Episode 105: OCI Basics with Former Law Firm Recruiter Sadie Jones

Alison Monahan: Welcome to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today we're talking with a former law firm recruiter about the basics of OCI, or on campus interviewing. Your Law School Toolbox host is Alison Monahan and normally I'm with Lee Burgess. We're here to demystify the law school, an early legal career experience, so that you'll be the best law student and lawyer you can be. We're the co-creators of the Law School Toolbox, the Bar Exam Toolbox, and the Catapult Career Conference. I also run The Girl's Guide to Law School. If you enjoy the show, please leave a review on iTunes. 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. We would love to hear from you. With that, let's get started.

Welcome back. Today we're talking with a former law firm recruiter about the basics of OCI, or on campus interviewing. Welcome, Sadie. First off, give us a sense of your background. How is it that you know anything about OCI?

Sadie Jones: I've been a recruiter and in professional development at a handful of law firms for the last ten years. I've organized our on-campus interviewing process at different firms, and done the call-back schedules and follow up with students, and been on campus with them so I have a variety of experiences at all the different processings of OCI.

Alison Monahan: Awesome. Let's break it down a little bit. For people who aren't really familiar with this process, what's the point of OCI and how does it work basically?

Sadie Jones: OCI is the way that most large law firms, and even medium size law firms and some public interest jobs, find their summer associates. They interview them on campus first in short interviews, and then they call them back to the office if they're more interested to do a more in-depth interview. From there they make offers to decide who their summer associate class is going to be.

Alison Monahan: Give me the really brief synopsis, particularly in big law, what is a summer associate?

Sadie Jones: It's basically a six to ten-week job interview to find your future lawyers. It's really how most big law firms do the majority of their hiring.

Alison Monahan: Just so we're clear, our listeners are clear, these people actually get paid what the regular lawyers get paid. Right?

Sadie Jones: They do. They get paid a first-year associates salary for the amount of time that they're working at the law firm. Obviously, prorated for that amount of time.

Alison Monahan: That's a pretty sweet deal. They get wined and dined. Certainly, there's work involved but it's a pretty sweet position.

Sadie Jones: It is. I think something to keep in mind is that it's probably not a completely accurate view of what it will be like to be an associate at a law firm.

Alison Monahan: I think that's probably fair to say.

Sadie Jones: Yeah. You probably won't be working a lot of late nights. All of your lunches definitely will be paid for, and a lot of your dinners and drinks. You'll do different activities but you do get real work experience, so it is a chance to see what it's like to be a junior associate.

Alison Monahan: I was a summer I think at three different places. Some of them are better and worse experiences. One of my experiences definitely I think was exactly what it would have been like to work at that place, which is why you couldn't have paid me to get back there. That's a whole different story.

Sadie Jones: I think it's a job interview in terms of the firm looking for you. It's also a chance for you to see what it's going to be like in that culture, at that place, and for you to decide even if you get an offer at the end of the summer whether or not you think you'd be happy there.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think that's a key point to take away. Also, to think about even as you're starting this process because yes firms are similar in a lot of ways. They're structured the same way, which has its own pressures typically but they're not all the same. They have very different personalities I think. That's one of the things that I believe people should be looking for here is what types of firms do I want to be bidding on? What are the characteristics of a place that I would like to work? What advice to do have for people figuring that out?

Sadie Jones: I think there's a lot of ways to go about it. I've seen law students come up with flash cards for every firm.

Alison Monahan: This is after they've done the bids or when they're trying to figure out who to bid on?

Sadie Jones: When they're trying to figure out what to bid for. Then also I think once they get interviews, and call backs, and things. I think you can narrow it down. I've seen spread sheets and lots of complicated ways to decide. I think there's some key things to think about, which is location, size of firm, what are the hours requirements? Do you want to be at a big firm where you're going to have to work at least 2,000 billable hours a year? Maybe you want to work at a smaller firm where you're going to get paid less. Do you want to be at the main office of the law firm or do you want to be at a big law firm but a smaller office? All of that affects what your life will be like there. I think those are all things to keep in

mind. Then also just what your grades are in law school and where you think is realistic for you to be able to work.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I remember when I was doing the bidding process, it was just this black box. You're like, "What am I even supposed to be looking at here?" I think some schools they pass out a lot more information about ... I guess the process for bidding also varies by school. I went to Columbia, so you could basically at that time just pick who you wanted to do an interview with and they more or less had to talk to you. I think a lot of schools the firms are more involved in setting GPA cutoffs or deciding who they want to talk to. It's more like the residency match in med school, besides have to be willing to talk. The schools may or may not give you information about this is the grade range they're looking for. They're looking for people who are on law review, or whatever it is. I'm assuming that firms pretty much always have that stuff behind the scenes. Is that right?

