Episode 2: Why is Law School Hard?

Alison Monahan: Hello and welcome to the Law School Toolbox podcast. We're here to help you get the most out of your law school experience. Your Law School Toolbox hosts are Alison Monahan:, that's me, and Lee Burgess:. We're the co creators of the Law School Toolbox, Bar Exam Toolbox, and the Catapult Conference, along with the Trebuchet Legal Career site.

I also run the Girl's Guide to Law School in all of my spare time. Each episode of the Law School Toolbox podcast is designed to demystify the law school and early legal career experience so you'll be the best law student and lawyer you can be. We'll talk about academics, careers, and life, since all three are critical to success and happiness.

If you enjoy the show, please leave a review for us on iTunes. And if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to us. You can always reach us via the contact form on LawSchoolToolbox.com. Or by emailing Alison, A L I S O N, or lee, L E E, at LawSchoolToolbox.com. And with that, let's get started.

In this episode, we'll be talking about why law school is hard. Stay tuned.

Welcome back. In our prior episode, we talked about mindset and how important it is to work on cultivating a growth mindset. Today we're going to talk about why law school is hard. Not to scare you, but to provide context and alert you to some of the challenges you might face. Forewarned is forearmed. And remember, a challenge, seen the right way, is just an opportunity for growth and learning.

So let's get started. Well, Lee, first off, how hard do you think law school is, really? Would you say it's the hardest thing you've ever done?

Lee Burgess: Well, I think law school definitely was a challenging time because of the intensity of the studies and the pressure and the academic rigor. I think the academics are definitely different than many of us experienced when we were in undergrad.

And then you finish out your law school experience with the bar exam, which is no joke either. But, I'll be honest, I had a baby a year ago, and giving birth was pretty challenging, both mentally and physically. And learning to be a parent and function with little to no sleep? That has been much harder than a lot of my law school experience.

So I think that, you know, it's one of the things that you need to kind of consider when you start the experience is what about the law school experience is going to be hard for you based on possibly your personality type. But to also try and

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maybe keep a little bit of perspective because it still is a voluntary experience that is just going to school and if it becomes much more than that, if it becomes something that really weighs on you or makes you miserable, then maybe it's not a great fit.

Alison Monahan: No, I agree with that. I mean, I think for me, I'd have to say law school was probably not as hard as certain other things that I'd done. For example, for me, architecture school, I did a master's in architecture for three years and I have to say that was much, much, much more challenging. Part of the reason though, is because that was something that I wasn't inherently very good at.

And I think, you know, that's always a consideration for people who go to law school. Sometimes they're things that, you know, you're just actually not that well suited for. And for me, that was architecture school. So, you know, that experience of really being sort of faced with my own inability, or I guess it was an inability, you know, to do something.

And in fairness, like I did graduate, I could have been an architect. It wasn't impossible, but that to me was more difficult than law school because law school is something that, you know, my sort of natural inclinations and talents and skills were pretty well suited to. But that being said, I mean, I think outside of the academic context, law school is a real challenge for me.

And that was something I wasn't necessarily expecting. You know, as I'll talk about maybe later on in this episode or in other episodes, the first year I found myself clinically depressed and I was really miserable. And, you know, there are all these other things that just really were not going so well.

So I think when we think about how hard law school is, there's not really, One answer, it's gonna vary based on your own personal talents and inclinations, but also, you know, your own experience. I don't know. I think there are a lot of things about it that are pretty difficult.

Lee Burgess: I also think that the culture itself fosters this idea that.

It is something that is incredibly stressful. I mean, going into law school, everybody reads the books, like the Paper Chase and 1L, and I think we start the experience thinking, like, this is going to be the hardest thing I've ever done, or this is going to be incredibly difficult, and if I'm not struggling, I'm doing something wrong.

And I don't necessarily think that's the best way to enter the experience. It's most people don't enter it with a ton of optimism.

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Alison Monahan: It's definitely true. No, and I agree with that. I mean, ultimately it's just school. , you know, and I don't think most people set out for their undergraduate degree thinking like this is going to be the worst four years of my life.

But I think a lot of people do take that approach to law school. Like this is going to be so miserable. And I'm going to be so unhappy, and it's going to be so hard. And, yeah, I mean, that's probably not the most productive way to go into it.

