Lee Burgess: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today we are excited to have author Julie Lythcott-Haims, joining us to discuss how to be an adult. 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 can 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.

Hi, this is Lee from the Law School Toolbox. Welcome back! Today, I'm incredibly excited to introduce you all to Julie Lythcott-Haims. Julie is an attorney, she's an author of multiple amazing books. She's a community builder, she's a thought leader, and she's even a member of the Palo Alto City Council. I don't know how you do it all.

Julie Lythcott-Haims: And I'm a mom.

Lee Burgess: And you're a mom? Oh my gosh. So, I met Julie last spring. I've consumed many of her books. I am thrilled she's taking time out of her busy schedule to join us today and share some of her thoughts with you. So Julie, thank you for the gift of your time.

Julie Lythcott-Haims: Thanks so much for having me, Lee. I'm really excited to chat with you and your listeners today.

Lee Burgess: Thank you. So, to kick things off, it would be great if you could share a bit more with our listeners about who you are and what was the meandering path you took to get to this moment.

Julie Lythcott-Haims: It is a meandering path, and I want everyone to hear that. Too often these days, our kids hear in the media, from their peers, "You have to be on the right track, you have to know what you want to do", like everything's linear. Everything is not linear. It all makes sense looking backwards, like Steve Jobs told us in his very memorable Stanford commencement speech 20 years ago. So, when I look back at my meandering path and try to make sense of it starting at the front end, here's what I would say. I'm a Black, biracial person who grew up in White spaces and learned early on that some people thought something was wrong with my Black father, my parents' marriage, and with me as this light-skinned, curly headed, what they didn't know. I experienced an otherness, an exclusion, "You don't belong", a sort of exotification or problematizing of my own self as a

small child. That I think instilled in me a compassion for humans. I don't want anyone else to feel excluded or less worthy on the basis of identities they're not even in charge of. This is who I am, this is my ancestry and my parentage. So, I'm a helper. I'm interested in helping humans on their journey, particularly when it comes to these feelings of unbelonging or "I'm not enough" or "People like me aren't legitimate" or what have you. I have been otherized and I'm so interested in everybody kind of finding themself, liking that self, loving that self, getting out there and being their best self. That's what led me to law school – wanting to fight for the right of all people to be treated justly. That's what led me to be an undergraduate dean at Stanford, really rooting for every student to chart their own path, unfettered, unencumbered, unshackled by other people's expectations of what you should be. That's what all of my nonfiction books are about. Fundamentally, I'm rooting for humans and more and more I'm trying to help humans get out of their own way.

Lee Burgess: Which we all need to do. Each of our paths has moments when we all have to get out of our own way, so I really appreciate that. I also really appreciate your identification of the word "helper" because I also have a different meandering career path, but I feel like you gave me the list of labeling what I felt about myself, as trying to be a helper. I think I have unique skills and experiences that let me help in a different way. I was reading one of your books and I'm like, "Oh my gosh, thank you so much for helping me with my own professional identity here in the mid-part of my life." So, that was very much a gift.

Julie Lythcott-Haims: I love that.

Lee Burgess: So as I said, I've consumed multiple of your books, but I wanted to touch on one of them today, which is called *Your Turn: How to Be an Adult*. So most everyone listening to this podcast is technically an adult, I believe. And what does it mean to be an adult? And I think this is a really big question that many of us don't spend a lot of time talking about. So, I know that you had been working at Stanford as a freshman dean. Your first book was on parenting, raise children to be adults. How did you feel that the next step was to try and communicate directly with this population on how they can move into adulthood?

Julie Lythcott-Haims: So, two questions here. What does it mean to be an adult, and also how did I pivot from a book on parenting to a book helping people adult. Let me answer the second one first. The book on parenting wasn't for the purpose of being a parenting expert or writing a book on parenting. There was a problem with a certain type of parenting that was impeding the growth and healthy living of children and young adults. So I was trying to support children and young adults in thriving by getting parents back in their lane. So, it was always about youth, it was always about rooting for that young person to make their way unfettered,

unshackled. And unfortunately, the micromanaging, helicopter parenting style that was very prevalent for Millennials and Gen Zs being raised, really encroaches on a person's ability to develop skills, develop independence, develop resilience, problem solve, and so on. So, it was never about the parents. Getting to the parents through a parenting book was a way to support youth in thriving. So it was a very logical next step for me to write *Your Turn: How to Be an Adult*. It's a little blurry, but there's the book. It's kind of thick, it's a tome.

Lee Burgess: It is. It's a great audio book though.

Julie Lythcott-Haims: I appreciate that, I'm the narrator. If you like my voice, get the audio book. What is adulting, what is adulthood, what does it mean to be an adult? There are these technical definitions, like at 18 you can be in the military and vote, but you've got to be 26 or 25 to rent a car. Like, what is this? The government has all these limits and levels and sort of, "Are you mature enough yet for this thing we have in mind?" And yet, I don't think adulthood is about an age or a stage. Some people have to grow up too quickly because their parents are not able to show up for them, and we say they're adults too soon. And that gives you a hint as to what the definition is. It's really being in charge of yourself, being in charge of what I call "your body, your bills, your business". It's like, you can get yourself more or less through a day, through a week, you know how to keep yourself safe, look after your health and hygiene, pay your basic bills. You are not dependent, is another way to look at it. A child by definition is sort of dependent, typically on parents, for shelter, and food, and care. And the love will be there forever, but we hope a child barring significant special needs gets to this place of like, "You know what? I can more or less take care of business." Doesn't mean we don't need each other. There's this beautiful state we get to called "interdependence" where we are no longer dependent, we are largely capable – so much so that we can offer others help with what they might need. There's this interdependence in adulthood of, "I'm good, but I also might need some help." "I'm good, I might also need some help." We're adults, kind of in an interdependent context, making our way forward in the world. So, that was a lot, but I'm just trying to come up with different ways to think about. It's the opposite of childhood, it's the opposite of dependence. It's that primary accountability and responsibility. But you know what it's also? It's delicious to be in charge of yourself, like, "I don't care, I'm an adult now. I can figure this out." It's scary, but it's also delicious to be in this place of, "I'm not on a leash, being led down the path of life by my well-meaning family. I'm off leash. I'm an adult, thank you very much."

