if you want to give yourself a year at a relatively relaxed pace, that's fine, but you definitely do not need more than that. And again, especially for those in their early 20s, these are going to be some of the best years of your life, I hope, before you're doing a BigLaw job maybe, or before you have obligations where you take on more responsibilities. So, if you want to take some time to have fun, that's okay too.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think back to my own experience – I was working full-time when I started studying for the LSAT, and it's hard. If you're in school, it's hard because you are balancing school. And if you have a job that has a lot of responsibility or you travel for work, that's also very hard. So, thinking about things in these longer timeframes, I think at that point in your educational career, often we don't think about things a year out, we don't think about things six months out. But you do want to think about how many hours you may want to study for this and how



you're going to put those deposits in the bank while you are doing whatever else you're doing, because you want to live life and you don't want your job to suffer because you're studying for the LSAT. You don't want your undergrad grades to suffer because you're studying for the LSAT. So you do have to kind of find that balance. It's tricky, but it might take a little experimentation, I would think, to see what you can actually pull off.

Steve Schwartz: Yeah, I would agree with that. And I think this is not something you want to cram for. You don't want to be studying for the LSAT seven, eight, nine hours a day. That will just lead to burnout. But if you do have other obligations, if you're working, if you're in school, even just an hour or two a day is plenty to keep that forward momentum going. And so if you want to take a longer timeline at a more relaxed pace, I find that's typically preferable for a lot of students, because they can treat it like their Saturday morning thing; or they can do it just maybe for 30 minutes, 60 minutes in the evening, do a couple of LSAT questions and that might be enough. Scaled over time, that can be even better than cramming in a concentrated period, because you give yourself time to let the lessons sink in.

Lee Burgess: I think a lot of people are talking about this around [spaced repetition](#), which is something we've been talking about on our podcast a lot. This is what apps like Duolingo focus on. There's a lot of science right now being talked about of how these I call them almost "studying snacks", but these little bites of time with a lot of consistency can affect real change. And I think they don't feel so good in the moment because you're like, "Well, whatever, it's just an hour", or it's just 30 minutes, or if it's my Duolingo, sometimes it's five minutes. But they give me positive reinforcement for my five minutes, so I feel better about that. But you do still realize in those 30 minutes to an hour, you can still make progress. If you do it consistently over time, those hours add up. An hour a day for 40 days is 40 hours – that's significant studying time.

Steve Schwartz: Exactly, I couldn't agree more. And 30 to 60 minutes – that is plenty, if you consider a single LSAT section is 35 minutes. So, you could do a single section in 35 minutes and be done for the day, and then review it the following day. Or you could even do a single logic game or a single reading passage for maybe 10-15 minutes max, and that would also be enough to make a significant impact. Or smaller, just a single logical reasoning question.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. So, this leads great into our second tip, which is you need to really understand the test that you're sitting for. And I think that some folks who may be asking people who went to law school a while ago may be getting advice about a test that was different than the test that they're



sitting for now. So, understanding the test and the project ahead of you is so important. Can you share a little bit more with our listeners about what does the LSAT look like right now and what has changed recently, so they make sure they're not getting old school advice for something that doesn't exist anymore?

Steve Schwartz: Of course, sure. So 2024 is actually a big transitional year for the LSAT, the biggest change to the LSAT since the current format began over 30 years ago in 1991. For those who aren't aware, they are removing the logic games section after the June LSAT and replacing it with a second scored logical reasoning section. So, if you're, say, a paralegal or you know any lawyers out there in your life who took the LSAT with logic games, you're not going to be taking them if you're taking the LSAT after June. So make sure that your resources are focused on logical reasoning and reading comprehension – those are going to be the only two types of sections on the LSAT. And to just get more specific about the change, they are removing logic games and replacing that section with a second scored logical reasoning section. So, logic games materials are going to be worthless and you're going to want to devote more time to logical reasoning.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Ooh, I like the point of making sure that your materials are correct, because so often LSAT type materials get passed down from friend to friend or through family, and you do need to be really aware that you're studying off of materials that are going to prep you for the test that you need to take.