Lee Burgess: And I think it even goes back to when people select a law school. You know, when people talk to me about which law schools they should attend, I think there are tons and tons of considerations that you should take into, something we can go into much further detail about in a future podcast. But one of the things I think that people often forget is, are you going to enjoy being there?

You know, are you going to school in a location that you're excited about? Are you going to enjoy being part of that culture? You know, if you really hate an ultra competitive culture, maybe that's not a great fit to go to an ultra competitive law school where there's a lot of competition between the students or commuter law schools.

You know, some people really want a community and some law schools, people drive into campus and then drive out and live somewhere far away. And I think you have to think about all of these things when you pick your law school to see if you're going to like the law school experience. I mean, I think people pay more attention to stuff like this in undergrad, because I think graduate school scene is something a little bit different.

But I don't know why you shouldn't take in a lot of the same considerations you would take into picking a graduate school that you did when you selected an undergrad.

Alison Monahan: No, I think that's absolutely right. I mean, for me, basically, the reason I went to law school is I wanted to live in New York and people are like, Oh, you know, you didn't apply to Harvard or Yale.

I'm like, I didn't want to live in New Haven. I didn't want to live in Boston. And it's just considered this like, Oh, but you, you know, if you apply to like one fancy school, you have to apply to all of them. Like, what are you doing? And I just found that to be kind of crazy. Like, you know, and for me, it was also like, I'd been living in California and I remember I actually filled out the application to Bolt at Berkeley.

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I had the entire thing in an envelope with the postage on it, ready to put into the mail. And I couldn't bring myself to mail it because the reality was I didn't want to go back to Berkeley. So, yeah, I think that's sort of the right.

Lee Burgess: And I really had just moved to San Francisco a year before I went to law school and I was in love with living in the Bay Area and I didn't want to leave and I got into other law schools outside of the Bay Area and I just really had this, you know, clarity moment where I was like, well, to be happy, I think I want to stay here and build a life here.

This is where I want to be.

Alison Monahan: That's a totally valid consideration.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, and I'm not going to be happy if I move away from this place where I'm very happy. To go to school in an area I'm not going to enjoy living. That just didn't make sense to me. And so I think for me, it became a very important consideration.

So, in sum, law school is really hard, but you can do things with your decision making, I think, to make it a little easier to take.

Alison Monahan: Right, or to make it a lot harder to take. You know, if you're someone who doesn't like cold weather, and you decide that you're going to go to law school in Minnesota, you've probably made it a lot harder than it needs to be.

Lee Burgess: But don't you think, you know, going back to our last discussion on mindset, You know, one of the things we talked about was this idea of failure, which is something that most people experience as part of the law school , experience. And I think that one of the things that's making law school harder is that a lot of people are really struggling with failure, and nobody wants to talk about failure anymore.

There just seems to be this huge pressure to be perfect, and I think if you go into law school thinking that You're supposed to be perfect, or you're not supposed to stumble along the way, that it can really increase anxiety and make it a much more difficult experience than it, that you come at it from that growth mindset and really look at it as an opportunity where you're going to stretch and grow to be successful versus it's, you're a genius and it's going to come easily to you.

Alison Monahan: Right. And I mean, I feel like law school has always been a challenging undertaking. I mean, you just have to look at things like the paper chase that you

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mentioned, or that Scott Turow book, 1L. You know, these were in the seventies or whatever, and people were struggling then too. But I wonder if it's harder in some ways for this new generation of students.

I mean, I'm thinking about everything from the onslaught of social media and sort of always on culture of the internet and our iPhones, the proliferation of these helicopter parents who want to, you know, raise kids who've been protected from struggling. What do you think? I mean, do you think law school is getting even harder to handle?

Lee Burgess: I mean, in a lot of ways, I think it could be. You know. For one thing, I think with the social media and the internet, the noise has gotten really loud. It's very hard. I think it used to be that you just kind of went to school and you studied and that was it. And now, you know, people get really sucked into reading lots of articles about crazy things that are happening in law school or what they're supposed to be like.

