# Episode 27: Job Interview Basics

Alison Monahan: Hello and welcome to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today we're talking about interviewing for legal jobs. Your Law School Toolbox hosts are Alison Monahan, that's me, and Lee Burgess. We're here to demystify the law school and early legal career experience so you'll be the best law student and lawyer you can possibly be.

We're the co creators of the Law School Toolbox, Bar Exam Toolbox, the Catapult Conference, and the Trebuchet Legal Career site. I also run the Girl's Guide to Law School. If you enjoy the show, please leave a review on iTunes, and if you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to us. You can always reach us via the contact form on LawSchoolToolbox.com and we would love to hear from you. With that, let's get started.

Lee Burgess: Welcome back. Today, we're talking about interviewing for legal jobs, both for the summer and for permanent legal positions. We'll be discussing lots of different types of job interviews, along with some universal tips that you can use in any interview situation. So with that, let's get started. First up, are there things that every interviewer is likely to be looking for?

What do you think, Alison?

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I do think so. I mean, think about any time that you've worked with someone or thought about hiring someone or anything like that. I mean, you're looking for someone basically who's conscientious, they're hardworking, but also someone who's not annoying or difficult and who's not going to cause problems.

I mean, I think oftentimes it's these negative traits that make people not get hired.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think that's true. I mean, one of the things you're looking for as an interviewer is not only are they a good fit, but are they not a bad fit?

Alison Monahan: Right, I mean because, you know, because everybody wants the perfect candidate, but I think it's actually way worse to hire someone who's a terrible fit.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, yeah, and so I think you know, it's good to keep that in mind during your interview, both like how you're presenting yourself and also how you're answering questions or asking questions.

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Alison Monahan: Yeah. Because I think, and I think this is an important point, sometimes people get really caught up in this idea of, you know, they have to be the perfect interviewer.

They have to be like totally prepped for every single question and they have to have their sales pitch ready to go. I mean, all that stuff's great, but in a lot of cases you don't actually have to really hit the ball out of the park.

Lee Burgess: Mm-Hmm.

Alison Monahan: You just have to avoid making a really critical error .

Lee Burgess: Yeah. No, I think that that's true.

You know, I remember in one of our past podcasts, we talked about being your authentic self, you know, and finding your persona, and I remember the the job, big law job I ended up taking, I thought that was my worst interview of all of them.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, sometimes you just really never know.

Lee Burgess: You just never know what is going to jive with the interviewer.

He was kind of really dry, and he was a bit harsh with me, and I walked out and I was just like, well, there goes that one. And then apparently I was his top candidate. So yeah.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. And this is sort of an important point. I was talking to a friend who's not a lawyer about this recently about interviewing for jobs.

And I think this idea of like, you know, you kind of get who you get as an interviewer and how you respond to that can be really critical. So I know for me, like one of the things I sort of try to do either consciously or subconsciously. is sort of match my energy level to the energy level of the interviewer.

So, you know, if you go in and this guy is like really dry, kind of like slow, not making any jokes, you know, you don't want to go in and be this like, Oh my God, I'm so bubbly. And he's gonna be like, I hate you. You know, but at the same time, if you get someone who is like this really bubbly, high energy personality, and you're sitting there kind of saying like, Yeah. I, yeah, law school is fine. I mean, I like it. Okay. You know, I mean, and again, this goes back to sort of authenticity, but you know, we all have a range of personality types or personality traits we can kind of display, and I think paying attention to the sort

of energy in the room and to kind of matching which pieces of yourself, you know, you're using to that energy can actually be a really effective technique to make people feel comfortable and that's sort of the goal of you as an interviewee is you want this person to feel comfortable thinking, yeah, I could work with them.

Lee Burgess: For sure and I think one of the ways that people can misstep is they actually try too hard instead of taking some of these cues off of the interviewer and then they end up just killing their chances.

You know, you want to be competent and enthusiastic but if you're really over the top that's probably not going to go over well.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, because I mean, these are lawyers typically that you're working with. I mean, obviously if you're interviewing at a corporate position, it might be different because business people tend to look for more of a hard sell in interviews.

Lee Burgess: Mm-Hmm.

Alison Monahan: You know, they, they really want someone who's out there saying like, here's why I'm the perfect person for this job. You know, this is, this is like why you should hire me. If you go into the average legal interview and. This is why I'm the perfect person for the job, and this is why you should hire me.

I think most people are going to be like okay, thanks, crazy person, you know. Like, this is not what they're looking for.

Lee Burgess: Right, or I think sometimes it's a balance too, because the interviewer can also basically think, you know, it's my job to decide if you're exactly what I'm looking for. I think, you know, we've interviewed candidates for various things before where we felt like this, the sell was a little too hard and, you know, that person spent the entire interview telling us why we were so lucky to be interviewing her.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean, that's another one. We've talked before about entitlement in a legal setting for young lawyers, but, you know, someone who walks in as like, I'm the answer to all of your problems, and like, here's why I'm the perfect person to be hired for this job. And you're like, you've never even written a brief.