Sadie Jones: I think that's correct. I think for firms it's the same thing. It depends on the school and what information they're given. For a lot of the top schools, firms don't get to see students grades before they interview them. It's a lottery system, so the firms really have no control over who they're interviewing or whether people would meet the criteria that they want. There's other law schools where part of it's lottery and part of it law firms get to choose. They actually get to see all the materials first. Some of it depends, but most of the time the law firms only get the students' information less than a week ahead. They just get a resume. They don't really know what they're going into or who they're going to meet. Out of, let's say, a schedule of 20 students you don't really know how many you'd be interested in.

Alison Monahan: Right. I remember when I was working at the firm they were pretty explicit, even at the very top schools, about for people who are going to do on campus interviews, this is what we're looking for. I think sometimes at least at some of these top schools' people would be a little bit delusional because they're like, "Oh. I can just bid anywhere and they have to talk to me. I'm at Harvard, of course they're going to hire me." That's not necessarily the reality, right?

Sadie Jones: Absolutely. I worked at a few different top firms that had different policies on which students you could call back. I worked at firms where there was a pretty strict cutoff of no matter how much you like the student, if their grades didn't match up they could not call them back even if the interviewer really, really wanted to. I worked at other firms where the interviewer could make a case for the student if their grades were borderline. I think it's also important even if you don't have extremely stellar grades that you excelled maybe in one or two classes, I think that says something. Also, if there's an upward trend of your grades, I think that helps.

Alison Monahan: Right. These are all ideals, so if someone is listening to this right before OCI they cannot really change their grades. What other things are firms looking for in

summers? Like you said, you might really like the person. What exactly are you looking for outside of the grades that we really can't alter at this point?

Sadie Jones: I know that every firm I've been to had a different word for it, someone called it sparkle, or some factor that was intangible. I think it was basically that the interviewer enjoyed talking to the person and that they were passionate about something, had interesting things to say. I also think a key point is that you've expressed your interest in that particular firm. Whether or not you've had to do that for multiple firms, I think you need to be as excited about each firm and make the interviewer feel like you really want to work there.

Alison Monahan: I think that makes a huge difference. I remember once I walked into an initial interview and for whatever reason, I guess basically I bid on the wrong office of the firm, which I hadn't noticed. I'm happily doing my standard speil about why architecture, then law, then programing. Blah, blah blah. I've got my standard thing down then they say, "Why do you want to work in DC?" There's this pause and I said, "DC?" She said, "Yeah. You do realize you're interviewing with our DC office?" Suffice it to say I did not get a callback.

Sadie Jones: I've had students that get in those situations and somehow make the best of it and roll with it.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think I made a joke about it.

Sadie Jones: I've often had students come in and ask about offices we don't have, and things like that. They're trying to get added in and it's very obviously that they're just doing this everywhere.

Alison Monahan: Practice areas that don't exist.

Sadie Jones: Exactly. Yes, you ask about practice areas that don't exist. I think that sometimes you have to fake it until you make it.

Alison Monahan: It's a fine line because the reality is from the student prospective a lot of these firms really are fungible, but each one of them wants to think that they are a unique unicorn of wonderfulness.

Sadie Jones: I think at the law firm side you're realistic that some of the things they're saying to you are just things they're saying to you, but if they sell it to you then that means something.

Alison Monahan: They're good lawyers at that point if they can make you believe the crap they're spouting to every single firm about how special you are.

Sadie Jones: Exactly. I think that might be the top things that I've seen at firms, what they're looking for is why. You just to have some reason.

Alison Monahan: No, there needs to be a reason. It needs to be at a minimum. I think people, well we'll talk about this in a second, but I think people need to at least have looked at the website. You need to have drilled down and did what practice areas do and don't they have. You need to be prepared to talk about the practice areas you're interested in, why you're interested in them. You can't just be like, "Oh, well, you're in New York." It's like, "Okay, there are a lot of law firm in New York. Why do you want to work for us?" Sell me on this, make me feel special.

Sadie Jones: I have someone who had no connection to San Francisco at the time, and was from New York and needed to come up with a story. Their answer was that they felt that San Francisco was close in character to Brooklyn. I just said, "I don't think that's going to work. You need to at least come up with a better story than that."

Alison Monahan: Yeah, make up a significant other or something.

Sadie Jones: Exactly.

Alison Monahan: Alright, so we've talked a little bit about bidding and how to figure out what's the right perfect firm for you. News flash, there's probably not one that's perfect but you can probably make lots of them work. I've got my bid list. I've gotten my interview list. Some of the firms that I truly really wanted are not on there. Is there anything I could do at this point?