Lee Burgess: Yeah. One of the examples from your book – and it's been months since I listened to it – but I think you were talking about, one of the tests to see if you

feel like an adult is, what do you do if you get a flat tire? Was it a flat tire or was it a car accident? I can't remember.

Julie Lythcott-Haims: Actually, I think it was a fire in the moving van.

Lee Burgess: A fire in the moving van, okay. There were a few vehicular examples, but I think one of the examples I remember is, if this thing happens, could you handle it without calling your parents? And if you can, then you are on this road. Not that you don't want to tell your parents about it, not that you don't want maybe big strategies afterwards, but do you know how to solve this immediate problem? And it really struck me. And when I was remembering being a young adult, I was living in Los Angeles and my car broke down on the side of the freeway, and I did have to handle it myself. I had an AAA card and I had to call them, and it was a little scary because it was on the freeway in LA. And there was something about knowing that I just had to do it, and I could do it. And that was a big milestone that you carry with you. It can be these little things.

Julie Lythcott-Haims: Well, it is these little things. It's these little moments that we might think of as blips or snafus that require us to go within and do some reconnoiter, "What's happening? Oh my gosh." Some problem solving. What do I think is happening? What do I think could happen? That's when our brain fires up all the parts of itself and makes a plan, and that's how we feel alive. And so, when someone's always rescuing us, it's like, I'm safe, but my own existence is diminishing because I'm not actually doing the work of life, which turns out to be really existentially problematic and leads to mental health difficulties. To your question of where was this in the book? I think it might have been because I had the fire in the moving van, which was my "A-ha, I'm an adult" moment. But I think the example I might have given was, young adults whose parents have always filled the car with gas, who may find themselves out on the road on a long trip, having to pull over to a gas station for the first time. This person is well past the age when they first got their license, but now they've been overhelped, therefore they're underprepared for this road trip. They pull up at the gas station, they have no idea how to put gas in their car, and/or they put diesel in instead of unleaded because they don't know. And that loving, helpful parent always thought, "Aren't I great? I'm always filling my kid's car with gas." It's like, whoa, you've skipped the step of teaching your kid to be accountable and responsible for themselves as a driver. Put differently, it's great to have AAA. AAA can get you out of a bad situation. They can tow your car, they can replace a tire. Who's the one to call AAA? The driver, right? The driver should have the AAA card and call AAA. Yes, if you feel the need to also inform your parents this is what happened, make sure you've already called AAA. The correct step is, you do the work, inform your parents; rather than, "Oh, I need to tell my parents I've had a flat tire 3000 miles from them and have them call AAA." No, no, no.

That's acting like a child. And if you're the parent in that scenario and you allow it, you're infantilizing your adult child.

Lee Burgess: So, did you know that I once...

Julie Lythcott-Haims: Ooh, I'm on a roll. I'm feeling extra blunt today.

Lee Burgess: Oh my gosh. Oh my gosh. I did that.

Julie Lythcott-Haims: I'm feeling extra blunt.

Lee Burgess: And it wasn't because my parents put gas in my car. I was just really tired from a work trip and I put diesel in my little Honda, and that is a very expensive mistake. I do not recommend anyone do it. Do not do it.

Julie Lythcott-Haims: Great way to learn. Great way to learn.

Lee Burgess: Yes, never will happen again.

Julie Lythcott-Haims: Right? It's like touching the stove. Most of us have to touch the stove once to discover, "Oh God, that's hot." Guess what? That's how our brain learns, "Don't do that again!" Same with filling your little Honda with diesel. The experiences of life. Life must be experienced so we can learn the lessons that make us more capable and confident for the next thing that comes.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. So, folks listening to this podcast, a lot of them may say, "Yep, I have helicopter parents. I am one of those students whose parents want to know everything. They want to be on phone calls with me, they are perhaps overinvolved." So, how can a young adult or someone in the beginning of their career manage up and try and break free and create autonomy for themselves?

Julie Lythcott-Haims: It's a great question, and I do have a lot of advice on this in *Your Turn*, and a little bit in my first book on parenting, *How to Raise an Adult*. I actually have, what is it, I think a six-step method for having a tough conversation, and if I may outline it. Is that okay?

Lee Burgess: Yeah, let's do it.

Julie Lythcott-Haims: Okay. It's like you want to have that tough conversation about your major, about your course of study more broadly, about your career plans, about your identity, about who you're in love with, or what you want to pivot away from and toward, whether it's work or more personal. Step 1: You ask for a meeting. It's respectful to ask for a meeting about a difficult topic rather than plop it on