Or they start reading articles and freaking out about their job hunt. Or, you know, they really take on this information overload and they create. This world for themselves where they're supposed to be ingesting information about all of these different topics as well as being successful in school and then looking perfect on your social media.

And that's got to be an exhausting way to live. You know, it's, It's definitely become a more complicated existence than I think it used to be. And, you know, my contracts professor actually wrote the paper chase, the book, and he was not super intimidating like the professor in the paper chase. I can't remember the professor's name.

Do you remember the professor's name from the paper chase?

Alison Monahan: I actually never bring myself to watch that.

Lee Burgess: Really? Okay, well-

Alison Monahan: I, we, we started it. It was one of those things I remember from my first semester, maybe around Thanksgiving. We thought like, oh, this would be a great, like, relaxing thing to do and we started watching the paper chase, and about ten minutes into it my roommate and I looked at each other and were just like, we can't do this.

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Lee Burgess: Which is probably wise. Yeah. Yeah. So, um, but anyway, he was not an intimidating person at all, actually, who's very, very nice, kind of very kind professor. But, you know, even those kind of intimidating stories, I have to wonder, you know, what the existence described in the paper chase and what I'll would it be like in this new age of everything being online, all of this information, all of this connectivity, I think it would be even more overwhelming than the experience that people had back then.

Alison Monahan: I think that's right. I mean, you know, there's a recent article in the New York Times about undergraduate suicides, and that was one of the things they're really mentioning is that, It's so easy. And, you know, we all do this to look at someone else's Instagram feed or Facebook feed and think, man, you know, they're so perfect.

They have the perfect life. They have the perfect kid. I mean, you know, look at you, Lee, like got this adorable baby. And you know, people, it's easy for people to be like, Oh God, like. Lee is like, everything in Lee's life is perfect, you know, then I get the email where like, my kid just threw up on me.

Lee Burgess: Right, I did walk back from the coffee shop covered in baby vomit yesterday morning. Yes.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. And you haven't, you know, you haven't slept for days and he's not sleeping and you know, all these things. Like I know the reality, but someone who's looking at Facebook is like, wow, she is just. So perfect, right?

Lee Burgess: I spend Friday afternoons in the park with my beautiful kid taking adorable pictures. Yeah, that's only a very, you know, that's a snapshot of life, but yeah, you don't necessarily share the mucky stuff. And who really wants to hear about the vomit story, except all of our podcast listeners right now necessarily vomit story.

Alison Monahan: But you know, I think that the same thing applies in law school. Like there's pressure, particularly, I mean, and some of this actually I think comes from a lot of the state bar associations where they're, they can cause problems, you know, for people who seek out treatment for mental health issues and things like that, which, you know, I think is probably a violation of the ADA and also a terrible idea, but it happens.

You know, so occasionally I'll hear from someone who's like, you know, I really think I need, I need help. And I'm afraid that this is going to impact my bar

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admissions. What should I do? And of course I tell them you should do what you need to do and get the help that you need and worry about the rest of this later.

But you know, it's this thing about like we're lawyers. We have to be so perfect. We have to be in control all the time. And I think that really starts in law school.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I mean, I think that some of the dialogue around this is at least shifting a little bit in the legal profession. I think, you know, the mindfulness community is really starting to be honest about some of the realities and the emotional realities of being a lawyer and ways to cope with things better.

But, You know, there's a reason why most law schools actually have programs to get students counseling for free. It's because law students need a lot of counseling.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. And there's actually a great article on this. We'll have to put it in the show notes. I can't remember the exact title, but something about being a happy, healthy member of an unhealthy profession.

And we're going to talk a little bit about this in a later episode. But you know, that is kind of what you're dealing with in a lot of ways, is how you are going to be And going to be healthy and happy in this environment that is not necessarily conducive to that. All right. Well, let's talk a little bit more specifically about some of the difficult aspects of law school.

Because at least for me, and I found this to be true about being a lawyer as well, the difficulties weren't necessarily just from the schoolwork or the work aspects. I mean, things weren't academically easy, and it's certainly not easy doing the work of a lawyer. But often getting my work done seemed to be the least of my worries.

It was things like jobs and overall well being that were the real challenge. So I want to talk about those, but first let's at least touch on the academic aspects, because those are probably the concerns that most people have immediately.

