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 figuring out your career preferences. 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. And you can check out the Bar Exam Toolbox podcast if the bar exam is on your radar. Alright, 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 figuring out your career preferences. Welcome, Sadie.

Sadie Jones: Thanks for having me back.

Alison Monahan: Oh, my pleasure. I think this is such an important topic and one that is under-discussed in law school. People just seem to expect students to know what they want to do without giving a lot of direction on the nitty-gritty of figuring things out. So, let's talk about this. What are some of the really big questions that law students need to be thinking about to figure out what they want to do in their career?

Sadie Jones: Well, first I would say whether they want to be in a firm or they don't want to be in a firm. And that could be short-term or long-term, but that's going to affect probably what kind of summer jobs you're looking for, and even where you're applying, when you're applying. So, I think that's the first big question to ask yourself.

Alison Monahan: Exactly. And at some schools it might be like, "Of course you'll go to a big firm for a while." Other schools, that might be a reach. But I do think that is one of the biggest questions. And when we say "firm", it could be big firm, which is the classic summer associate experience. But you could also have smaller firms, mid-sized firms. They're probably not going to be taking you to the opera or whatnot, but those are still options in the law firm kind of context. And then even within a law firm, you could have a boutique type of firm versus somebody who does more general practice. So the classic large law firms have been, "We do corporate, we do litigation, we do everything." But that's not always the case. So there are boutiques that do just litigation, they might do tax or

whatever. And then within the firm, the question they always ask you in interviews or when you're actually theirs: "Corporate or litigation?" And there are universes beyond those two options, but I think those are the big questions that you're expected to have an answer to. Do you agree?

Sadie Jones: I agree, and I think those are questions that you really should do the research on ahead of time, especially if you have a really big list of places you're applying for. Make sure you're really clear that the places you're applying for fit what you're looking for, in terms of the type of practice they do, where they're located. Don't just assume that you can move to a different city just because they have maybe even offices in other cities. Maybe you're going to be in the office you apply to. There are big firms where you can be at a smaller office of that firm, a satellite office, which I think most firms don't want to admit that's what it's like. There's the idea, "Oh, we're all the same", but that's not necessarily true. I think sometimes you can have a smaller firm experience at a big firm if you're, let's say, in a smaller market and that office has 20 attorneys. You will know everyone, and it may be smaller, even if you're working with attorneys in other offices at that firm. So, I think there're advantages and disadvantages to all these things, and maybe you're not sure. So, if you're not sure, don't pick a firm that's some boutique that only does litigation if you want to be open to discovering different practice groups. So I would think about what you feel "for sure" on and what you feel "maybe".

Alison Monahan: Right. And I think that point about the satellite offices is so key. Some people want to live in a big city and some people don't. Some people want to be in the kind of home office in New York City with hundreds of attorneys, and that seems really exciting. Other people look at that and think, "Oh my gosh, I don't want to live in New York. I don't want to be in this huge office. I would rather have the same paycheck, basically, in a smaller market where it's more intimate and I know people." And there are pros and cons to each of those. So I think that is actually a really important thing to be thinking about as well.

Sadie Jones: And I think you can do some research in terms of talking to people either that you know or through your network, and you can ask questions. If you see someone had an experience at something you're thinking about, maybe ask, "Oh, you moved from the big New York office to their Charlotte office. And what was that like? Was it a different experience?" So, these are all things I think you could spend some time on figuring out before you're in the interview process, and then you're on a tight deadline.

Alison Monahan: Right. And I think something like this, people can think about this beforehand. I think this is definitely one of those where people just get sucked into, "Oh, of course I'll go to New York City and work in BigLaw." That's what everybody

wants to do. That's the pinnacle of everything. But if you're a person that you know does not like cities, does not want to live in a small apartment – that is probably not the best fit for you, in the short or the long term. Maybe it's exciting for the summer, but then you're sucked into this life that you might look around a few years later and be like, "I don't want to be spending all this money on this tiny apartment that I never see. I don't want to be in this huge city. What am I doing here?"