Sadie Jones: Absolutely. I think you have a lot of control about that and I think a lot of law students don't realize it. The last firm I worked at, most of the summer class came from either people I added onto my schedule when I was in the hospitality suite at OCI or people that had written me as the recruiter ahead of time and asked to get added in.

Alison Monahan: It's totally fine to find out who the recruiter is? Send an email and say, "Hey, I'd really love to talk to you guys when you're on campus next week."

Sadie Jones: I think that I was surprised at how few of those kind of inquiries that I got. I think students don't realize that they have control of it. What I would do is make sure that you know who is going to be on campus, where their hospitality suite is, or contact the recruiter ahead of time of a firm you're really interested in and explain why you're so interested. Send your materials, so send your resume and your transcript ahead of time so they know who you are. I think most of the time if someone seemed really interested and contacted me ahead of time, or came to the hospitality suite, I would try to add them on. That might mean that the interviewer has to stay through lunch or stay late, but I never really had an interviewer complain about it because most of those students ended up being someone who we like.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. It appeared they had great credentials, or great reason that they want to work at your particular place, and they just happened to have not been on the

schedule. It would be silly to be like, "Oh, no. Sorry, the lottery didn't pick you so we can't talk to you."

Sadie Jones: Exactly. I think it goes above and beyond that you've reached out to them. I think that's one area that students have a lot of control over.

Alison Monahan: Alright, well that's good to know. I'm not sure if it ever would have occurred to me to send an email to a recruiter being like, "Hey, I'd really like to work with you." I just was like, "Alright, well these are the places I'm talking to. Apparently one of them is in DC. Wow, did I really sign up for Wachtel? This could be weird. That was a really weird interview." If you go in and you tell, this is not the answer to give but this is literally the answer I gave, they say, "Why do you want to work at Wachtel?" I'm sitting there thinking how in the name of God did I end up in this Wachtel interview? I don't want to work at Wachtel. Literally, I couldn't think of anything to say other than, "To be perfectly honest with you, I don't think I do."

Sadie Jones: I bet the interviewer appreciated that.

Alison Monahan: Then he literally spent the next 25 minutes trying to convince me that I did want to work there and they weren't as bad as everyone thought they were. He was a really good lawyer so by the end I was like, "Maybe he's right. 3,500 hours a year, that's not worse than other places." Then you walk out and you're like-

Sadie Jones: It's an interesting approach of the interviewer.

Alison Monahan: Sorry, what?

Sadie Jones: It's an interesting approach of the interviewer to try to use it for good PR for the firm.

Alison Monahan: He was obviously surprised as anyone when this came out of my mouth. What not to say when you're asked why you want to work at a firm. Alright, well let's touch on that. Alright, so now let's talk to, a little bit, how to prepare for these initial interviews because they are going to be hard to keep apart. I remember doing eight or ten of these a day for a couple days. Some places spread it out, but some places it's really concentrated. How should students prepare for these? Then let's talk about what they should wear and bring.

Sadie Jones: I think preparing, like you said, they should definitely go to the firm website and figure out the basics, how big is it what are its main practice areas.

Alison Monahan: Where are they located.

Sadie Jones: Do they have offices? Exactly. Is there something recent in the news about the firm? I think anything like that just so you could throw it in. It could be something small. I also think you should make sure to look up your interviewer.

You might not know until right before. You might not even know until the day of who your interview is. Early in the day go up to the room and see whose bio is out there.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I don't remember ever really knowing what I was getting into.

Sadie Jones: I think interviewers really appreciate though if someone knows something about them.

Alison Monahan: I feel for callbacks I would usually get a list but for the first interviews I feel like you just walk in the room and you just got to roll with it.

Sadie Jones: I think that's a big part of it too is changing your approach depending on the person, or being able to think on your feet. In terms of what to wear and bring, I would always wear a suit.

Alison Monahan: Yes.

Sadie Jones: Always business attire.

Alison Monahan: Don't stray from that.

Sadie Jones: I was surprised at the random person that would wear something completely inappropriate. I also would stick with really basic colors. Black, dark blue, gray. I wouldn't try to make it a fashion statement.

Alison Monahan: I remember I had a pretty conservative suit but I just couldn't resist the temptation of throwing on a really loud obnoxious Thomas Pink shirt. I was just like, it's memorable. They'll be like, "That girl in the crazy purple shirt. You remember her?"

Sadie Jones: I would say stick with classic.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I wouldn't recommend it as a strategy. If it's your personality and you can't resist, you'll probably still get callbacks.

Sadie Jones: I agree, but I would definitely make sure that you're wearing a suit. If you have an issue where you don't have a suit, talk to your career services. You can borrow one; there are lots of options. In terms of what to bring I would make sure that you have copies of your resume, and transcript, and writing samples. Anything you think someone might ask for.