Steve Schwartz: Exactly. You don't want to waste your time studying something that's not even going to be on your test.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, absolutely. So now we know what the test is, which takes us to tip number three. The third thing to consider is, what are the pros and cons of different prep options? Something that, of course, my team always loves to talk about, especially in relationship to the bar exam. What's out there? I know you do this work. What are the different types of options? And considering whether you're someone who's thinking of that "slow and steady wins the race" type prep or that more intensive, "I just have this period of time to study", how does that influence what's likely to be the best prep option for you?

Steve Schwartz: Of course. So there are a lot of different options, more than ever before now, with online resources as well. It used to be either you were reading books or you were taking an in-person prep class. Of course, since 2005, my career in this LSAT world, a lot has changed. Now you have live online classes and you also have on-demand video courses as well, so you get a bit more flexibility. I find that the textbooks aren't always the most engaging. There're a lot of LSAT books



that are literally 500 pages or more, which is a lot to get through. That's going to have you thinking that you're going to need that entire year to study for the LSAT, when you may not need that long, of course. And of course, the books will likely be outdated, if you're getting them passed down especially. So, I would focus more on the online resources or getting some one-on-one support that could be more personalized and tailored to your specific situation. But just to group those other options, we have the on-demand video courses, we have live online classes via platforms like Zoom, and then we have private one-on-one support, which could be in-person, but nowadays is more likely via Zoom as well.

Lee Burgess:

Yeah. And it's also really important, I would think, to consider your own strengths and weaknesses while picking your prep. So, I was just doing an interesting podcast yesterday with students who are the co-presidents of the National Disabled Law Students Association. And we were talking a lot about accommodations in law school and the challenges for getting the accommodations you need. And then also the awareness about your own individual challenges when it comes to exams, be it in law school exams or something like the bar exam. And I think if you are someone who comes to a test like the LSAT with unique needs or unique challenges, I would think that's when you want to be very thoughtful about your prep options. If you get time and a half, are you going to prep with an option that's going to recognize that and help you make sure that you maximize that time and a half? Or if you have a learning difference, is your prep option going to match your learning difference? I would have to think a lot of students need to think about this, to set up a prep solution that's going to work for them.

Steve Schwartz:

Exactly. And that's where that personalization comes in, right? So if you were taking the LSAT 20 years ago, you were probably going to be either studying out of books or going to an in-person prep class that might have anywhere from 30 to actually up to 70 students with some companies in a single room. So, of course, you're not guaranteed to get your questions answered there. If you're taking a proctored exam, like a simulated diagnostic, it's going to be with a standard timing. But now more and more students are getting the accommodations for extra time or extra breaks. And so, something more personalized and tailor-made can often be a better fit to make sure that it's replicating your learning style, and also the exact mechanism through which you're going to take the LSAT, whether it's on paper or in-person on a computer or anything in between.

Lee Burgess:

Yeah. And just a plug – if you think you are going to request accommodations, that's probably also something not to wait to the last minute to do, because I



can only imagine that [LSAC](#) is not the speediest when it comes to evaluating all of those things.

Steve Schwartz: That is true, and their deadlines are also strict. They do not make exceptions for those deadlines.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. So, find out those deadlines and get that process done early, because it is really critical and it also lays the foundation for future accommodations in law school and on the bar exam. So, I think you don't want to think, "Oh, I don't need it for the LSAT." If you need it to level the playing field, check those boxes because what you're also doing is laying the foundation for future accommodations, especially that may be more important. Okay, so we've talked about our different prep options, let's talk a little bit more about practicing. Our fifth tip is really to focus on LSAT prep tests that are released by LSAC. Now, how is this working with the new test, with new things? Is LSAC providing practice that is from them, or do you really have to use providers who've made up their own questions?

Steve Schwartz: Well, so they are providing their own practice tests, which is great because you never want to use the simulated fake questions. They're just not realistic and a lot of them actually contain mistakes. If you get like *LSAT for Dummies* or something like that, it's laughable just how many errors there are in their questions. So, give that book to your worst enemy. Don't use it. Luckily, LSAC has actually provided materials in a new format. I would have thought it would be simplest if they had just removed the logic games section from all of the numbered practice tests – there are currently 94 that are numbered. But they did not do that. Instead, they reorganized everything, they reconfigured all the old exams. Not only did they remove logic games, but then they reduced the number of available tests by splicing up some old exams and mixing them into others as simulating the extra unscored experimental section. So, there used to be 94 numbered exams. Now going forward, they're going to be currently 58 numbered exams, numbered from 101 to 158. So, 96 to 100 don't exist. If you see any practice tests that are numbered 1 to 94, that's the old format. And if you see any that have three digits – 101 to 158, that's going to be the new format. But you can get all of those in [LawHub](#). And if you're looking at old materials, you'll just need to translate from the old to the new, in terms of where it's going to appear. So, needlessly confusing. It's a transitional year. Hopefully anyone listening to this in 2025 or beyond is going to have a simpler experience.