Sadie Jones: I totally agree. And I think that's more common than not, that you end up on this path that you didn't even put yourself on; someone else put you on it, especially depending on what kind of law school you're at. If you're at a top 50 law school, you are going to get pushed in that direction. I think you're going to get pushed towards litigation, because they don't give you a lot of chances to see what other things are like. That's just the way it is. So, you have to take some ownership, and I think the law students I talk to who do that really stand out as being mature and thinking ahead. The other thing is, your 2L summer is extremely important, and it will just put you on a path. You don't necessarily have to end up back where you started in your 2L summer, but a lot of times, you just are going to go in that direction, because it's going to be hard as a 3L to start over. There are ways, like get a clerkship and you stop the clock a little. But generally these are things I think you should be thinking about as a 1L, because you just start on the path. So, don't start yourself on the wrong path because it will be harder to change your mind down the road.

Alison Monahan: I remember being in an interview at OCI with someone from a San Francisco firm and I was in New York and she was saying, "Oh, it's so interesting. I'm meeting all of you people and you all seem so great, but I just feel like you're all on this treadmill that you don't even realize you're on. And maybe you need to step off that treadmill and kind of think about this." And I thought that was so interesting.

Sadie Jones: I wish that there was more of that, or even a class about this, or even if firms put on events to make you think about it, because I think it's better for everybody that people don't end up in the wrong place. That doesn't help anyone.

Alison Monahan: Totally. Yeah, I was a litigator at a big firm, and I liked it. I wanted to do litigation. But at the same time, after the fact, I was talking with some friends of mine who had done the same thing and kind of repositioned. And one of them had a really profound question that seemed very obvious. She's like, "Nobody ever asked me if I really like to argue all the time, if I like conflict. I don't like conflict." I said, "Yeah, I don't think I like conflict either. Why are we litigators?" No one asked us that.

Sadie Jones: That's really funny. Well, that's what I think get to the kind of the core questions of what these different jobs involve, because I think there are people who are very adaptable and could do well at all of these different things. And for them, it may be wherever they end up. They may apply to a bunch of things, and whatever works out, they will move forward with it and they will be fine, and there are definitely people like that. But I think there are a lot of people where they're going to naturally be inclined to certain things. And the opposite, I think, is true – there are people who feel like they can't be litigators. Let's say they're not really excited about getting up in front of people. Not every litigator is going to be in that position, and going to court is not something that a lot of litigators do at a firm that often, especially when they're brand new. So, you could also say, "Okay, there're things about it I like. What practice areas would not be involving the things that don't suit me?" So, don't just cross things off the list because you think, "Oh, I've seen A Few Good Men, and I'm not going to be yelling at people in a courtroom."

Alison Monahan: No, I think that is very fair. I think before you write off litigation entirely because you don't like pounding tables in front of a jury, you should probably go to court for a day or two and just see what's actually happening. Most of it is fairly polite hearings, where the judge is asking questions about the briefing.

Sadie Jones: Right. And there's part of corporate where you have to be aggressive and negotiate things, and maybe that's not for you either. Find out what it really involves and not just what you think it involves.

Alison Monahan: I think that's a great point and I think that's so hard to do. And even in corporate, I was talking with a partner yesterday on the podcast about this. He said, "You still have to speak. You still have to present to clients. It's not like you don't have to do public speaking just because you're in corporate. That's not how this works." Public speaking is probably something that most lawyers end up having to do at some point. Maybe if you're writing your appellate brief in the back of a law firm and have somebody else argue it, that would be about the only way that you're not going to have to talk to anyone. But that's pretty rare.

Sadie Jones: And I think ask yourself whether business development is something that's up your alley or not, because if you want any kind of firm job, that will come into play at some point. And so, if that's not something that feels like you really can handle it, then I think you should look elsewhere. Obviously, everyone has clients, to some degree, but not everyone needs to do business development in the way like you will have to do at a firm.

Alison Monahan: I think that's a great point. And so, if you're listening to that and saying, "Oh gosh, I definitely don't want to do that" – well, you don't really have to do that the first few years of your career when you're an associate. So, it might not be that you could never go to a firm because you don't want to go do business development eventually, but you might want to have a plan that says, "Okay, I'm going to go to a firm, get some experience, pay off my loans. And then when that sort of process of having to do that type of thing starts rolling out, I'm going to move on." And that's totally fine.

Sadie Jones: And kind of figure out from, again, doing research, what's the point where you should start thinking about that? I would say think about that even going into starting your career, because that's another mistake I think people make, is they're like loose about it. They just figure they're going to stay as long as they're wanted, or as long as they aren't fired. And that's not really a great career strategy, because you want to leave at the right time, depending on what you want to do next, and what your bigger career goals are.