Alison Monahan: I think that's a great point because oftentimes the people doing these interviews, you want to think that they've slaved away reviewing your materials for hours beforehand. Reality is they might have been handed them as you're walking in the door, or they might have not even been handed them. I definitely

had callbacks where I was like, "I'm sorry. They never gave me a copy of any of your materials. Could I please have a resume?"

Sadie Jones: I think those things happen all the time. Also, maybe you have an updated resume. You just got on a journal or something new. You want to make sure that they have your most current one.

Alison Monahan: What can people expect both in terms of a setting? Is it usually one person, two people? Is it partners? Is it associates? What kind of questions are they going to be asking?

Sadie Jones: I don't know if students know this, but a lot of on campus interviewers are in hotels.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, that's super weird.

Sadie Jones: Often the setting is a hotel room, which can be awkward.

Alison Monahan: Super weird.

Sadie Jones: Yeah. Usually they try to put the bed away.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, or they have a suite but you can still see it. It's just creepy and weird.

Sadie Jones: There's times where it's not set up well and it's just awkward. I think you have to go in knowing that it may be an awkward situation. Just look past it. The firms that I worked at, we always just sent one person. I know that occasionally there will be two. I have never seen two interviewers work out that well.

Alison Monahan: I feel like I did a lot with two people. Oftentimes it was like they were talking to each other and I was sitting there being like, "Hi. Well, I guess this is going well since everyone is chitchatting amongst themselves."

Sadie Jones: That's exactly what I've noticed. That's why I, as a recruiter, wouldn't send two interviewers.

Alison Monahan: It's a little weird. It can be a weird dynamic.

Sadie Jones: I just don't think it works out that well. Usually it's going to be either a partner or a senior associate, someone with more experience.

Alison Monahan: Oftentimes firms will try to pick someone who went to that school, too. Right?

Sadie Jones: Correct. You try to find someone who has a connection, an alumni or someone who has been involved in events on that campus or know something about it. As a recruiter, sometimes you're just sending whoever is available. There's last minute changes. I think you could expect that most people are experienced

interviewers but they're not always. Sometimes it's you as the person being interviewed needs to be involved in having it go well.

Alison Monahan: I think that's totally true. I think one of the reasons I got a lot of callbacks was probably because I'm a pretty good interviewer. Part of that is literally just rolling with whatever situation is presenting itself. God, I did some weird interviews. Particularity the callbacks, because they're all different. You're in someone's space. You walk in their office and they all have these totally different energies. I remember this one guy, this appellate lawyer in San Francisco, who was really into yoga. His whole office, he was basically meditating when I arrived and the lights are low. We spent the whole time talking about yoga. It was fine.

You get somebody else who is totally frenetic and really high energy. Part of it is you have to adapt to that. I think doing some practice can be great. Also, there are probably certain things on everyone's resume that you can guess people are going to be interested in. You need to have a story ready for that. My resume is really weird. I literally told the same story about why it wasn't so weird and why it was really good for me being a law firm associate to probably 100 people in this process. They all were like, "Okay, great." One bad grade, something like that. Lee has a story about doing really horribly her first semester in Legal Writing, and of course they always talk to her about it. She's like, "Well, look at the next semester. I got the highest grade in the class. Alright, moving on." Whatever it is that's weird or problematic about your resume, I think you've got to be prepared to talk about it confidently.

Sadie Jones: I think those things definitely stand out. I remember the student that we interviewed who the interviewer asked him about, I can't remember if it was a club or some kind of activity they had been in. The student said, "I don't know what you're talking about," and it was on their resume. It was just a horrible moment. You should make sure that there is nothing on your resume that you don't expect to be asked about.

Alison Monahan: For sure. I remember doing an interview once in a callback where the guy was really hard to talk to. We had nothing going on. It was just like I'm dragging to fill 20 minutes or whatever I had with him. I'm casting about for things to talk to him about. I look down and his introspection, which you should always have for this reason. I was like, "Oh, I see you're into cooking. What do you like to cook?" Can there be a more softball question than that? He goes, "Oh, well. I guess it's something I'm interested in learning about. I like to watch cooking shows." I was like, "Dude, just make something up. I don't care, just give me something."

Sadie Jones: Just say, "Yeah, I like to bake."

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it doesn't matter. No one cares what your answer is. You just can't put something on your resume like that and not have an answer.

Sadie Jones: I think actually that's a key point with interviews is it doesn't necessarily matter what the substance of what you're saying is. It matters a lot about how you're saying it and how you're able to answer questions.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I remember I was in a clerkship interview and the clerks were interviewing me. One of them was being super aggressive and starts drilling me on the exact contact of my undergraduate honors thesis. At which point I basically started making stuff up because I'm like, "They're not going to know the difference. I don't remember this. They're not going to go to the library at Chapel Hill and pull this out and find the answer." You have to go with it.