- Lee Burgess: Yeah, but it is good to make sure you advocate for yourself and ask those questions, especially if you're getting handed other materials that you're studying off the right stuff. I mean, it is challenging to know.
- Steve Schwartz: Yes, it is. It is. So yeah, do your due diligence, check into things. There are plenty of converters out there. LSAC has their own official converter to help you navigate the renumbering.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. Okay, that's fascinating. I hadn't heard about that little tweak, but we're going through some big bar exam changes coming up. I'm sure that it's also going to be equally chaotic. Alright, so you take the LSAT, you get the score, now you have to think about starting to research law schools. So, do you think that folks should be researching law schools before they take the LSAT? Do you think that they should wait until they're done and get these scores? Do they do it in parallel? Is it a distractor? What do you think is a best practice for students managing this moment in time?
- Steve Schwartz: That's an excellent question. Yeah, I actually don't get that one too much, but it's good to think about. I think that there are pros and cons and it's more of a personal decision, but I could imagine some benefits would be, it keeps you motivated to know, "This is what I'm doing this for. This is why I'm studying for the LSAT. I want to go to this law school." Maybe it's a prestigious school, maybe it's a school that's in your area. But yeah, I think it could be helpful. But I wouldn't spend too much time on it, because of course the LSAT score itself is going to be what determines to a large extent where you end up being a competitive candidate.
- Lee Burgess: I'm also thinking about things like scholarships. If you're looking for personal motivation, there's where you want to go to school, but if you do really well on the LSAT and you have great academics, especially from your undergrad, your likelihood of getting an academic scholarship goes up too. And given how expensive this whole situation is... I just paid off my last law school debt bill. I did a little dance.
- Steve Schwartz: Congratulations!
- Lee Burgess: Thank you. Yeah, it was quite nice to just get that, "Your balance is zero." I was like, "What?" But this is quite an undertaking. And that LSAT score, if you need motivation, also is going to influence whether or not you can get some financial relief in this situation too.



Steve Schwartz: For sure. I mean, it's not just about getting in; it's also about getting scholarships. You might want to choose a less prestigious school where you could get a full ride, and the LSAT's going to make that difference. So, of course, you could start making contact with the school early, tour the school or set up a Zoom informational interview, just to put a face to the name, and that can help if you establish that you're interested early. But then take a break from the school research, get the LSAT score, then you work on your applications and come back to them with a compelling mix of numbers and essays and all that.

Lee Burgess: I'm now thinking about money, and I do think that that's something that folks should spend a little time researching in this "understanding the law school experience" phase, right? You're researching schools. So often we don't talk about what those schools cost. The schools are a little cagey sometimes about what they cost as well, right? But I think that understanding not only where you want to go to school, but how much it's going to cost and what debt means... We were talking about having a lot of fun in the phase of your life between college and maybe graduate school, but it's also a time to start to realize that once you make these decisions about debt, and sometimes we're talking about six figures of debt, not a little debt. We're talking about large debt. That six figures of debt doesn't sound that intimidating until you think about how long and how much money you're going to pay over time including interest, because banks don't give loans because it's good for people. They give loans because it's good for them, so they're going to take their bite of the apple. I think that if you are not someone who has ever budgeted for yourself, if you're not anyone who's ever taken on debt, especially if you don't have debt from undergrad, so you haven't gone through the financial aid process – I think it's time to really sit with that and inform your choices that way. I think it's a good motivator to do well on the LSAT, but you just really need to understand what you're taking on. And you can use a tool that we've talked about on our podcast before, called [You Need A Budget](#), to lay out for yourself what does law school life cost, and then what does post-law school life cost, and what does law school life cost with \$100,000 of debt, and what does post-law school life cost without \$100,000 of debt? And that might inform some of the decisions that you make. But that's not the fun stuff to talk about, it doesn't come in a fun mailer. Do they still send you mail from law schools when you take the LSAT, or does it now come all electronically where you used to get the invitations?