Lee Burgess: For sure.

Alison Monahan: I mean, I think it's true law school is different, but And typically more challenging than your average undergraduate program.

Do you agree with that?

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Lee Burgess: I think so. I also think it's just a different beast. It depends, I guess, on what your academic program as an undergraduate was. I had some friends who were maybe pre med or did some of the hard sciences, and they found law school to be not that different because a lot of that structured study that they did in undergrad was really exam based, so they were used to-

Alison Monahan: And very curved.

Lee Burgess: Right, and very curved and very competitive, and they were used to, you know, studying for one big, O Chem exam. Whereas I was a psychology and media studies major. So, you know, I did a lot more projects and papers and I did take exams, but by the time I was a junior and senior, the exams were few and far between. And they really were a regurgitation of stuff that we had covered in class, it wasn't anything new, you know, and I think the law school exam and the law school semester of how it's set up with very little feedback, oftentimes you just get one grade at the end of the semester, and the way that they test you is by giving you, you know, what we call a hypothetical or a fact pattern that's this made up, ridiculous scenario, That you have to apply law to, and that's a completely different type of exam than, you know, discuss the pros and cons of this philosophical theory that maybe mimics a lecture that one of your professors gave in a class.

So I think that the academics themselves are much different, and if you didn't come from an academic background where you were forced to memorize verbatim a ton of information and then apply it to a situation on exam, then this is going to feel really different and it definitely felt different for me.

I had a learning curve about the academics when I got there and to not have any feedback or check ins all semester, it's really nerve wracking. You get one shot to get your whole grade. Some schools are now doing midterms, which I think is great, but still I think the majority of law students out there are just going to get one final exam at the end of the semester.

Alison Monahan: No, that's right. I mean, it's interesting. My undergraduate background, technically I was a sociology major, which it was what you're talking about. I could do independent studies. I could write papers. I mean, it was kind of a joke, but I was also pre med for a while, you know, so I was pre med through second semester of organic chemistry.

And at that point I decided I didn't want to go to med school, stopped studying, got the worst grade I've ever gotten in my life, I was very, very, very happy to get

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out of that class, but I think it was a C minus. And I had actually calculated. The exact grade I needed on my final to pass. And I think it was like a D plus and I barely, I barely eked it out.

But yeah, I mean, in some ways law school is a lot like that because you would learn all the stuff and you had to memorize all of these different ways that like the chemicals could interact or whatever. I don't really remember. It was a nightmare. And then you get this exam that looked nothing like what you had done.

And if you hadn't practiced how to do that exam, like you were basically in a world of trouble. So I think, yeah, I think it does depend. I mean, people who come from the hard sciences, or from particular schools, or who are used to being in a very competitive way. I mean, my first year of college was actually at Rice, and there they do a much more strict curve.

So I was at least used to that. But I mean, frankly, you know, at most undergraduate institutions these days, there's massive grade inflation. If there's a curve, it's probably to like an A minus. , and I think a lot of people just are not used to that level of competition. And also the fact that, you know, the, the academics themselves, as you said, they are challenging, you know, there's a difference between just regurgitating information and actually having to put a lot of information together and use it.

That's, you know, several more steps, basically, in logic, and it's not that easy.

Lee Burgess: I also think that Law students forget that while they may have been incredibly successful in their undergrad, people who choose to go to graduate school, most of them were very successful in undergrad and liked school or they wouldn't continue going to school.

Alison Monahan: Well, and they wouldn't be admitted.

Lee Burgess: Right, and they wouldn't be admitted. So there's a filter here. There is a filter and so I also think you, you know, you walk into your law school class and you kind of have to remind yourself that pretty much everyone in the room was successful. That's all. their last academic endeavor.

And so when then you curve those people, someone who is used to doing really well is not going to do as well. And that's a really hard wake up call. And if you've never had that experience before, if you have never, struggled academically and had to learn from that, I think it can be a real shock to your system.

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And if you don't have the right mindset, 'cause we have to keep going back to that.

Alison Monahan: Ding ding.