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Like, what do you know? You don't know anything. Sorry. Like you might have potential and you might be a nice person and we might be able to work with you, but like, seriously, you know, come on.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. Exactly. But I think one of the hard things for law students is a lot of times, this is their first time interviewing for any sort of professional job.

So, yeah, totally. And there are definitely some things that you need to keep in mind. We've talked a few, about a few of these in some of our earlier episodes on professionalism, but they're such critical points I think it's worth running through them again.

Alison Monahan: Yes, absolutely. So what do you think people need to take a look at?

Lee Burgess: Let's start by what you're wearing, our favorite topic.

Alison Monahan: Ah, the classic one.

Lee Burgess: Classic question. I think for men it's a little less complicated than for women because most of the time you should wear a suit unless you're not going to a typical law interview. But I think most of the time you're supposed to wear a suit.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean it's hard for a guy to go wrong basically if they put like a nice suit and tie on.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, but you know, for women, I definitely think your default should be to wear a suit, but again it needs to be appropriate for the setting. Yeah. I mean, you definitely don't want to be less dressed than the other lawyers in the room.

That's a huge mistake.

Alison Monahan: No, absolutely. Like, if anything, you want to be slightly overdressed. I think where people can get in a little bit of trouble with this is if, you know, it's pretty obvious if you're interviewing for, like, a large firm job, you should wear a suit. But when you look at other settings, I mean, again, like, I think, you know, you worked at the U.S. Attorney's Office there. I mean, definitely a suit, right?

Lee Burgess: Oh, yeah. Any government job especially if it involves, like, going to court, all the lawyers will be in suits. And they're much more conservative. And where you are in the country, I mean, back east, everybody's much more conservative generally than in California, so you want to talk to people about what you need to wear.

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Alison Monahan: Right. I think where this gets a little trickier is when people are interviewing at public interest organizations and things like that, or possibly like, you know, not many law students are probably interviewing at corporations, but you know, if you're interviewing at like a startup or something for a summer position is their legal intern, you know, those are the settings where you really want to think carefully about, like, should I be wearing something else?

I mean, I still think you probably can default on the side of slightly more formal, but you know, if you're going into like a really casual organization. You know, maybe you just want to have a blazer instead of a full suit.

Lee Burgess: Or I think you can even hedge your bets a little bit. I think both for men and women.

I mean, for men, it's a little easier because they could always lose the tie quickly if they realize, you know, they're overdressed.

Alison Monahan: If you walk, yeah, if you walk in and you're like way overdressed, like. Put the tie in your briefcase or in your pocket.

Lee Burgess: Exactly.

Alison Monahan: Loosen your top shirt button and suddenly it's a different look.

Lee Burgess: Right, and maybe for women, you know, that's something to think about too. If you're really unsure, maybe you want to, you know, have a blouse or a nice short sleeve sweater or something under your jacket so you could take off your suit jacket if that was appropriate. You know, sometimes I would wear like a tank top shell or something under my suit jacket and that would not be an appropriate thing to, you know, to necessarily wear.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think that's a good point. I think that's a good point. You could hedge your bets. Like, if you had a cute like short sleeve shirt on, you know, with like little puffy sleeves on it and you walked in, you're like, oh my gosh, I'm totally overdressed in this blazer. You can be like, oh wow, it's just so warm in here.

I'm going to take my blazer off. But then, you know, you carry it with you for the rest of the day and no one thinks twice about it. Yeah. But yeah you can't do that if you're wearing a shell.

Lee Burgess: No. But you know I think the other thing that comes up a lot and I think law schools are maybe more conservative with this advice than we are is you don't

have to completely, you know, strip yourself of all your personality and how you're dressing.

Again, I think this is more of an issue for women. But you know, you don't necessarily want to wear something that's going to be outlandish and distracting. But, you know, you don't have to make yourself so dressed down that it doesn't even feel like you anymore. That's not that's not necessarily a good idea in my opinion.

If you don't feel like you can be yourself, then that may not be a good fit for the place you want to work.

Alison Monahan: No, I agree with that. And I think, you know, I think we mentioned this before, you know, if you're really unsure about what to do, you can often go to stores that don't have to be super expensive. It can be like, you know, the J. Crew of the world. You basically go to J. Crew and you tell them like, look, I have an interview coming up. I'm not really sure what to wear. Can you help me with some ideas? Like, I don't want it to be super conservative and really boring, but it's for law. It can't be too crazy. They're used to these questions.