Alison Monahan: And the reality is, if you come in as a litigator, it's going to be probably infinitely harder to shift. It's not you can't do it; lots of people leave firms who are litigators and do something else. But there's less of a path than if you have done corporate work or some other type of work, where it's a much clearer path for you to go in-house and get that job next. So, if that's something you think you want to do, you need to think about that going in.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely. And that's part of what I think about figuring this out is. You can figure out your short-term goals and your long-term goals, what area you want to practice. And maybe you think, "It would make sense for me to start at a firm to get that experience." And if you can get into a big firm, you can make a great salary from the very beginning and plan it out, and know that you're going to make less later on. So, be strategic about that. But I think you should think about the career trajectory, because it probably is easier to start at a firm and kind of move on to some other things. It can be harder to go the other direction, with a few kind of noted exceptions. There are people at the public defender or DA's office or they get big time government jobs and they are able to make it back to a firm. But these are people who have done really well at those jobs. So, it's not going to be easy to just switch from public interest to a firm if that's the direction you want to go.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, that's probably the least likely of the options, but not impossible. It could be like an environmental thing and you decide you want to switch sides, but probably not.

Sadie Jones: You have to make a strong case for that.

Alison Monahan: And probably a strong internal case to yourself as well.

Sadie Jones: Exactly. I think the government is the most clear path that you could go from government work to firm work, but it really depends on the area and the experience you've had, and who you've worked with. Maybe you've worked with someone who was a partner at a firm, is doing this for a little while and is going to be going back and will take you. Be strategic about who you have in your corner.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, things like DA's office, maybe public defender, U.S. attorney, assistant U.S. attorney type stuff – that's a pretty clear path: "Okay, I've done that for a number of years. I've gotten a good reputation and now I want to go make some money."

Sadie Jones: That's the one example where you can switch sides.

Alison Monahan: Exactly. Yeah, that's always a funny one. I'm like, "Wait, you were a prosecutor and now you're doing white collar criminal defense work. Huh, okay."

Sadie Jones: I always think about that. It seems strange, but it's very common.

Alison Monahan: Very common, but it is a weird one. You're like, "Do you have any principles?" But that's a question for another day. Yeah, if you're talking about not firm stuff, there's a huge universe – you've got public interest work of all different types, you've got the government has a million lawyers, quite possibly literally. You've got in-house work where you are actually working at a company as their in-house counsel, you're advising the business people on what they should be doing, not doing. Solo practice is huge. People don't really think about that, but something like 50% of attorneys end up being in solo or very small practices eventually. And even things that are entrepreneurial now, non-law stuff I think a lot of people are interested in. But each of these things has a really different vibe, and there are tons of options out there.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, and I think the way to do this is to talk to people who are in these jobs. Make it a real kind of research activity to figure out what they do, because I think similarly to the courtroom work, you might have this idea of what all of these things are involved. I think a lot of people go into public interest thinking that they, quote unquote, "want to save the world". They want to do good, they want to give back. Find out what the reality of working at different places would be, because a lot of these places are underfunded, are chaotic. You may not get the training that you need, so it may not be a good place to start, because there aren't a lot of people and maybe hard to find a mentor. So, I think that there can

be a disconnect between the type of work you want to do and what it will be like in actual practice.

Alison Monahan: Oh, for sure. And I'm just thinking of something even as simple as, is your day-to-day going to be state court or federal court? If that does not seem like something that should matter, that is a huge thing for what your day-to-day life is going to be like. State courts in general are very chaotic, particularly if you're dealing with something like family court. I did a pro bono case in San Francisco in a divorce case, while I was working in a big firm, and oh my gosh, we would walk into the state court, it would be a different judge, they'd come over from traffic court, and I would never have gotten the papers that we were supposed to be discussing, and they're like, "Well, you're all here, let's just have the conversation." That does not happen in federal court.

Sadie Jones: So, I guess you need to know, are you the kind of person who can just roll with it? There are people who can just get the paper right before, go up there and talk, and sound knowledgeable and know what they're doing. And there are people where that would be paralyzing.

Alison Monahan: Exactly. I think that's something that people just literally have never thought about that makes an absolutely enormous difference. Federal court, generally speaking, is very slow, things take a long time, it's all lots of hearings. Everybody dresses up, they're very formal. State court is like the Wild West, at least in my opinion, coming from the federal court background.