the dinner table or into an unplanned phone call, because it's not likely to go well if you just drop it. But if you ask for a meeting, you're signaling "I have something important on my mind", and you're giving them sort of a heads up, "Mom, Dad, whatever, I'd like to talk with you about some of my career choices, where I think I'm headed next, and/or, how things are going between us, how our relationship is working. Can we set aside time this weekend, later next week?" You ask for a time, number one. Number two, you are in the meeting. You have asked for the meeting and now you're in it and you open with gratitude. It's important to express gratitude as often as possible. When you express gratitude or praise of a person, it makes whatever's coming next by way of concern or critique land more easily. So, express whatever is authentic gratitude between you and your parents: "I know you love me and I love you. I'm so grateful for all you've done for me. I know you've sacrificed a lot for me." Whatever is the highest level of authentic praise, that's Step 2. Step 3: "I want to talk with you about" – whatever – "the degree to which you're involved in my academics, your sense of what I should do for my career, versus my thoughts. I know you have a lot of opinions and they're valid, and I'd actually love for you to go first. I want to offer you the chance to just tell me what's on your mind about that." Giving them the opportunity to go first is nice, unless they have no idea what you're talking about, in which case you should just frame the issue. But it also allows you to demonstrate respectful listening, which is what you're implicitly trying to teach them. So you invite them to go first, and hopefully they do. And you listen actively. You do that mirror listening, that listening without judgment, you repeat back. This is Step 4, you're doing your active listening: "What I'm hearing you say is you only want the best for me, you want me to be happy. You've known I'm always good at math and science. You really hope I'll go into tech. You just love me so much. You know I'm bad with deadlines, you want to be sure I'm on top of my deadlines, so that's why you're always checking." And you just try to reflect it back without snark, without defensiveness. Just let them hear from you what they said to you. Alright, then you take a deep breath, you're ready to Step 5, you say, "Great, thank you. Is there anything else you want to add?" Assuming they're done, then you say, "Alright, I'd like to share my thoughts." So you've gone through Steps 1, 2, 3, and 4 before you've even said a word about your own opinion. All of this has been laying the groundwork or kind of creating the container that is much more likely to support your conversation being successful. You've demonstrated a great degree of maturity, respect, restraint, and now you're saying, "Here's what I think. It really troubles me when" or, "I really think I'm going to pivot to this" or, "What I really know to be true about myself is this, and I'd like to talk with you about it." You say what's on your mind, and hopefully, they are now a little bit more open-minded to what you're trying to present. Step 6 is you say, "I know you may not agree with me, but I'd like to try this", if it's like them pulling back on surveilling you or checking up on you or what have you. "I'd like

to try this because it's really important to me. Can we agree that we'll try it for a period of time?" or, "I know you may not understand this" – if it's about identity – "but I ask you, can you love me regardless? I'm asking for your love and support, and for me, being who I am." This is drawing a significant line, like I'm telling you, "This is who I am. That's not going to change. And you can support me or you cannot, that's up to you." The final thing I'll say is, you can appeal to their memories of their younger self: "When you were my age, did Grandma and Grandpa let you do X, Y, and Z on their own, or choose your path?", or dah, dah, dah. If they say "yes", you say, "I just want that from you. I want the same thing you had." If they say "no", you say, "How did it feel when your parents were all up in your business, or your parents were dictating your career, or your parents' opinions became your sense of worth?" You're trying to elicit from them empathy that they may have for you based on their memories of themselves as the child in the adult/child relationship. So, that's a long six steps, but I hope you can sense that there is a process, and ultimately it boils down to really good communication and you are feeling ultimately, "I am an adult now, so I have the right to go off leash. I have the right to say, 'You know what, y'all? That isn't working for me. And if we can't reach a better compromise, I'm going to have to make some tough decisions.'" I'm not urging you to be estranged from your parents, but I am urging you to summon the sense of confidence that this is your life, not theirs. You are not a pet or a project; you're a person. And yet, early adulthood is the time to claim your own voice, your own right to decision making; not be subject to their consequences or rules as an adult, even if you're living in their house. And my latest book is *How to Live with Your Parents as an Adult Child*, and I'm talking about how power has to be shared, not hierarchical. "My house, my rules" really doesn't work when you're a 25-year-old, 28-year-old, 33-year-old, living with your parents. You deserve more respect. And of course you have to be respectful of them as well. It goes both ways.

Lee Burgess: And I think that young adulthood is such a great time to practice these skills, because adulting doesn't get easier, in my opinion. I think life challenges you to be the best version of an adult if you choose to have children, if you partner with somebody, if you end up taking care of other family members or friends who are in crisis. There are many moments that you have many hard conversations, and I think in your youth it's such an important time to kind of practice these six steps, to practice presence in these conversations of really, "How do I prepare myself to talk about something hard with somebody I care about?" I don't know, I've been with my significant other for 18 years, we've had a few of those conversations. And it's a skill that you also want to work on, because it's not going anywhere. Hard conversations exist forever.

Julie Lythcott-Haims: Yeah. Lee, I appreciate what you're saying and I'm mulling over your sense that it doesn't get easier. Adulthood doesn't get easier. Because when you first said

that, I found my body going, "Wait a minute, she's not right about that." So I was interrogating my feelings as you spoke, and I think you're right, it doesn't get easier. What does aid us in the process of living life into our adulthood, which we hope lasts for many, many, many decades, is, we become more familiar with uncertainty, we become more familiar with snafus, we become more comfortable with the fact that change is inevitable, and often, it doesn't come with a warning. So, we become more agile and we have all of this past experience that's like, the last time you had something happen at the side of the road, this is how it went. Let's see if we can learn the good from that and don't repeat that silly mistake you made, right? We build upon the lessons. Everything we do prepares us to be better at the next thing we'll do. And the more that happens, the more we develop this, "You know what? I'll figure it out." And that is a deep, delicious confidence. "I'll figure it out." That sense of agency, like, "I can, I'm capable. This is hard, but you know what? I do hard things. You know how I know that? Because I did hard things before." And that turns out to be the fuel that gets us going, that gets us back up after we've fallen, the sense of, "I'm going to move forward." There's a velocity. Can you hear it? It's like a velocity to adulting, rather than a stagnancy, as long as we're mentally well.

Lee Burgess: And as I make that comment about things getting harder, to me it also is a little bit about the responsibility you have as you become more and more an adult. Typically you're responsible for more. More people might rely on you, you may have other financial responsibilities, you may have professional responsibilities. I remember a moment during early COVID – my children were pretty young – and turning to my husband and saying, "We're responsible for a lot." I own my own business and my business partner and I are responsible for our team. And my team is scared, and my children are scared. And we have two sets of grandparents that we are also responsible for. And I have childcare that relies on me for their job, and I'm responsible. You have these moments where you say, "Wow, I am now somebody that other people rely on." And I think for me it was a moment where I was like, "I am now truly the adult in the room, because other people are now looking to me for guidance and security. And it is now my job to step up and be that person who does not put diesel in their Honda. I need to be better and I need to show up as my best self." And that doesn't mean that it wasn't still tumultuous and sad and there wasn't crying in my car by myself or on the phone with my therapist during that time. It was so hard and scary, and my family was touched by COVID in sad ways. But there was a moment where I said, "No, but I am also okay to be responsible. It's not easy, but I'm here for it." And I think that whatever those moments are, there is something to me about acknowledging that and saying, "It's okay. It's okay to be in this role. I don't know everything because I am always learning, but I know enough that I can be the adult in the room that other people may be looking towards." And that was a really powerful moment for me, and something I thought about in your book

of like, you're doing all of these things, so whenever the moment that you're called upon to truly own that adulthood, that you're there for it. And it's not perfect. It can be messy, but you feel like, "I can step up to this moment that is hard."