Like they know what to do.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And sometimes they can really help you even create some options. I know Nordstrom is one of my favorite places to do this, if you can go during one of their sales especially, but typically they'll really help you put stuff together and you can even say, like, I need one suit that can look like four different outfits.

Or something like that, you know?

Alison Monahan: Yeah, definitely.

Lee Burgess: And they will bring you things to create that. So you should ask for help if this is not That's your favorite thing to do. Absolutely. I also have to put a plug for something else that I think is helpful, which is Stitch Fix. I'm kind of on Stitch Fix.

Have you done Stitch Fix? You haven't yet, have you?

Alison Monahan: No, I haven't. No, because I don't think they're shipped to Mexico.

Lee Burgess: No, okay, fair point. But but a lot of people, especially in the Bay Area, I know they now have more of a national following, like Stitch Fix because they do personal shopping for you and they just mail it to you, you try on what you want, you tell them how expensive you want it to be, and you can say to your stylist,

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like, I'm looking for things to go under suits or, you know, or accessories to go with suits or something like that and they might be able to help you too.

So it's just another way. So get a little creative and I think you can build a wardrobe that you feel comfortable with.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. And the point is you need to do this before you start scheduling interviews. So if you think you're going to get a summer job, for example, now is the time to be thinking about like, well, what am I going to wear to that job interview?

Because you do not want to be scrambling the day before to try to put together an entire outfit. It's just not going to work. That is not fun. I've done it. Been there, done that. Not fun.

Lee Burgess: Not fun. Okay, well, what about what you need to take with you to an interview? You know, your laptop bag full of all your school stuff?

Alison Monahan: No, I mean, you know, this is not rocket science, but again, you just need to think about it. Like, A, the most important thing is you actually have copies of all of your documents. You know, there's nothing more annoying as an interviewer. Well, there probably are some things, but one of the more annoying things as an interviewer is when, you know, somebody who is supposed to give you like your, the resume of the person you're talking to for whatever reason has dropped the ball and they've switched up the schedule and you have no idea like what you're supposed to talk to this person about. So, you know, when you ask them like, Hey, you know, I'm really sorry, but like, there's been an HR mix up.

Could you please give me a copy of your resume so I can take a quick look at it? And the person says, Oh, actually I don't have it.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Whoops.

Alison Monahan: Not good. Not good. Cause then I'm like, great. What am I supposed to talk to you about for the next half hour? You know, and it makes you look totally unprepared, which is never good.

So, you know, bring extra copies of everything, but, you know, keep it simple. I mean, a nice portfolio with a pen, it's all you need. If you're a woman, obviously you can carry a small bag, turn your phone off, bring like your creature comforts, your mints, your gum, your things like that. So you can sneak away to the bathroom between interviews.

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But you know, keep it simple.

Lee Burgess: So I think one of the other things that's important to remember is that, you know, the interview process, even if some crazy stuff happens, can still go your way, so you never want to decide that things have gone south. So for instance, I had a friend in law school who went to an interview at a big firm, and while she was washing her hands in the bathroom because it was really cold, like her hands had shrunk a little bit, that her wedding ring slipped off when she was drying her hands.

Alison Monahan: Oh my gosh.

Lee Burgess: So she doesn't realize that her wedding ring is gone until she literally walks into her next appointment and then looks down and is like, oh my gosh, I have, my wedding ring is missing and she ends up having to go hunting in the trash in the bathroom with one of the legal secretaries to find her wedding ring.

They end up finding it and then she goes back and she does finish her interviews and I remember talking to her afterwards and she was like, there is no way. There's no way they're going to give me a job offer, but they actually did. And I think what probably came out of that is that it was pretty impressive that she didn't completely lose her mind when her wedding ring was missing.

And maybe they were impressed at the fact that she could get her act together.

Alison Monahan: I'm sure she made it. Yeah, I'm sure she made a real impression. It's like, you know, you're sitting around the room, like, who should we hire? Like, oh, what about that girl who lost her wedding ring that still kept going? Like, yeah, I think I could trust her at trial.

She seems like she can keep it together.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. So, you know, I think the other thing, especially if you haven't done very many of these interviews, I mean, crazy stuff can happen, you know, maybe your shoe breaks, or you lose something, or, you know, Something happens, just continue to roll with it, because you never know, they might actually be impressed with how you roll with whatever's coming your way.

Alison Monahan: Right. I mean, you know, these are people too. It's like everybody understands like crazy stuff happens, you know, and you're just like, well, how do you respond to it? That's really the issue.

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Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: One thing I want to talk sort of along these lines of not being able to roll with things. Everybody, of course, tells you to be on time to an interview and you should be a few minutes early, but I think only a few minutes early.