Lee Burgess: I know. It can really knock you backwards and make you think, well, maybe I'm just not supposed to be a lawyer. Maybe I'm not smart enough. You know, et cetera, et cetera.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. There's a great study that came out, I think one of the LSAT companies does it every year, did it where they asked incoming law students, um, you know, how many of you think you're gonna be in the top 10% of your class? How many of you think that you're gonna be in the top 50%? I think about 90% of them were pretty sure they would be in the top half.

And about 40 or 50 percent thought they're going to be in the top 10. So, you know, that tells you something about the expectations that the average law student probably has coming in.

Yeah. You know, I also think that school can be kind of hard because class. Isn't necessarily very exciting. I mean, did you find all your law school classes to be really interesting and exciting when you started?

Lee Burgess: This is why I tell people not to to bring their laptops. Cause all we did in class was like, Yeah, play solitaire. And then it was one class that we particularly hated first year. And as my friend, who had been an it guy would actually set up a group chat, like in the class. And so that, you know, a hundred people are in the classroom or whatever and And maybe 20 or 30 of them are in this group chat room and people are making jokes and some people are breaking out laughter all over the classroom for no apparent reason. I mean, it was horrible. It was a horrible thing to have done, the poor professor. But he was terrible. He was such a terrible professor. It was like the only thing you could do to stay alive.

So the thing is, though, to totally date ourselves, did you have Wi Fi when you started?

Alison Monahan: Yes.

Lee Burgess: Okay, see, we didn't have Wi Fi my first year on campus, which was actually kind of a blessing, because you had to get out the hard Ethernet cable, and then the professor would look at you.

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Alison Monahan: And like, why do you need that?

Lee Burgess: Why do you need the big, long ethernet cable to plug in during class? Because there's really only one reason to turn on the internet during class, and that's to do something other than pay attention in class. So, that would kind of help the first year, but then the second year, yeah, for some of the painful classes, one of them specifically was my corporations class, that, I don't, I guess I would have lived through it without the internet, but I probably indulged a little more than I should have in hindsight.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean, in hindsight, you know, it was all kind of stupid. Like, you're paying a lot of money to be there, you should be paying attention, but I mean, yeah, like you said, a lot of the stuff is not that interesting, a lot of the reading load can be extremely boring and tedious, a lot of these cases are a hundred years old and not particularly well written, you know, it's a struggle, frankly, to make yourself care about any of the stuff sometimes.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I mean, and I think a lot of times too, what can be frustrating is even if you are dialed in and paying attention, the law is not always clear cut. And so if you're coming in looking for the right answer to everything, a lot of the law, the beautiful answer is it depends.

Alison Monahan: Oh, it always depends. I remember one time when I was working as a judicial clerk.

And my co-clerk turned to me and said, so do you think you could make an argument? Blah, blah, blah. And I just sort of looked at her and I said, of course I could make that argument. I'm a lawyer, , you know? And I think, I mean, for me, like I have a programming background and the thing about that is it can be challenging, but at a certain point it either works or it doesn't work.

Lee Burgess: Mm-Hmm.

Alison Monahan: And there's not that kind of clear cut like you're right or you're wrong. It, you know, it is or it isn't in law. I mean, the law, as you said, is all about it depends, and I think. That can also be challenging for people who are used to sort of looking up the answer in a book and you know you look it up in the workbook and either you're right or you're wrong and that's just not really what this is about.

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Lee Burgess: I remember I was helping my dad who's a private criminal defense attorney with an appellate brief and I sent him an email and said I've come up with this argument, but I don't know if you want me to include it. And I think his response was, could I stand up and make it without laughing?

Alison Monahan: it the straight face test?

Lee Burgess: Right. The straight face. And then he's like-

Alison Monahan: I was talking to a student about this the other day. He's like, I just don't know if this is the best argument. I'm like, let me explain something to you. Can you make it with a straight face? Put it in the brief.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. And you realize that, you know, the gray area is really where the magic happens in the law, you know?

And if people didn't make crazy arguments, we wouldn't have a lot of. You know, precedent out there. Sometimes it's the crazy arguments that actually make a difference.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. So I mean, compounding all these academic challenges, you've got this general social environment. In most law schools, people say it's like going back to high school and in some ways I think it really is.