Julie Lythcott-Haims: Yep. So much is coming up for me as you say this. It's a beautiful point. It's scary as... Can I swear on your podcast or no?

Lee Burgess: Sure.

Julie Lythcott-Haims: Scary as f*ck when this happens. Like, "Where are the adults? Oh sh*t, it's me. Like, when did that happen?" And it will happen typically in an emergency. I also want to acknowledge, you said you had some really sad stuff happen in your family in COVID times. I just want to acknowledge that you said that.

Lee Burgess: Thank you.

Julie Lythcott-Haims: Yeah. It also is a profound opportunity if we seize it to start to lay down different patterns, or put differently, to break generational patterns, even heal generational traumas. That is, "I'm the adult now. Oh sh*t, wait a minute. Oh sh*t, I get to behave differently than my parents would've behaved in this circumstance." For example, I've got two kids in their twenties – 26 and 24. When they were teenagers and we were exploring the concept of sex and safety and consent and all of that, my partner Dan and I decided we are going to behave very differently around this topic than our parents did with us. We are Gen X, we're of the generation like, "Not in our house." If you wanted to be intimate with somebody in high school, you had to be in a car or in a cornfield or hiding somewhere else. We were like, "That's not safe. That is reckless." In fact, how are we going to have a relationship with our kids around their sexual behavior, choices, safety, all of that, that is a healthy conversation dynamic so we can have confidence that they're smart and safe? And so, that was a moment of pride, like, "Oh, we're the adults now. We get to decide the context in which our children are going to grow up and how they will be treated and talked with, and consequences for things and how decisions are made." And that was a lovely moment of arrival, like, "Oh wait, we're the adults now. Okay, whatever came to us, we can throw that stuff out. The stuff that's outdated, outmoded, we can throw it out." And it's joyful when you realize, "I get to be the one in charge here."

Lee Burgess: It is, yeah, because you get to write the story a bit more and not feel so batted around. I think it is a very powerful moment. It's not always easy. Not everybody always appreciates it when you own that role of being an adult. That's part of it,

is that you're not really serving everybody's needs, right? You have hard conversations, you set the boundaries you need. And in the end, it's your one...

Julie Lythcott-Haims: Precious life.

Lee Burgess: Right, your one precious life.

Julie Lythcott-Haims: You know I like to quote Mary Oliver, the late great Mary Oliver.

Lee Burgess: Who doesn't love to quote Mary Oliver?

Julie Lythcott-Haims: She said, "Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?" I am super clear that that is the truth of it. This is our one – as far as we know – wild, untamed, precious, rare of value life. And she ends with, "And I'm rooting for you to live it." And every interaction I have with humans who are seeking my advice and counsel is all about rooting for them to figure out how you're going to lead this one wild and precious life. I am definitely rooting for you.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I love that quote. And the quote I also read during COVID, in one of Eve Rodsky's books, was, "It's not about waiting for the storm to pass; it is about learning to dance in the rain", or something very close to that. And that I printed, I posted it in my office next to my desk, because to me, if I think about adulting, that quote is really, really meaningful for me. There are so many storms that come, and it isn't about being run by the storms. I think when you feel like you have control and autonomy over your life, you learn how to move through these really hard things. And that doesn't mean that you shouldn't do hard work and go to therapy and work through trauma. It's just that life is happening right now, and this is your one life. And so you have to decide how you want to be and how you want your experience to be.

Julie Lythcott-Haims: And to this point of being the adult or the responsible one in a certain situation and how bewildering it can be at first, harking back to what I said about interdependence, it doesn't mean to go it alone as an adult. You're just your primary resources, you have confidence in your own brain, body, heart and spirit's ability to kind of think it through, figure things out. Definitely consult with others, definitely get the support you need, but the primary actor is you, not texting someone else to handle it entirely for you. And in the pandemic, because I had written a popular parenting book, because I had gone to hundreds of communities over a span of five years with this book, people were reaching out to me for help in the pandemic. School districts were reaching out, heads of schools were reaching out, parents were reaching out for my help and guidance. I mean, what a privilege, what an honor that people thought I could

help. But I was as scared and bewildered as they were. I had my two kids back, 20 and 18 years old, my mom. It was just like my work had all fallen off a cliff, because nobody wanted to pay for people to give speeches in public anymore. And I had to turn somewhere. So I was determined to be of use, but I knew I needed help. So, a group of parenting authors ended up getting together to put on a webinar on, "Okay, it's the coronavirus. Here's what we're learning about it, here's what we think when it comes to kids and schools and homework, all of this stuff." We put together a webinar to try to be of service, and we were, I think. But we so loved talking with each other and getting support from each other as we were being solicited for help. We also realized we needed help and community and people we could let our hair down with, metaphorically, and talk it through and get some help. And that group ended up meeting every other week for three to four years. A lifeline, a true lifeline. It's like, therapists need their own therapists. We all need places where we can go and have those more vulnerable, frank conversations, and get it all sorted out so we can get back to our kids, or the clients we serve or what have you, with more confidence and direction.