Sadie Jones: Exactly. I think that's probably one of the characteristics of being a good lawyer.

Alison Monahan: Right. Particularly litigators. Litigators will definitely go after it, really just for sport, in an interview.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely.

Alison Monahan: If they sense weakness.

Sadie Jones: At one of the firms, actually it was the head of the office, he really took this as his own sport. He went through his stacks of how many people he'd call back, and how many people got offers, and how many people came. It was really just about how-

Alison Monahan: We have one of those people. The spreadsheet guys.

Sadie Jones: Yeah. It was just like what kind of good job did he do as an interviewer?

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and let's face it. Some of these people are lawyers. They maybe shouldn't be talking to strangers. You're going to encounter some weird stuff and I think the rule of thumb is just make the best of it. Keep calm, go with it.

Sadie Jones: I agree.

Alison Monahan: Alright, so let's talk briefly about callbacks. The process is basically you've done these initial interviews, hopefully they went well. You rolled with the punches. Now the firm is like, "Okay, great. We'd love to talk to you. We want you to come back to our office," usually for half a day plus some sort of meal. How does this work, and particularly if people have to interview in a different city? Do they have to pay their own airfare or what goes on here?

Sadie Jones: This is a very set process that is governed by NALP, which is an organization that oversees this whole process. There is actually a set form that the firm you're getting called back to will probably give you, or you can find at the NALP website. You fill it out and you say who you're interviewing with. Then the firm splits the cost between wherever you're going.

Alison Monahan: Right. If you're going to interview with three firms in one city, the first one that invites you doesn't have to pay for everything.

Sadie Jones: Exactly. Now, the person who invites you first will probably say, "Do you want us to be your host firm?" That's just the firm that controls the process so you might as well say yes to the first one.

Alison Monahan: Are they going to book your hotel?

Sadie Jones: Exactly. They're probably going to take care of all the logistics. I would say that it's not required but it's in good faith to book things for one trip to the same city. I wouldn't take advantage of the process if you're a student. You have some events that you want to be there for, that's not really how this should work. You should try to group them in as few trips as possible and you probably don't want to be flying around the country for a month or two.

Alison Monahan: Do I get to fly business class?

Sadie Jones: Probably not. As a recruiter, I looked at things like that. It's very specific what your meal allowance is. I've had a lot of people try to put things through and just give you the credit card receipt, and not the itemized.

Alison Monahan: Not the mini bar. I definitely remember one when I was in San Francisco. A friend of mine came over and he wasn't really thinking. He took some stuff from the mini bar and mixed himself a few drinks before we went out to a concert or something. I remember being the day I'm checking out. Like, "Oh, wait. I need two separate bills for this." I can't submit something with a mini bar thing on it. That's just not acceptable and I can't mark it out because that looks really suspicious. Like, "Were you watching porn?" You need to think about what you're doing and these little things.

Sadie Jones: We did look at things like did they order a movie and try to charge it to us for $19.99 or something.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think this is one of those scenarios where is it going to pay to be conservative?

Sadie Jones: Absolutely. You want to make sure that everyone feels like you're doing things on the up and up, you're not going to be a problem. Because I think all of these things to law firms can be a sign that you're going to be a problem later. You want to be as easy as possible.

Alison Monahan: That's one of the key things they're looking for, right? You do not want to hire a problem child.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely. When I look back at the people who turned out to be those people, usually there was a sign of it very early on in the process. I think what you want

to do is stand out as being someone interesting, and passionate, and smart, but I don't want to stand out as someone who is asking a lot of the firm. That's how you shouldn't be.

Alison Monahan: I think this comes down to simple things like don't complain about a layover if you have to take a layover. Sure, if it's like 12 hours, fine. You can be like, "Hey, can you do something else?" At some point this is time for the two put. You nod, you smile. Like, "That flight seems great. That hotel seems great. Loved the lunch we went to."

Sadie Jones: Exactly. I had a local law student once try to book travel from another city and have me pay for it. Then I had to look back because she went to a law school that was about 30 minutes away. When I called her I said, "I assume this is a mistake." She said, "Well, oh, no. I'm going to be somewhere else for a wedding. I just assumed you would fly me back." It was hard to even book her callback after that because that was not a good sign.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, you don't want to be that person.

Sadie Jones: Exactly.

Alison Monahan: The firms are basically looking for someone who seems competent, responsible, not going to take advantage of things, easy to work with, a person you could put in front of a client. If you're not going to be that person, probably not going to go well. Alright, so give us a basic what happens at a callback. I show up what time, what happens?