Steve Schwartz: I think now they send you a little bit of mail, but they more often barrage you with emails that it's difficult to unsubscribe from. But they are definitely marketing hard.



Lee Burgess: If they're marketing hard, then it's your job to become a smart consumer. And I think we often don't think about school as something to be a consumer about, because it just feels like a privilege to be there. And it is. But you are really making choices, possibly when you're very young. Some people are making these choices at, what, 22 – to start law school – that are going to hang around with you for a long time. I am no longer 22, and I just paid off my last law school debt.

Steve Schwartz: It's funny, they technically might be non-profits, but they certainly operate like businesses, and have the overhead and the administrative salaries that are more associated with a business. But yes, you're absolutely right that even just doing a little bit of research now could pay off huge down the line, just as a small difference in an interest rate can make a very big difference over time. So part of school research is not just what's the most impressive sounding name, but what are the employment outcomes, what are the bar passage rates, what are the debt-to-income ratios. I think luckily there's been a lot more awareness about this over the course of my career than when I started – after the financial crisis, when people went to law school, then things changed in terms of employment outcomes. Things have gotten a bit better, but there's a lot more transparency in terms of students looking up ABA 509 reports to get some of this data. The [Law School Transparency website](#) organizes a lot of it really nicely to let you easily see school statistics in terms of these sorts of outcomes, and it's worth taking the time to research those.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, and what sort of salaries lawyers make, based on the type of work you want to do. This isn't the fun, exciting part of picking this next part of your career, but I think before you're super busy in law school, it is great to do these informational interviews. You mentioned informational interviews at the law school – you can do that with DAs if you think you want to be in public interest. I'm from a family of public servants – there are real benefits and real challenges to choosing that path, and that \$100,000 of debt is going to inform some of those choices. There could be public interest scholarships, there can be debt forgiveness, but you need to understand all this so you can make really thoughtful choices of how to go forward. If you can come to it with an open heart and some curiosity – and maybe not stress but more curiosity of learning – all of this information, no matter what path you choose, will be helpful. More people should understand what debt actually means. So, if you just go learn about that, that is good for your life, because life comes with debt most of the time, right? And so, you just need to understand what that means if you don't understand it, or if you have debt and you don't understand what that means. That's important, so it might be a good time to do that. I know we got a little



off-track, but it's a practical life thing. It's important to think about before you make long-term decisions. Some of these decisions are really long-term.

Steve Schwartz: Yes, they are. And I think this is important. I think it's not talked about enough, so I'm glad that we are covering it. It might be helpful for students to think about reframing this whole journey as if they're buying an asset – the asset is a JD. And yes, you have to apply to get that asset, but you're applying for the privilege of spending six figures, potentially, on getting an asset that could pay off big. But it's an investment, and you have to look at where can you get the best value for your money. Just as if you were buying a car or buying a house, you would do your research. Law school JD is a similar price point, and so it's worth spending some time researching that as well.

Lee Burgess: That's true. I have probably talked to bankers about mortgages more than I ever talked with my school about my law school debt. I think that that's kind of interesting. Maybe that's changed, but I do think that it is an asset. You are investing a huge amount of money and the opportunity cost of not working and going to school. So, if you really pull all that stuff together, it's a big financial decision. And it kind of starts with how much money can you invest in prepping for the LSAT? It starts with that, right? It starts with, this is an investment of time and energy and money. And then the next thing is the time and energy and money of applying to school and then picking that. So it is, unfortunately, something you have to do with a lot of adulting, because these are adult choices. And it doesn't matter how old you are, there are some times you just have to do adulting, and this I think, is an adult-type decision, even though it's about school. And I think that's something you have to consider.