Lee Burgess: Well, and I love your point about vulnerability, because I think that appreciating vulnerability is not the opposite of strength. Brene Brown has talked about this so much and written about it, and I've seen her speak about it. But I think this idea that vulnerability is not the opposite of strength is so important to realize, because I think when I remember a younger version of myself, vulnerability felt like admitting I didn't know what was going on, and that made me not feel like an adult. It was like, if I'm vulnerable, then I've screwed up or I've made a mistake. And one of the things I appreciated in your books and in your writing, and when I've seen you speak, is you seem to lead with vulnerability as a tool for connection, as a tool for learning. I think that is very powerful, and I think that when you realize that, "I can be the adult in the room, and I can also be vulnerable and seek out those in my trusted circle for support" – I think that is a really magical idea. It's not about things not going wrong; we've all had moments. You haven't met my business partner, but we've worked together for about 14 years. She's my other long-term relationship, and some text messages start with "You better sit down, because I've got a doozy coming for you." But she is a confidant in life, professionally and personally, and she's one of those people that I can say, "I need to talk to you about something and I need your feedback on this and that." I don't know, I love this idea about vulnerability. You're incredibly vulnerable in your books.

Julie Lythcott-Haims: Yeah, I will say thank you. It's definitely a facet of how I aim to communicate and be heard and received, because I know so many of us are wearing masks, facades, portraying the part of the self we hope will please others. And underneath that mask and the facade, if you tap on it, it cracks and goes away.

So it's like gooey individual who just wants to be accepted and valued as we are. And so, I'm really interested in getting to the gooey individual and connecting to that. So I know I have to offer vulnerability for the person listening to me, to be willing to remove their own mask a little bit and maybe get inside. One of the times I first deployed this intentionally as a tool of connecting was when I was the dean of freshmen at Stanford. When I started that role, it was 2002, and here I was, I had a big title, at an important university. And we put on an event, we created an event called Mid-year Convocation. It was January, school started in September, and the point was like, "The bloom is off the road, you're freshmen." The bloom is off the road. They're no longer applauding everything you do, there're no more balloons and acapella groups attending your every move. It's raining here in California. Let's get real. You've had one set of classes, you've got one set of grades. How are you doing? How are you feeling? It's okay if you're struggling, if you're not happy here, if you think you want to leave, if you don't know. Let's get real. And I had upperclassmen on a panel really talking about all of these things you may be feeling, to validate the feelings of discomfort or fear or what have you. But I opened the event with my own keynote, where I told them that as a freshman Fall quarter – so this was January, so they had just finished their Fall quarter – I said, "When I was in your shoes however many years ago, I got a B, a C, and a D in Communication of all things." It's ironic because now I'm a bestselling author and speaker, but I was like, "Your dean had a 2.0, your dean almost got put on academic probation. The person you've been told to respect because of my position is in this position by choice, because I have such empathy for the struggle. And my one piece of advice, if and when you find yourselves in that struggle – and I'm not saying you will – but if you do, don't make the mistake I did, which was to wither in shame and hide and not tell anyone, delaying, therefore, the amount of time it would take for me to get the support and help that I needed to turn things around. Come see me. I do this work to root for you to be successful. You do not need to be ashamed. If you feel I'm talking to you, come see me tomorrow. I got you. My job is to give a damn about you thriving." Oh my God, I'm getting emotional just saying this. The first time I would've said this, it was like 23 years ago. And because in my academic upbringing it had been so austere and everyone was so important and you couldn't dare say, "I just got an F on the exam", I couldn't go into office hours and ask for help. I was ashamed to be the person who had just gotten a bad grade. How was I going to, right? So, I really turned that on its head and I think it became a hallmark of my style of leadership and mentorship.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I am from a very small town in rural California and I went to college down in Southern California. And it is possible that I felt like a bit of a big fish from where I came, and so I was feeling pretty good about myself when I got to college. And I took upper division Calculus, because of course I had taken the AP test and passed it. And I am sitting in my Calculus class and we're getting ready

for our first exam. And I was like, "Where's the sheet of formulas that we can bring in?" And they're like, "No, we don't do that here." And my friends who went to fancy prep schools are like, "What are you talking about?" And I'm like, "Uh-oh." So that was my first moment. Then I did not do particularly well on that first test, and I had to go to this very intimidating German professor. And I've got my paper test, and you can imagine 18-year-old Lee just standing there. And I was showing him, I was like, "I was trying to redo the questions I missed, and I don't understand them." And he just leans back and he is like... Well, I won't do a German accent because it's really bad. But he's like, "Well, some people make mistakes. You make mistakes. I don't. I don't make mistakes, but this test is full of mistakes." And I was like...

Julie Lythcott-Haims: Oh my God.

Lee Burgess: I remember just taking my paper and just walking out of the class. I was like, "What has happened?" And I also really struggled that first year of freshman year, being very much a fish out of water, if I can mix all my metaphors. I mean, I was not used to competing with students of that caliber. That professor was not leading with his kinder self. I ended up in the Psych department, where they were much more understanding and supportive.

Julie Lythcott-Haims: Good. Good.

Lee Burgess: But that moment of saying, "Uh-oh, I had this question, should I be here? Am I smart enough to be here?" Because no one had ever taught me how to study hard. I didn't know. I didn't know. And I think that happens to law students, because a lot of law students have that moment as a 1L, because undergrad might've gone well, and then law school comes and smacks you in the face.

Julie Lythcott-Haims: So, I was in higher ed for 14 years. The first two years were as dean of students at Stanford Law School.

Lee Burgess: I didn't know that.

Julie Lythcott-Haims: Yeah, so I became the dean of freshmen the latter 10 years of that career, but two years as dean of students at the law school, two years in the president's office, and then 10 years as dean of Frosh. So my first non-law job... I was a corporate lawyer in Palo Alto, the heart of Silicon Valley, at a firm called Cooley, in litigation, particularly trademarks, copyrights, and advertising, but also general litigation. Look, it's all coming back. I left after four years. I went in-house at Intel for a short while, then I pivoted. I had figured out I'm a people person, I want to help people. I thought law was going to be the way to help, but I chose corporate to pay off my loans and now I can't stand the practice,