Sadie Jones: At the firms I've worked at, we've either done callbacks in the morning or the afternoon. The morning callbacks usually start around 10:00. You see, let's say, three or four attorneys. You go to lunch and you leave after lunch. We always thought lunch was a really important part of it. We would lead towards having morning interviews as much as possible. Because I think you do find out more about candidates during lunch a lot of times more than you do in the formal interviews.

Alison Monahan: What kind of things might you find out?

Sadie Jones: Something to keep in mind is that a lot of times the lunches are with junior associates, so maybe a first or second year. There will usually be two of them with you. I think it's a chance to open up. Something to keep in mind is that you're still on an interview. Even when you're at lunch, don't let your guard down too much. I think it's a time to be a little more relaxed but you wouldn't want to say things you wouldn't say to the last person who interviewed you.

Alison Monahan: Right, because these people are going to be submitting a report on you too.

Sadie Jones: Exactly. I think potentially because they're closer in age to you. I've had people say they're not really interested in the firm. I've had weird things like people take off their shoes.

Alison Monahan: What about drinking?

Sadie Jones: I would never drink at an interview lunch.

Alison Monahan: What if everyone else is?

Sadie Jones: Do not do it. First of all, the interviewer should not be drinking at the interview lunch. I would review every receipt to make sure there wasn't alcohol on it or the person would get in trouble. I did have an interview once when the candidate ordered drinks, no one else did. It was a person we really liked but they didn't get an offer because it was just such a bad sign. There's just no reason to drink at an interview lunch. I think a summer associate lunch when you're working there, even that's questionable but a little more understandable.

Alison Monahan: Then you're not going to get fired on the spot for it, but it might raise some eyebrows.

Sadie Jones: Another thing to keep in mind at interview lunches, order something that's easy to eat.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and not the most expensive.

Sadie Jones: Exactly. Do middle of the road. I would say follow what the interviewers are doing. If they order appetizers and entrees, you can do that too. I wouldn't order something where you have to use your hands a lot. We had someone order chicken wings once and the whole review of the lunch was all talking about what a mess this candidate was. Just order a sandwich is good. Even salads I think can be hard to eat.

Alison Monahan: What if someone has dietary preferences or restrictions? Should they mention those beforehand?

Sadie Jones: Yeah. A good recruiter should ask you those questions and should ask you if you have dietary restrictions, or practice group interests, or things you're looking for, because they try to make good matches. If they don't ask you and it's something that's strict, I would tell them. I would say if it's something like I don't eat tomatoes-

Alison Monahan: Right, if somebody keeps kosher or they're vegetarian. Maybe I guess gluten free counts these days.

Sadie Jones: Yeah. I would say give them the best chance to make it go well. That's how a schedule will work. You'll meet with the recruiter probably before or after, both.

I think you should remember that whoever you're talking to, you're in the interview. If you're talking to the receptionist, if you're talking to a secretary, if you're talking to the recruiter, all of them can give feedback on you. You want to be polite and not weird.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, don't make a bad impression. Do you think people should send thank you notes either after initial interviews or after callbacks?

Sadie Jones: This is a very controversial topic.

Alison Monahan: Well, tell us.

Sadie Jones: I personally think no. I know other people would disagree with me. My last hiring partner disagreed with me on this. I feel like there's a big chance to mess it up in a thank you note. I've seen that happen more times than I've seen it do anything positive. I would say if you really want to send one I would keep it short. I would proofread it many, many times and have someone else look at it because the last thing you want is a typo in a thank you note in an email or paper note.

Alison Monahan: Right, so if we are going to send them do you think email or paper?

Sadie Jones: I think email.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I agree.

Sadie Jones: Because I think paper just gets thrown away. I would probably mention one specific thing about that experience with that interviewer, and just make sure that it's accurate and you're not confusing them with someone else.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, those were the only ones that I ever found made any, I mean not even that they necessarily moved the needle, but maybe they moved it a little bit. If somebody wrote me an email or even a note that they clearly had mailed that morning or that day and said, "Hey, I really enjoyed meeting with you. Thanks so much for taking the time. I enjoyed hearing more about this case that we talked about. Thanks a lot."

Sadie Jones: I agree. I think maybe I take back not sending them at all, but only send them in cases where you feel like you had a very strong connection with the person.

Alison Monahan: I don't think they're necessary, and I agree with you. I don't think they're necessarily going to move the needle that much, but as you say if you screw it up they'll move it in the wrong direction. Finally, we're running out of time, but let's wrap up with a few questions that we get a lot. Is it a disadvantage, and I guess at what extent is it a disadvantage, to interview in cities where you don't really have strong connections or your law school is not located, and what can people do about that?

Sadie Jones: I think it's tough but I think that if there's a very specific reason that you want to be in another location that it's absolutely something that you can do. I think the key is to make sure you have a solid story. Like I said before, the story can't be, "I think San Francisco is very similar to Brooklyn and I really like Brooklyn."