I mean, the level of gossip and backstabbing and that sort of thing, it's just off the charts, especially from people who are theoretically grownups. Do you have any theories on why this is? I mean, why do law students behave so weirdly all the time?

Lee Burgess: I think somewhat it is the stuff that we've been talking about, about the competition and the feeling like this experience is supposed to be so negative and all consuming.

I think people almost come into the experience like they're ready to fight. Even though it's just going to class.

Alison Monahan: It's like, it's a battle. It's a war. They're going to be at the top of the heap. It's like, really? You're just going to school.

Lee Burgess: I know, exactly. And people get, I think, really obsessed with the competition.

And I think some people try and reinvent themselves into this lawyer persona that they think they want to be, which can be kind of awkward. So I, I think that

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sometimes it's just the environment itself kind of really brings out some strange parts of all of our personalities. Maybe not our best parts.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, definitely not the best. I mean, I think that, you know, when you have the small section where you've got the same people, it's kind of like Stockholm syndrome or something almost, maybe it's the opposite of that. I don't know. Maybe that doesn't make sense, but you know, it's like, you've got 50 people and they're all together all the time and competing for the same resources.

Maybe it's like the lion, you know, show at the zoo or whatever, but,

yeah, it's like you're stuck with these people that maybe you would never want to interact with. And it's not like college where you just take a different class and you get different people. I mean, some schools, thank God my school was not one of them, but you know, you have the same people in your 1L section for every class for an entire year.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that was me. Actually, we had that. Yeah, it's a lot. And then there's this pressure. People think they have to create these study groups, which is something we can talk about on a different podcast. But, you know, there's all this competition of like, who's going to be in your study group. And if you're not-

Alison Monahan: We had the funniest, like I heard this story, I thought there was no way this was true, but it was true. Like my first, A few weeks of school where someone who was in my class had formed a study group, but it was only, he was only accepting people who'd gone undergraduate at Yale and, or maybe it was Harvard. And I heard the story from a friend who'd gone to Yale and it was just like, Oh my God, are you kidding me?

Like, what is wrong with you people?

Lee Burgess: Yeah, here, here's just a short of it. Study groups don't mean you're gonna do well in law school, so don't worry about it.

Alison Monahan: No, you don't have to be in one with people just from Harvard.

Lee Burgess: No, exactly. And then I think that, you know, as we've talked about, because it is. com, It's actually a very stressful experience that it can kind of challenge you in ways you haven't been challenged before.

I think a lot of law students don't have great coping skills, which is why people drink a lot, they act out, they get depressed, they To stop taking care of

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themselves. I mean, you can kind of sometimes see people start to unravel throughout the semester.

Alison Monahan: Yes.

Lee Burgess: You know, where you start wearing the same fleece and jeans all the time.

Like I did at certain points in the semester.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Or in my case, like you start dropping a lot of weight and suddenly people are like, are you okay? And you're like, Oh, great. Everything's fine. The reality is I'm clinically depressed and probably anorexic.

Lee Burgess: And I think there's not necessarily an environment where people are open to talking about it.

And I think that that kind of feeling like you need to have that persona of everything's okay is very exhausting, you know, as we were saying, can be exhausting and kind of an external context of like what's on social media and things like that. But even within your law school community, you don't want to be the person who's really struggling.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean, you know, the irony is, I think at one point, like everyone that I was friends with had started therapy. I mean, maybe this was a New York thing, but you know, in the end, I mean, I look at going into therapy and law school is one of the best decisions that I ever made. I mean, law school basically had made me crazy at that point.

So, you know, I think that I think the reality is basically most people are struggling. And if you find yourself in that position, it's better to get help early and not let things really spiral out of control because with the pressure that you're in academically, You know, it's easy for things to get really out of control and that's not something that you want to, you want to nip things in the bud early.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I had a friend who actually was telling me that she went to the doctor because she was having heart palpitations and she thought she was having issues with her heart and the doctor at our student services at our school looked at her and was like, That would be stress. This happens to a lot of students.

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Alison Monahan: After graduation, I'd moved from my clerkship and I started having these heart pains and you know, I finally went to a doctor and they're like, there's nothing wrong with you.