Sadie Jones: No, I can imagine that it would just be a really different experience. I also think, look into what these jobs pay, because actually, there's sort of an idea that public interest doesn't pay well, or the DA or public defenders don't pay well. It actually depends on where you are. Some of these jobs actually pay really well. Maybe not as well as BigLaw, but very solid amounts for what they are, depending on where you are. So I think you have to be really detailed about where you're looking and what the specific jobs are, because that's obviously a big part of it – what do you need to live on?

Alison Monahan: Right. And also look at loan repayment options. So if you are working some type of government or public interest job, you might get your loans paid back, either by your school or by the federal government who gave you the money.

Sadie Jones: Look into how long you need to stay.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. So it may be that 10 years, 20 years down the road, you end up sitting on zero loans and having a reasonable life and a decent salary and a job you like, versus somebody who went in and did something they thought was going to

make more money, but they were also slogging through their loans. All these things are really complicated questions that you have to look at.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely. And I think this is also very much a location question. Be careful about where you're living. Also, that some of the places pay a lot more, let's say in San Francisco, but the cost of living is going to be a lot more. Really budget this out.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. And I think also we alluded to this with the state versus federal court stuff, but also think about what type of working environment are you going to be comfortable in? Does it seem exciting to just show up on day one and get handed a stack of cases and sent to court, which literally is what happens as a public defender? I know a number of people who've done it. And a DA, too – they might be handed a murder case and told to prosecute it with five days to get up to speed. These things absolutely happen, and if that seems great and exciting and you want to do that – fantastic. But like you said, for some people that could be paralyzing. On the flip side, if you do go to a big firm, you might find yourself for three to five years sitting through endless seminars and training, and never actually even defending the easiest deposition, because that also happens.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely. And if you're like, "Trial experience is the most important thing to me" – then to me, being a public defender should be top on your list, because you're probably going to get that.

Alison Monahan: That's literally going to be your job.

Sadie Jones: And it's hard to believe they'll just send you out there, because obviously a big firm would never do that.

Alison Monahan: Never in a thousand years would they just be like, "Okay, cool. Day one, here's a stack of cases, go to court." I know people who've done that and that's literally what happens.

Sadie Jones: And it's going to be sink or swim, right? That's high pressure. You think being in a BigLaw firm is high pressure, because they expect perfection and you're going to be judged and you need to do the right thing. But the stakes are obviously very high when it's people's lives that you're dealing with without much experience. But maybe you're someone where you would thrive in that environment and you really would do well.

Alison Monahan: I think you just have to know yourself. And a lot of this is, really, what have you naturally done in your life? Do you feel like you're more of the caregiver type

who wants to reach consensus, or do you love to argue? Those are pointing you in different directions.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely. And I think, ask yourself these questions, and I would talk to actual lawyers to maybe talk about what these different qualities fit into, because I think also you may not realize, "Here are the things I'm good at, here are the things I've done well at, here are the environments I've been better in." And you may think, "Oh, all of this leads me to a small firm." And you might talk to some different lawyers and they're like, "No, actually, you would be great in solo practice" or, "You would be great in the DA's office." So sometimes I think you don't know what the qualities are going to lead you to – that's where I would ask for help.

Alison Monahan: Definitely. I think that one of the questions we've alluded to is, how much autonomy – and the flip side of that is how much responsibility – do you personally really need? Some people are not comfortable taking on responsibility for things, and they're perfectly happy to have somebody else kind of outline what they should be doing in a day, and they do that and they're happy. Other people are not like that. If you're not like that – which I am definitely not, it turns out, like that – I don't like billing time, I don't like having somebody else tell me what to do – that was a problem for me working in a large law firm, where you're billing in six-minute increments and someone else is basically telling you what to do 24 hours a day.

Sadie Jones: That may seem like a small issue, but I will say that is the number one thing I hear from attorneys that have left law firm life, that the thing they're most excited to leave behind is the billing, which is interesting because it really does affect your day-to-day. It affects it in the small ways and the big ways, and it's how you think about your life. And also just the billing – that you need to bill 2000 hours a year, and you're really tied into that. And a lot of people say that when they leave, that's the number one thing they want to never have to do again.

Alison Monahan: Oh, I can absolutely see that. And I have learned that there are certain types of people and certain brains that it's really difficult to keep up with time in that way. I'll go into a flow state and work for three or four hours, and then take a break for two days. That's just my natural way of working and interacting with the world. And it literally drove me crazy, basically, to have to be like, "What did I do every minute of this day?"