Alison Monahan: I had someone tell me, "I think San Francisco is my spirit city." I'm like, "Yeah."

Sadie Jones: What I would say is I wouldn't lie, but I would say that you can really focus on some connection that you have and maybe make it stronger than it actually is. Like you said, I think it could be family, a significant other. I think it could be an experience you had in that place. I think law firms definitely want to know why you want to be there, so just make sure that your story is solid if you're looking at somewhere where you've never lived and there's no obviously reason.

Alison Monahan: In that case I think you just have to play up what's unique about that city. If somebody came to me and they were like, "I really want to work in San Francisco because I'm very interested in the Silicon Valley ecosystem. I interned in law school for blah, blah, blah. I took this class on start-ups," whatever. You can sell that.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely. I think the thing with law firms is they don't want to take a risk on someone who doesn't really want to be there. On the other hand, I think that law students want to find their real job during their summer associate position so they probably wouldn't take a position somewhere where they didn't want to end up.

Alison Monahan: Some cities it’s less of an issue. If you're interviewing in New York, nobody really cares. They just assume you want to be in New York. It's really outside of New York that you've got to ...

Sadie Jones: I think the West Coast especially has had bad experiences with people who end up not wanting to be there, or try to transfer to another office. I think they had smaller summer classes and they feel like it was a waste.

Alison Monahan: I ran into that even when I lived in San Francisco for years. Then I went to law school in New York and I came back. I was interviewing with a San Francisco firm and they didn't give me an offer. I have some interior scoop so somebody told me why. They were like, "Well, basically because you're in New York and we didn't think that you really wanted to come back to San Francisco yet." I was like, "Okay." I think that was actually a lunch screw up too. I think I was a little too honest at lunch, but live and learn.

Sadie Jones: I told you the lunches will get you every time.

Alison Monahan: No, they did because you're just chatting away and they're like, "Well, you know." I was like, "Well, I don't know. I haven't really decided. I'm interviewing

both in New York and in San Francisco. I really like San Francisco but I really like New York." That's not what I should have been saying.

Sadie Jones: Like you said, you live you learn.

Alison Monahan: Exactly. I was trying to be honest but maybe honesty is not the best policy. Speaking of, what kind of questions are and are not appropriate to ask in these interviews?

Sadie Jones: I would say it depends on the firm but my general advice would be I would stick with pretty substantive questions about the work and that particular firm. I would probably stay away from too much about work/life balance. I think you can ask about pro bono especially if the firm, it's a really big deal to them, but I wouldn't make it too much of a focus in an interview.

Alison Monahan: I think that's right.

Sadie Jones: Ultimately, these firms are for profit companies. That's not necessarily the main goal. A lot of law students I think talk about it because they think it's something interesting to talk about, but you don't want to firm leaving with the impression that that's the reason you're coming.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I went to ask someone in New York like, "Oh," because you talk about the pro bono practice, I was basically just killing time. He's like, "Well, to be perfectly honest if that's something you are really interested in you should probably go somewhere else." I was like, "Okay."

Sadie Jones: I think that that's probably more honest than a lot of interviewers.

Alison Monahan: I was like, "Fair enough." You wouldn't believe it, I had some crazy interviews. I think one of my favorite questions if you're running out of stuff to talk about and you need to kill some time is always, particularly for associates, what kind of stuff are you working on? Could you give me a sense of what your average day looks like?

Sadie Jones: That's what I was going to say. Especially with junior associates, I think that's great because it's a real question. It's something you're going to know, that's what you're going to be doing later so you want to hear about what they really have to say.

Alison Monahan: Also, people like talking about themselves.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely. Think a few of those questions that you always have prepared. Because I also think it's pretty bad if someone says, "Do you have any questions," and you just say no.

Alison Monahan: Right, or you have one and the interview still has ten more minutes to go. It's like you need to come up with some stuff. You need to be able to have a conversation basically.

Sadie Jones: I think you need at least five in your pocket, just in case.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, because you never know. You might encounter that person who has just nothing to say as an interviewer. You're going to have to carry the ball, telling some stories, asking some questions, for basically the entire half hour.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely. I think that says a lot about you that you can do that. Yeah, I would say that some of those more fluffy questions you can ask once you have an offer.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, don't talk at lunch about how many hours are you billing. What you can do in this situation is once you have the offer it's very acceptable basically to go back and do another interview, or another lunch. Then you can ask those questions.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely. I think you just want to get the offer.

Alison Monahan: Exactly. Eye on the ball here. Eye on the prize. Get the offer and then decide. In fact, that was actually my final question to you. What factors should students consider when they're selecting an offer, assuming that you have several to choose from?