Lee Burgess: And of course they look at you, you're like, you're in your 20s, like, come on.

Alison Monahan: Exactly. And they're like, Oh, you're a lawyer. Yeah, so, okay, this makes a lot more sense now, but I mean, the thing is, like, this stuff really does manifest, you know, and it's really unhealthy to, to live in a constant state of stress and fear that a lot of people are in.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: It can also be really hard on your external relationships, particularly with people who aren't in law school. I mean, I definitely saw a lot of breakups in law school. Did that happen at your school too?

Lee Burgess: Yeah. In fact, my first semester of law school, one of the professors. Brought all of the one else into a room and basically told everybody that if they were in a romantic relationship They were probably gonna break up by Thanksgiving.

Alison Monahan: Nice.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, it was super supportive.

Alison Monahan: Was this meant to be helpful? We might tell you this, but we really do mean to be helpful.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly, but, I I think it is hard on those external relationships, especially if you our, either in a romantic relationship with someone who isn't familiar with the law school experience. Or if you're in a romantic relationship with another law student, I think that that could create a whole sort of conflict. But even friendships can be difficult because you're so consumed with your existence. You know, your friends don't necessarily want to hear about law school all the time. It's not that interesting to people who aren't in the midst of it.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I mean basically I think you pretty much become a total narcissist as a 1L.

Lee Burgess: I think that's true.

Episode 2: Why is Law School Hard?

Alison Monahan: I had a friend in law school who was talking about going out with her boyfriend and some friends after exams and she, or in the, maybe it was like in the middle of exams and she's like, I just realized I have nothing interesting to say anymore. Like I used to be a person who had thoughts on things and had seen recent movies and read just like, I have nothing to contribute at this point.

Lee Burgess: Which is why law students hang out with each other.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. Because then they can talk about school. Yeah, which is like such a horrible thing to do, all the time. Well, I mean, finally, let's not ignore the elephant in the room. The reality is the job market is still pretty bad for new law grads, which means the competition for summer jobs and permanent jobs is really fierce.

How do you see this factor impacting law school?

Lee Burgess: You know, I think it, it causes a lot of anxiety for those students who immediately walk in the door and then think they are battling each other. You know, for the coveted jobs.

Alison Monahan: Right. This Uber sum game.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And you know, I think some people may not even want those coveted jobs, but they think that that's what they're working for.

So they were still battle each other for those jobs.

Alison Monahan: Yes, exactly. It's like the survivor episode of getting a really crap job that you don't actually want.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. Exactly. And you know, I think that's too bad. I think that it's kind of cheating people out of doing a bit of self-exploration and really trying to figure out what law they wanna practice, how they're going to happily fit into the legal profession. And I think it starts the competition from day one where, you know, you can't do much about your job hunt when you walk in the door, the best thing you can do is be very successful and learn the trade. So you can impress people and be a good lawyer.

Alison Monahan: And Lee, that's why I have to beat you down.

So I can get that A, so I can get that job.

Episode 2: Why is Law School Hard?

Lee Burgess: I forgot about that part. That's right. The only way to be successful is to beat other people down to be successful yourself. That's true.

Alison Monahan: Duh, I know.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. So I do think that that just, it's just making things more competitive, because people think like, you know, it's, it really has become Survivor Law School.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, Law School Survivor, please. No, that would not be an interesting, interesting film to watch. The only people who would want to watch that might be law students, or lawyers. Oh, horrible. It would be horrible. Or ex lawyer, or lawyers who want to, like, relive the glory days of, God, that was awful, wasn't it?

Sort of, like, today, like, on Facebook, the bar exam is starting, and, you know, lawyer friends are like, let's tell all the horrible stories about when we took the bar exam. It's like, oh, do I have to relive that? But of course you participate, and you're like, well, there was this time.

Lee Burgess: I know. And you do get sucked in.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, Yeah. Yeah. Well, with that, it's time to wrap up this episode of the Law School Toolbox podcast. Don't worry. In later episodes, we're going to have suggestions for handling all of these potential problem areas. Because law school is challenging, but it's not impossible, and you can do it. If you enjoyed this episode of the Law School Toolbox podcast, please take a second to leave a review and rating on iTunes.

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