Sadie Jones: And it can make you less productive, I'm sure, because you're constantly having to flip between different tasks and make sure you're keeping track of it.

Alison Monahan: Exactly. You're basically spending time doing the billing, you're spending mental energy trying to track it all. I was constantly making notes all over the place about like 10 minutes here, 15 minutes there. And then I have to, at the end of the day or end of a couple of days, go back and be like, "What in the world was that even about?" But other people, it doesn't really bother them. They're just super organized, and they turn on their timer when they start doing something and they turn it off when they stop and they're like, "I don't see what the big deal is."

Sadie Jones: Exactly. So, figure out, are you going to have to bill your time in this job? Any firm job you're going to have to bill your time. Maybe you'd be better in-house, where you're the client.

Alison Monahan: Right. The other big question you need to think about is really what brought you to law school? And secondarily, what have you learned about yourself since then? So, did you come in thinking, "Okay, I really want to do this"? Maybe you made it up for the essay. But hopefully you had some incentive to actually do this, so go back to that. What was it that made you think, "Oh, I want to be a lawyer"? Is there a way you can do that?

Sadie Jones: I totally agree. I also think that it's a good idea to think about your life in the bigger picture too. What do you need to get out of your job and your work? And what can you get out of things outside of work? Because if you want to give back, maybe working in public interest isn't the right fit for you for all the reasons we've said, but there are other ways for you to give back. And you make sure that you include them in your life also, because I don't think you have to get everything out of your job. So, I would ask yourself how this fits in. And there are a lot of people where once they make their passion their job, it's not a passion anymore. I've heard a lot of people say that. And so, maybe that's a reason not to go into that area.

Alison Monahan: I think that's a great point. I can even think of something like, you're at a firm and eventually you become a partner and you're making a lot of money. So now you have money that you can donate to things, or you can sit on the board of your school, or you can do pro bono work, or you can become an adjunct at a law school. I think that's a big one – we haven't even talked about academia. Lots of people say they want to do that. Most people don't end up doing that, but that's a way that maybe you can dip your toe in and get that experience of, "I want to work with students. I want to share my knowledge", without that being your full-time job.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely. I think there're lots of ways you can do things on the side. There's another example of, maybe you don't want to be in BigLaw because you won't have time to do any of those things on the side. So, pick something that gives you more of a flexible life. I'd also be wary of places that immediately tell you that you're going to have a work-life balance, it's in their marketing materials. I think it's rare you can find that at a big firm. Figure out what the reality is. But yeah, I just think it's important to know what makes sense as a job, what makes sense for your life, what makes sense in the bigger picture, because sometimes you do things for a few years to get somewhere else, and that's totally fine.

Alison Monahan: Exactly. Alright, so in law school, obviously you can try a bunch of things – you can do summer jobs, internships, externships, clinics, pro bono work. You've mentioned talking with people about their work – I think that's so important. I also think it's great to take classes that just seem interesting, and really talk to the professors and really dig in, because that might be pointing you in a direction. And also, talk to a career counselor, read some books. I feel like this stuff is really important and actually worth spending some time and energy on.

Sadie Jones: These are all the things that I think when you're on that treadmill and you're just being pushed in a direction that you miss out on. You're just trying to find a job and find the, quote unquote, "best job" and you're not trying to figure out how this all makes sense for your career goals. Obviously, this is all contingent on, you can get through your law school work, right? I always go back to, grades are obviously going to be the most important thing to get any of these jobs. So obviously you shouldn't take on all of these things if you can't balance all these things. But I am sure that you can make room for at least some of them. At the very least you can read, I'm sure, in some kind of free time that you have. But I think that law school is really an opportunity to try things, and it's something that'll never come around again. These two summers where you can work places and it's part of the whole experience, places where you can get real world experience in these different environments. I'm sure your professors have lots of information to give you if you are interested. I always say to people who say they want to do corporate work but don't really have experience in that, "Are you taking whatever courses make sense for that?", because that's going to stand out to a job. It's hard to make the case when it's, "I haven't taken any of the corporate-related classes" or, "I couldn't get into it." You need to find something. And I always suggest that you ask these partners who are in these areas, "Oh, what do you suggest? What do you think is really helpful for practicing in this area?", particularly in areas that are not litigation and aren't what law school is set up for.

Alison Monahan: I think that's great advice. Well, unfortunately, with that, we are out of time. Thank you so much for joining us.

Sadie Jones: Thanks for having me.

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

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