Sadie Jones: My number one is always the people because I do think that law firms, especially in big law, are very similar. They might have slightly different cultures. They're in different cities. They're different sizes but ultimately you're probably going to be doing good work. You're going to be working a lot so you want to feel like you fit in with the people at the firm.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think you have to be a little careful here because obviously they're trotting out their most personable people to do these interviews.

Sadie Jones: That's why I would do, like you said, a follow up visit.

Alison Monahan: If you're on a different side of the country, maybe you do a couple of phone interviews. It doesn't have to be that you fly back across the country for lunch.

Sadie Jones: I agree. Because you want a big enough sample size that you feel like they didn't just give you their four normal people.

Alison Monahan: Right. As always, be careful. If you're a non-traditional law student and they give me the new mother, it's like, "This is not an accident."

Sadie Jones: Yes. I would never try to do something that obvious, but I'm sure a lot of people would. I think that's really important. I think I wouldn't make an offer based on AmLaw rankings. I remember a summer associate that we had really tried to recruit hard and went somewhere else that I knew the person would not be happy at. It was completely not their personality. They wanted to be the cooler guy and not the nerdy guy, and picked that law firm. Then at the end of the summer called me and said, "Are you looking at 3Ls?"

Alison Monahan: You're like, "I'm so shocked to hear from you."

Sadie Jones: I just said, "I'm really sorry but we picked our summer class and that's going to be our incoming class." The thing is he had told me at the time before that this other firm was ranked five spots higher. I would never make a decision based on that. I think that if it's in the same range it's probably fine.

Alison Monahan: They're all basically the same.

Sadie Jones: Yeah. I think you want to look at the people. I think you want to look at what practice areas you're interested in. I think you want to get the feeling that people are busy, that the firm's doing well. All of those kind of things. I think just going back and getting to know people better usually solidifies your decision.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think that's true. Also in terms of practice areas, sure a lot of firms do everything but are they really known for the area? One of the firms I summered at, they were really known as a corporate firm and I wanted to do litigation. They sold me really hard on this idea of, "No, no, no. We're really litigation too." I get there and you find out that's not really true. You have to be a little skeptical of the line that you're getting in some of these interviews and just really do your due diligence. You're going to be a lawyer, you should be capable of doing some due diligence in finding out what the reality is like at these places.

Sadie Jones: I think the people you really should talk to are former summer associates, people who are a year older than you, because they're going to tell you the truth. That's what I would say.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think that's fair. Even young alums from your school might be more likely. If you go for coffee they might be a little more likely. They might also lie to you. You just have to accept there are a lot of people shading the truth at least here.

Sadie Jones: I think most people give you some good, some bad, but I wouldn't rely on things like surveys. Their summer associate surveys, mid-level surveys.

Alison Monahan: Well, this one got a 4.7 and this one got a 4.8 so obviously I should go to the 4.8. It's like, "Really?"

Sadie Jones: Yeah, it's a ridiculous curve those surveys. I would also just say on a final note that if you have a bunch of offers and you know there are firms that you don't want to be at, I would say no to them early because you're taking that away from your classmates. Maybe they're waiting to make more offers. I would say maybe you do need extra time and you're trying to figure it out, but I would be as honest as possible.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, if you're holding six offers, come on. You're not really seriously considering all six of these. Get it down to the two or three you're most serious about and let somebody else have that spot who actually wants it.

Sadie Jones: Yeah. I think people remember even students who they made offers to years ago. You never know when it's going to come back around and maybe you end up at that firm later. I think you just always want to make sure you never did anything that left anyone with a bad taste in their mouth.

Alison Monahan: Absolutely. I think that's the goal of this entire process. Don't make yourself memorable for bad reasons.

Sadie Jones: Exactly.

Alison Monahan: Alright, well unfortunately with that we are out of time. Hopefully this has been helpful. Thank you so much for joining us.

Sadie Jones: Thank you.

Alison Monahan: If you enjoyed this episode of the Law School Toolbox podcast please take a second to leave a review and rating on iTunes, or your favorite listening app, because we would really appreciate it. Be sure to subscribe so you don't miss anything. If you have any questions or comments don't hesitate to reach out to Lee or Allison 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. We'll talk soon and good luck at OCI.

Resources:

- Podcast Episode 3: Mastering the On-Campus Interviewing (OCI) Process
- Podcast Episode 4: Callback Tips for BigLaw Summer Associate Positions
- Podcast Episode 55: An Overview of BigLaw On-Campus Interviewing
- Podcast Episode 85: Surviving as a Summer Associate and New Firm Lawyer (with Grover Cleveland)
- Ahead of the Curve: What are BigLaw Recruiters Really Looking For?
- How to Prepare for OCI Interviews
- Dressing Like a Lawyer on a Student's Budget