because it sucks the life out of me. How can I help law students stick to their values? How can I help them be more on the shore path? If you go into law school to be a public defender, I don't want law school or life to pull you off that intention. If you go to be a human rights lawyer, I don't want you to get swayed by the corporate allure. And so, I became the dean of students, and got to root for law students to be their best selves, live their best life, be vulnerable about their fears and their failures and all of that. I have this term, "life's beautiful F-words": failure, falling, faltering, flailing, floundering, fumbling, f*cking up. These are our greatest teachers, but particularly when we're successful, particularly when things have gone well in youth, in high school, in college, whatever – we're like, "I'm great, I'm good, I'm perfect. I don't have any experience with those F-words." It can really slam us, smack us in the face when we finally do encounter that first real hurdle and we feel our own sense of self, our very worth has shattered, because our worth was constructed of our ability to always be the best and now we've got some evidence that we're not the best. So in my books, I really try to push this concept of "life's beautiful F-words". These things you fear are actually our biggest teachers, if you can be willing to take the lessons that they're offering.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Alright, I want to pivot because I wanted to talk about this, because I think it's under talked about. We talk about it on the podcast. I don't know that everybody loves it when I talk about it, but you talk about finances as being a big part of being an adult. You talk about it in a lot of different contexts. You talk about it as far as negotiating your job offer letter and not letting your parents help you. That was one of them. About being understanding of what finances mean, IRA, saving money, things like that. This financial literacy is an important part of being an adult. We've talked on this podcast with the founder of You Need A Budget about why it's important for even students to think about this. But why do you think this financial piece is so critical for folks to think about, especially folks who are on the cusp of maybe their first professional experience or their first pivot for their professional experience? Nobody likes to talk about the finances F-word either, but it seems like a pretty important one to talk about.

Julie Lythcott-Haims: Yeah. So, why is it important? Because we live in a hyper capitalistic society where our very worth, our ability to survive comes largely down to how many dollars we have, or certainly having enough dollars to kind of pay for the things society requires us to pay for, like shelter. In a more communal society, in a more shared economy, you could have greater confidence that you will find the support you need in an equitable way. But that's not America in the main. So, finances matter because they will turn out to play a huge role in your ability to kind of take care of that body, those bills, and your own business. I do want to say, asterisk. You said that I have said people should negotiate job offers on

their own, without the help of their parents, without turning to their parents. What I meant is – and I hope I said it this way in the book – is, it's okay to consult your parents for advice, but your parents should not be the one on the phone with your future boss. And that's what we're seeing in the sort of helicopter realm, like the parents submitting your resume. You don't even know. You get a call for an interview, like, "What interview? I didn't..." And your mom did that for you, right? That's all a nightmare. Don't let that happen. When we are in charge of our money, when we're earning some money and we know what we spend it on, we know what we're saving for, both in the immediate and long term, it gives us a whole lot more control over the life to come, instead of being at the mercy of, "Oh, I don't know." Anything could always happen, but when you understand, "This is what I make, this is what I spend, this is what I'm trying to save for" – it becomes a roadmap that starts to really demonstrate its own value as you go. Issues of financial literacy, like what is money? I think the more wealthy we are – the more well off we are, I should say – the less familiar we may be with how money works from childhood, because maybe we didn't have to worry about it. Maybe we're so privileged it wasn't an issue. And so, we find ourselves in adulthood not really understanding how money grows or, "How do I determine the worth or value of something? How do I know if I'm paying too much?" My son, bless his heart, would have $20 bills on him and give out $60 to an unhoused person on the side of the road because of his compassionate heart, which I love. He didn't have the appreciation at 16, "You just had $60. When are you going to get $60 again? Can you afford that on an ongoing basis?" And he thought he could, but the answer was "no". So, it's important for us to be able to have these conversations with parents early on, certainly in teenage years if we can, to understand the financial picture, to understand what's going to be expected. But it's a very taboo subject and often there's a lot of emotion around it, so people have a hard time talking about it. It's funny, the book that I'm writing right now, if I may, it's called *The Bonus Years: The Definitive How To Guide for Adult Children and Parents Living Together*, because so many are now. And I'm writing the chapter on money and how you decide what's the equitable contribution of every adult living in this multi-generational household. Not necessarily if there're eight adults, you take an eighth and that's your share. It's like, what's your age and stage? What's your financial capacity? What's your goal here? But it is important for everybody to have some skin in the game and contribute in a way that's valued by yourself and by the others.

Lee Burgess: Well, it goes back to what you were talking about, of your six steps of a hard conversation too, because even if you are going to share a living space with someone, share a life with someone, those are hard conversations. I have watched marriages crumble because they would not talk about money. And so, you also need to understand your own finances and what you can contribute, so

you can have a compassionate conversation with whoever you are sharing life with as well, to get that information and make thoughtful choices to avoid painful conflict. Not that conflict doesn't happen. Conflict always happens, right? It's just, does it have to be painful, toxic conflict, or can it be avoidable – which is one of my life mottos, is, if I can have thoughtful conversations to avoid some avoidable conflict in the future, that I will.

Julie Lythcott-Haims: I love that. Or differently put, we can't not talk about things.

Lee Burgess: Yes.

Julie Lythcott-Haims: You know, we can't not talk about things. That doesn't help. It helps in the immediate moment – you're avoiding a conflict, you've put it away, but it's always going to be there until it's actually addressed, and that's the way to make it go away.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I would also add to that, over the last year, I have been the executor of an estate for my best friend that died of cancer quite young. And I've learned a lot. Even as a lawyer, I was woefully uninformed about how trusts and estates work in the real world. And that is something I also think that most of us don't want to speak about, because no one likes to talk about end of life of your parents, of yourself. But when you're young and starting out, they give you all these forms, like, what's a beneficiary? It's like, do you know what a beneficiary is? You open a new bank account, does it have a beneficiary? What should that beneficiary say? And do those people know that they are the beneficiary? These are all terms that seem so outside the realm of anything we need to worry about. But I have learned again at this point in my life that there are real consequences to some of these choices we make, sometimes when we're quite young. Some of these bank accounts that we create... My first bank account, I was 17. I was 17. I never updated information on that bank account from when I was 17. I went back and cleaned up my own house and said, "Wow, I had not fully engaged in this."