Steve Schwartz: Yeah, and the nice thing is that if you're still in the academic world, if you're in college or a young professional – not everyone is, but if you are, and if you have that study habit ingrained still, then you can use the skills you've been building over the course of your K to 12 and over the course of undergrad and maybe beyond. You can use those skills for the adulting, to get you the LSAT score that will then get you the scholarship money that will help you reduce the debt that you're taking on. So luckily, it actually all ties together, and the skills that you've built can help you here as well.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Another thing about doing all this extra work is, although it might seem a bit overwhelming, law school and a legal profession requires a lot of work, and the executive functioning skills that you're going to work on to make these choices and make thoughtful choices, and to study maybe while working full-time or being in school full-time. This is the stuff you're going to have to do when you're in law school and as a practicing attorney. We work a lot. It's good



to work on those skills too, and make sure that you really want to do this, because this isn't for most people, like a 9:00 to 5:00 experience. Even in a public interest job, most attorneys don't have 9:00 to 5:00 jobs; that's just not how it works. And so, if you put in this extra time, do this research, study for the LSAT, and you're having trouble finding the motivation, if you're having trouble getting the work done, if you're struggling with balance, I think that's something to really listen to and ask yourself if this is the right path for you. That's not a judgment; it's just a worthwhile question.

Steve Schwartz: Yeah. You have to make the decisions here and do the research here that is going to dictate the rest of your career.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, yeah. Alright, so moving on to tip number seven, also in the "applying to law school" realm – another point that I think you can use to see if you are really ready to do this is to craft a personal statement, because you have to write something to talk about why you want to be there, what are your experiences, why are you going to be a good fit. You've got to kind of pitch yourself. It's a lengthy elevator pitch, I guess, is really what it is. But that's another great thing to kind of force yourself to work on, to see if this is the next thing that you want to do.

Steve Schwartz: Yeah, it can be incredibly clarifying. For me, my personal statement draft ended up being all about why I didn't want to practice a certain kind of law. I sent it to my brother and he was like, "Sounds like you don't want to go to law school", because like 90% of it was why I didn't want to do international law, and then 10% was why I wanted to maybe do something else. And he's like, "You don't want to go to law school, do you?" I'm like, "I guess not. The LSAT teaching is going well, maybe I'll just keep doing that." And that's what I ended up doing. So it ended up being really beneficial to do that soul searching and exploration. It had a negative tone in my case, but for others, it could help them figure out what kind of law you want to practice. Or if you're writing a "Why do I want to go to this school in particular" essay – the "Why X" – that can help you figure out, do you want to go to that school or not?

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And you can use these exercises to be very clarifying. If you're struggling to answer the question of why you want to be a lawyer, then you probably should sit with that for a little bit, because it's a big undertaking. You don't have to know exactly who you want to be or exactly where you're going to land or have your whole life planned out – I don't think that that's important. But you do need to have some intrinsic motivation about what you can contribute to the profession and why you want to be there. You can figure out what you want to do as your job later. I also think that those personal statements and the things



that come into those personal statements are what you cling to in the hard moments of law school. You need to go back to that idea of why are you there? I've had students go back and re-read their personal statements if they feel lost, if they feel like they're wondering why they're there. You can go back and say, "What was myself thinking about when I picked this path?" It can either show you that you're on the right path and remind you why you're there. Or you can say, "No, my desires and my goals for myself have changed", but that's important information to know too. It is an important exercise, and not just for admission. Although you need it for admission too, so you have to do it.

Steve Schwartz: No, of course. I mean, it's good to tell admission officers and good to know for yourself as well, like, "Why am I going on this path? Why am I going to law school? Why is this the next natural step in my journey?" And as you said, yes, you don't have to know exactly which kind of law you want to do, but does law school make sense for you at this point in time? Know that for yourself when you're studying for the LSAT, when you're applying, when you're in law school itself. And you also want to communicate that to the admission officers as well, so they know that you're not just going through life on autopilot.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Alright, our next tip is about recommendation letters. I think this is another one of those things can be hard for folks to do, to ask for this. But you want to identify professors, supervisors, people in your world who can give you thoughtful letters of recommendation. Asking isn't always easy, but I think most people say "Yes" when you ask them. I write letters of recommendation for folks and I always say "Yes", unless it's like you need it tomorrow, and then I might say "No." But I always say "Yes." But I have been surprised at folks, sometimes outside of the legal profession, who forget that employers and supervisors can be really powerful, especially if you have been out of school for a bit, because they're the folks who know who you are as a professional, which this is a professional vocational school. That's going to have a lot of meaning, right? How you take feedback, are you reliable, do you know how to work with others, are you a team player? All of that is really important. And so often I think people think they can only pull from professors, and I think that's a mistake.