Julie Lythcott-Haims: Good for you.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. It's another thing nobody wants to talk about, but it is the real life that you have to deal with.

Julie Lythcott-Haims: I need to say one more thing about money – this is what I meant to say in response to the last question. Nobody taught me about compounding interest early on. I didn't understand how money worked – meaning, if you put it away in a decent investment savings vehicle, it'll grow significantly over time. I had no idea. So my dad said to me when we were getting married – we were in our

young twenties, I was 24 when I got married. He was contributing, so were my partner's parents. His contribution was $25,000 in 1992. He said, "Baby, I would rather give you $25,000 for you to put it toward your savings than to spend it on a party that's going to last for five hours." And all I could think was, "It's my wedding. What do you mean? It's not just a party." And I didn't know what he was talking about. And he printed out an article that was in some business magazine that showed the value of compound interest, like, "This much money invested today, in 10 years, in 20 years, boom!" I don't know what my $25,000 would be, I can't do the math right now, but it'd be a lot today. And then the universe tried to hand me $25,000 again. I had a fire in my moving van. When I was graduating from law school, moving back from Massachusetts to Palo Alto, there was a fire in my moving van. We had a settlement, because it was their fault. And I got a check for $25,000 and we just spent that on more great furniture from Crate & Barrel and Pottery Barn instead of, "What a windfall! Let's live like grad students and put that money away." So, I've learned twice in retrospect, the hard way, do not... When you get a big sum of money, pretend you never got it and just put it away, and your older self will be like, "Thank goodness. Thank goodness."

Lee Burgess: Yeah, important lessons. I thought those were both compelling stories in your book, so I appreciate that. But I wanted to talk about your civic engagement, because you talk about being a helper and you're on the Palo Alto City Council. So, why was it important for you to help in this capacity as a public servant?

Julie Lythcott-Haims: I am going to be honest. I'm in my fifties, I'm a lifelong member of the Democratic Party First Caucus in Wisconsin as a 16-year-old for Jesse Jackson in 1984, voted in every election. I was a delegate to the 2008 election, an elected delegate for Obama. I've been very involved. But I tended to think that the problems, air quotes, that I was interested in, were elsewhere. Like, I need to send money to that state, I need to work on electing that person over in a different state because I'm good here in the San Francisco Bay. I had that attitude, honestly. I was reading the New York Times, listening to NPR, caring about national issues and regional problems elsewhere, and thought we were good. And then I got persuaded that right here in my own very blue city and my very blue county and my very blue region of my very blue state, we have social justice issues, like the lack of affordable housing, which totally undermines our youth, low-income people, working families, etcetera. And once I got persuaded that we had very compelling social justice issues, the helper in me was like, "Oh, they're asking me to run. I keep saying 'no', because I'm more concerned with what's happening elsewhere. I've got stuff right here I should care about." And once I realized that, I was like, "I'm all in." I ran, thank goodness I got elected. I ran on affordable housing, youth mental health. We have a huge concern here around the unwellness of our youth in this high-achieving place called Palo Alto,

Silicon Valley, more broadly. Belonging. I try to view every decision we make as a council through the lens of equity. For example, we were just making a $6 million cut in our $1 billion budget. And what, $300 million is our general fund, so that's 2% of our general fund had to be cut. And some of the proposals were, "Let's cut this position that gives access to our very fancy junior museum and zoo to underserved communities. Let's cut The Wellness and Belonging Program." I was like, "Wait a minute. Why when we have a budget problem..." Our budget is not just numbers. It tells the story of our values. Why would those things – access, equity, wellness, belonging – be the first things on the chopping block? Why are we turning to those first? And I'm delighted to say I and others fought for that not to happen. That's why I'm serving on the Palo Alto City Council.

Lee Burgess: That's amazing. I love that you keep finding ways to be the helper.

Julie Lythcott-Haims: I love being the helper, because I'm so grateful to those who helped me, and I do believe everybody deserves a chance. My heart breaks at the thought of anybody at the side of the road. Lately I've been showing up at Stanford Hospital, had somebody brought in there by ICE, denied her access to her lawyer, her family, her priest, and I spent time with the family. And it's like, "I can't solve this right now, but I can sit here and hold your hand and hug you and show you that I give a damn, and that you're not alone." I mean, so much of life is just showing up, and that's who I am and who I'll always be.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I also think as lawyers, as future lawyers who are listening to this podcast, there is a unique ability for us to be helpers. My parents are lawyers, so I grew up with this, but I've always felt that having the ability to help someone navigate a hard situation with the law, which feels like a gate so often to folks – it's a door that they don't know how to open, that it's too confusing, too scary, too hard to advocate for yourselves. I think we need great lawyers to show up for people. And I think if you're listening to this podcast and you are wondering what you want to do – even if you do that BigLaw corporate job, which I did too, so I'm not faulting, but what can you do to be that helper and help someone? It could be through your firm, it could be showing up at other events. There are so many ways for lawyers to even specifically help. I think it's a really important thing, and I've always felt that it's a bit of a duty that we have for being able to have this education, for being able to get these licenses. It's a duty to be a safe place for someone who needs help.

Julie Lythcott-Haims: I would love for you to say that at every law school graduation, every time someone passes the bar, these reminders, because I think for many of us, there was that stirring of like, "That's what I want to do with my talent, with my skills, with my opportunities. I want to go be a lawyer. I want to go stand up for

people, stand with people, be there, show up, fight for what's right." And for many of us, we just get those ideals beaten out of us, or they just start to fade because other things seem to be more compelling. The allure of the big paycheck is undeniable, but I've learned the hard way that the big paycheck does not nourish your soul. It's the work that nourishes your soul. And an undernourished soul will act out and complain, your body will be unwell. Your body and spirit will send you all kinds of signals that you're not in the right place. You have to have the courage to listen to that self and honor what it's telling you.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm. Well, one last thing I wanted to touch on was where we are in the world right now. So, it is a bit of a new dawn. Everybody's talking about artificial intelligence. People are very worried what's going to happen to the legal profession, that we're not going to need lawyers. I mean, maybe people won't have to do doc review like I did when I became a young lawyer, and I'm okay with that because that was not my favorite job. Speaking of things that feed the soul, document review did not feed the soul. But I recently read this quote in a book that I was reading by George Beard. It's from 1881, and it says – I think I'm paraphrasing a little bit – but "the technological breakthroughs, almost by definition, must make life more stressful, because they quicken the pace and raise the bar of what can be accomplished." And it was a book written about 10 years ago, even though the quote's from 1880s, the idea. I keep thinking about AI and this idea that lawyers think they're going to be replaced by computers, that we still will not have a role, that the AI will do all of our legal work. And although I know you are not practicing law at this moment, I was curious based on what you have seen over your career, both as a lawyer and in universities, how you think that someone entering the legal profession should hold this idea of, "Yes, technology and change is coming, but I'm still going to have a role"?