Steve Schwartz: Yeah, I agree. Even if you're still in college, if you're still an undergrad, if you've had a summer job or an internship, that can add an additional angle to your application that you're not going to get solely from professors. They can speak to you in an academic context, of course, but the employers, the supervisors, the coordinators of internships and such, they can speak to what it's like to work with you, and that is a different perspective that I think can be really valuable. And it's fun to write letters for folks. I write letters for a lot of folks too, and it's really nice to be able to share how someone has grown or how they've changed,



or celebrate their crowning achievement in their work with me. That's fun to do. And yes, you do have to ask early, but it can be exciting to ask if you think about it as like, "I'm telling this person that I'm going on this next stage of my academic career, my employment career, my journey of the legal profession. And I want this person to be in my corner supporting me." That's kind of like a compliment in a way.

Lee Burgess:

It is. The other thing is, if you want them to highlight very specific things, you can share that with them. So, let's say that I've had someone working for me and they really know that what they want to highlight is that they have resilience. Maybe that is part of their narrative – that they have overcome something challenging. I think it's okay to say, "Would you mind drafting a letter of recommendation for me? And do you mind highlighting these qualities?" or, "Do you mind highlighting that I was able to take difficult feedback and do something challenging?", whatever it might be. You can create a dialogue with the reviewer, especially if you're going to someone outside of a professor and saying, "I'm trying to tell my story and I think you have part of my story." I'm like, "Great, let me write whatever is going to be the most helpful." I'm not going to necessarily run it by you and let you edit it, but I'm going to say, "Yeah, I can absolutely highlight that for you", because sometimes what I think is important to go in a letter – although I do think I write quite a good letter of recommendation – may not be what you really wanted me to share. I like to highlight things about how you take feedback and how you're curious, or how you overcome mistakes, or how you are a team player. That's some of the important stuff that I like to highlight, but maybe that's not what you think is most important. So, you can make a dialogue with it. I think they're fun to write, it feels good to be able to help people who you've invested in, but you shouldn't feel weird about giving some feedback about what you're hoping that they will include.

Steve Schwartz:

Not at all, and it's going to make it easier for them too, especially if it's been a while since you worked with the person. They have to search the memories and search their email chains or whatever to find all those details. And if you're just giving it to them, you're going to get a better letter, and it's also going to get done faster.

Lee Burgess:

Yeah, yeah, make it easy. It's always good when it's easy.

Steve Schwartz:

Just a handful of bullet points could be really helpful.



- Lee Burgess: Yeah, it's so true. Okay, moving on to our number nine tip is to consider applying early decision and priority, because some schools are going to offer better admission odds for binding early applications. How does this play into when you take the LSAT, or your overall calendar for applying to law school?
- Steve Schwartz: Of course. So, all else being equal, applying earlier is better. Applications open typically September 1st or September 15th – it depends on the school. For this year, for example, if you take the LSAT in August or earlier – that would mean for folks listening now, probably June or August, I'm guessing – they could then get their scores back at the end of August and apply. The second applications open in September. Now, I actually wouldn't recommend applying binding early in the vast majority of cases, because you're going to lose any scholarship negotiation leverage that you would have. I mean, if you're committing, "I'm going to go to your school if I get accepted", why should they give you any merit aid? Because you've already said, "I'm going no matter what." It's like writing a blank check.
- Lee Burgess: Right. They're like, "Cool!"
- Steve Schwartz: Yeah. So, if you care at all about scholarship money, I would recommend not applying binding early. However, if you have plenty of cash in the bank, or if you served in the military and the government's paying for it and it's all the same to you – then by all means, go ahead, apply binding. But I think most applicants are going to want to apply early if they can, but specifically not anything binding.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. That's a really good point about the scholarships and the need sometimes to play scholarships off of each other, to shop scholarships around to get the best you can. I didn't even know that was a thing when I was applying to law school. And then my business partner was telling me about that, and I was like, "Oh, I didn't know you could do that. Whoops." Should have thought about that before I took that first scholarship offer.
- Steve Schwartz: Well, I think that higher ed has this air of a non-profit acting in the student's best interest in every single case, when I think it's somewhere more in the middle between that and buying a used car. They're not necessarily as bad as a used car dealership – I'm not saying that, but there's a spectrum. So, you can negotiate just as you would negotiate for a car or a house – I hope you would at least. Don't always take the first offer, or else you might be perceived as a sucker. I mean, you could have gotten more, especially if you make yourself an attractive candidate by having a high GPA, by having a strong application, and also, of course, having a high LSAT score. If you can put together the most



compelling application possible with the best numbers possible, then you become a hot commodity that schools will compete over. But you have to play the game. It could be as simple as a couple of back and forth emails. You don't need to be a hardball negotiator or get on the phone and be nasty – definitely don't do that. But you can go back and forth in a reasonable, polite way and let them know, "These are my financial realities. School X offered me this. Can you match that?" or, "I'd prefer to go to your school, but you've got to work with me here a little bit."

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think that that's a really good tip and just something that folks don't really consider, that there is the power to negotiate. I mean, we all want to go to law school, so most of us are decent negotiators, or at least want to negotiate in some form or another, and you can start working on those skills with your application. Number 10 on our list is something that Alison and I talk a lot about for law students and those studying for the bar, which is that you have to take care of your person, your whole person – your mental health, your physical health – while you're studying for something like the LSAT, and that includes sleep and eating good food, managing your stress, moving your body, getting outside, seeing people you care about, spending time with your dog, whatever it is that makes you a whole person, because you cannot perform at your best without all of that. And do you see students in the LSAT space really drive themselves into the ground and forget to take care of themselves?

Steve Schwartz: All the time. All the time. Of course, future lawyers – Type A personalities in many cases, highly driven. It's great up to a point, but we don't want you to burn yourself out. So, when I create a study plan for a student, we always build in days off. You're not going to study seven days a week, eight hours a day for months on end. We want you studying maybe five, six days a week max. But within a single day, only four to five hours a day at most. Take plenty of breaks. The LSAT itself with standard timing is going to be roughly two and a half hours, so your study sessions don't need to be any longer than that. And as we said earlier, even just a single question here and there can help you make forward progress. So, strive for balance, take care of yourself, sleep, diet, exercise, relaxation are all important. And they're also crucial to helping you perform at your best.

Lee Burgess: Yes. I know you and I both have lived through the age of small children, and let me tell you, sleep deprivation doesn't do good things to you cognitively. It really doesn't.

Steve Schwartz: No, it's real.



Lee Burgess: I have been there. I have been there. It is real. I spoke to a law student, or actually it was somebody studying for the bar yesterday, who admitted he was studying for the bar and slept four hours a night, and I was like, "Oh man, there is no way you can function that way. If you think you're functioning, you're so tired you don't even know that you're not cognitively functioning anymore. It's just not worth it." Even when you're earlier on in your career and you think you can pull these all-nighters and you think you can do all of this stuff, we're playing a long game with these tests and these goals, and you've got to figure out how to find some balance, because your body can't do that forever. It's not a good deal.

Steve Schwartz: No, you can't. And the LSAT makers are really sneaky – they lay a lot of tricks that are going to catch even the test taker who's gotten a full night of sleep. And so, if you've gotten four hours, or you've taken a test every single day for a week straight and you're just sick of this, then you're not going to spot that trap when they lay it for you. So, you really want to make sure that every single practice test you're taking is when you're at your sharpest, because when you get that result back, you want to know it reflects what you're truly capable of at your best, because on test day, you're going to do everything you can to be at your best for that day as well. So, make sure that all your practice tests are replicating yourself when you're operating at as close to 100% as possible.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Well, I think this has been a great 10 things to think about when you are studying for the LSAT and applying to law school. Steve, thanks so much for your time, for your wisdom. If folks want to learn more about you and what you do, how do they find that information?

Steve Schwartz: Of course, I'm glad to help. It's always a pleasure, Lee. So, folks can reach me through social media, they can DM me at LSATUnplugged on all major platforms, TikTok, Instagram. I'm on YouTube as well – [LSAT Unplugged, the podcast](#). They can also email me at help@lsatunplugged.com. I always love hearing from students and I'm happy to help however I can.

Lee Burgess: Awesome. Well, we will talk again soon. Thanks again for your time.

Steve Schwartz: Thanks, Lee.

Lee Burgess: 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!

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