Julie Lythcott-Haims: Big question. Caveat, I have no expertise on this, but I do of course have a lot of thoughts. The first thing I want to say is, it is the hallmark of the old to bemoan the new technology of the young. From the printing press, to the television, to the radio, to the Internet, "Oh no, it's going to ruin everything." And okay, okay, okay. So, there is a lot of good that will come from AI. I, as a writer, am deeply concerned. My books have been used to train the AI models. I'm a plaintiff in that class action lawsuit. They didn't even ask; they took my stuff without compensating me to train their damn models. And I am worried when I see people like, "I use ChatGPT to write my book." When does it become ChatGPT's book and not your book? If a painter asks ChatGPT or some other generative AI "Make me a painting", is it yours? I don't think so. Where's the line for us as writers? Could it help you outline, could it help you edit? If it's kind of writing your whole thing and you're just cleaning it up, I wonder about the ethical boundaries there. And I do worry that we writers will be replaced, and I do

worry that we lawyers will be replaced. And I think, therefore, if that is coming and each of us as individuals is really quite powerless to stop that, what can we claim? Our humanity. AI is not going to be able to relate in that vulnerable way, in that authentic way, in that mirrorless, that true human connection. The juice, the elixir of life is human interaction, human connection. The more our EQ – our emotional intelligence – can develop, the more we can center the value of human interaction, the more we create and strengthen the relevance of human beings in an increasingly technologized society. So, you'll always be able to hold your client's hand. You'll always be able to say, "I feel for you. I've been through something similar, I'm here to help." And so, lean into the human side of your interactions with clients, and that's what they can't outsource to a machine.

Lee Burgess: No. And I think the first time someone turns to you who's in crisis – which, that's what a lot of lawyers do, right? – we counsel people in crisis. Some lawyers counsel people before they're in crisis, but a lot of times you're counseling someone who's in crisis. The first time someone in crisis turns to you and says, "What do you think I should do?", that is a really big thing that I don't think AI can... I mean, it can tell you what to do, but I'd still rather have a person tell me what they think I should do and why.

Julie Lythcott-Haims: Yeah.

Lee Burgess: That's an important responsibility. And also, there's something about, I don't want to say to that person who has turned to me and said, "What do you think I should do?" and to say, "Hold up for a second, I'm going to ask ChatGPT" or whatever AI is existing at that moment, "what it thinks you should do, and I'll tell you", because I do think there is wisdom in the human experience as well. And we bring our own knowledge base, also trained on your books and other things, but in a different way. But we bring our own knowledge base that I just don't think will be dismissed. But I do think it is important. If I were in law school right now, I would want to take classes that would teach me about alternative dispute resolution, or doing clinics where I'm working with clients or feeling what the work feels like to do. Because yeah, document review – really, that's not a loss, folks. I just want to tell you, it's not a loss. But the work is going to change.

Julie Lythcott-Haims: But you know what? Legal research, I loved that. I was the kid who loved to go into the library and just do the whole treasure hunt from, "This is what we have. Where are we headed?" The ways in which that whole path has been set up through. I can't even remember the purveyors of these books anymore. What do we call it? Like Shepardizing…

Lee Burgess: It was Lexis and Westlaw and Shepardizing, yeah. KeyCite and all that stuff.

Julie Lythcott-Haims: Oh my God, I love that stuff. And all of that will be taken over. And this is where I worry that AI is going to rob us of the ability to develop and hone and strengthen our cognition. I want us to be able to go through those analytical paces of, "What's next? What's next? How do I know? How do I know?", because my brain figured it out. The logic problems that we have to undertake to do well in the LSAT and get into law school – those mental gymnastics are so important for our brains. And that's another part in addition to document review that I think is going to go away. No one has to do this anymore, because the AI can just follow the path from, "It was this, now it's this."

Lee Burgess: Yeah, it's going to be interesting times.

Julie Lythcott-Haims: Lean into your people. Love the people you've got in your life. Hug your people, express gratitude, have human interactions, break bread, eat meals, dance, sing, dance in the rain. It's raining now. Get your umbrella, figure out how to stop the rain, but also dance.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, a hundred percent. Well, Julie, your time is a gift, your books are a gift.

Julie Lythcott-Haims: Thank you, Lee.

Lee Burgess: It's been such a pleasure to get to know you and to chat with you today.

Julie Lythcott-Haims: Me too.

Lee Burgess: If listeners want to learn more about your work, how do they do that?

Julie Lythcott-Haims: People can follow me anywhere on social at jlythcotthaims. My website is julielythcotthaims.com. My Substack, where I try to write very vulnerably, it's called Julie's Pod, is jlythcotthaims.substack.com. I have a hotline, 1-877-HIJULIE. Call it and just leave a message about what's on your mind. I'm really just holding space for people's feelings. So, that's how to connect with me. You can Google my books. Anywhere books are sold, you'll find my books. Love to connect with people, happy to respond to your DMs. If any of this resonated with you, please reach out and ask me whatever you want to.

Lee Burgess: Well, thank you so much, Julie. And we look forward to reading your next book, so good luck finishing that project!

Julie Lythcott-Haims: Thank you. Appreciate it. Thanks, everyone, for listening.

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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