I remember I was interviewing for clerkships in the Southern District of New York and it was this crazy situation where like all the judges are interviewing like all these candidates all day long and like this is back in the day when like you all did interviews the first day and so I show up to an interview and there's another guy sitting there in like the waiting room and he had like just come in and I was like oh that's interesting. And so he's talking to, you know, the secretary and she's like, yeah, so I have an interview scheduled.

And I was like, I knew I was the next person to come. And she's kind of like, well, when he says 40 minutes from now, and we both just kind of look at him like, dude, go take a freaking walk around the block. Like, like, what are you doing? Like, this woman now has to deal with you for almost an hour. And like, you've made it really awkward for like the other candidate who's there.

And like, he, he definitely made sure to tell me he'd gone to Harvard. I'm like, yeah, I would have guessed that. But And just like, come on, like, basic, like, do not show up 40 minutes early for an interview. Like, you might show up 40 minutes early to the building to make sure you get there, but then you go find a coffee shop, and then you sit in the coffee shop, and you know, you review your notes, or you read a book, and then you go brush your teeth, because nobody wants to smell coffee on your breath, and then you show up five minutes early for the interview.

Like, that's, that's what you do. That is what you do.

Lee Burgess: That is exactly what you do, yeah.

You don't want people to remember you as the person who is awkwardly sitting in the waiting room for 40 minutes.

Alison Monahan: Well, I mean, it's just inconsiderate. It's like, why would someone hire you if you're making yourself their problem?

Like already, and you know, this goes back to like, you know, this goes to the old advice, like you have to be nice to everyone, everyone, you know. I've certainly worked places where like literally every person you interacted with filed a report on you. So it wasn't, it was not just the people you interviewed with.

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It was like, what did the person at the front desk think when you arrived? Were you polite to them? You know, did you seem competent? Like, did you say something rude? Like, what did you do?

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Yeah. So true. I mean, I think it's just, again, if, if you can come in as your authentic professional self and just be smart about it, it's going to be fine.

You know, don't just-

Alison Monahan: Your best, most polite, most accommodating self.

Lee Burgess: Be your best.

Alison Monahan: Any things happen, things happen in all these interviews. Like it might be the case that you know to you, this is the most important thing that's happening this week, but to someone who's doing these interviews, it's like just something that's on their schedule, their schedule shifts.

You might end up interviewing with someone who's never seen your resume, so you can't really expect people. I sometimes have people get huffy like, well, I thought I was talking to so and so. I'm like, yeah, that person had to go to court, so you're talking to me.

Lee Burgess: Right, it's like, that person gets paid like 600 an hour to do something else, so.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, like, I'm, I'm sorry that you're upset that you had to have the last minute switch, but you know what? Go away. I don't want to deal with you.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. So what about once you're in the interview? I think it's, you know, it's really important that you think about what's on your resume, because they can ask you pretty much anything.

Alison Monahan: Oh yeah, I got this crazy question in an interview for clerkships from one of the clerks, not from the judge, who probably could not have cared less, about my, like, the like, excruciating details of my undergraduate thesis project. And I'm like, I'm just making this up, because it's been, like, so long since I've thought about this.

I have no idea what the answer to these questions are, but you don't know that either and you're not going to go look it up. That's true.

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Lee Burgess: I'm thinking if, if you asked me about my undergraduate thesis, I could give you like two or three sentences, but that was a really long time ago.

Alison Monahan: No, exactly. Like I, you know, I had like the overview ready to go and I was like, Oh yeah, it was like blah, blah, blah, blah.

And she was like, no, like, what about like this? Like, what method do you use for this? Or like, what statistical analysis did you do?

Lee Burgess: Oh, dear.

Alison Monahan: She's like, what?

Lee Burgess: Oh my gosh. I could tell you that I did statistical analysis, but I could not tell you.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I can tell you I did whatever was considered standard at the time.

Lee Burgess: Right, I was like, I remember doing statistical analysis on a computer for hours.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I'm like, I think it was probably SAS.

Lee Burgess: I know, exactly.

Alison Monahan: But no, I mean, I think these are, you know, but you can't show, you know, that cannot be your reaction. Like, what? You know, your reaction has to be like, Oh, that's a really interesting question.

You know, I don't remember the exact details of it, but I'm pretty sure that I was using SAS and we were doing like, you know, bimodal blah, blah, blah, like, just make something up.

Lee Burgess: Oh my gosh. Yeah, so if you don't want to talk about it, don't put it on your resume.

Alison Monahan: Exactly. This goes to the whole story. Anything weird on your resume, people are going to talk to you about it.

One bad grade, if you have a weird work background, educational background, we talked about this, but it's up to you to basically address this confidently. Are you going to make this a big issue or not? I know, Lee, you had one bad grade. And people asked you about it, right?

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Lee Burgess: Yeah, I did have a couple, especially, I was interviewing with litigators, and so litigators love to ask you things to make you uncomfortable, and so-

Alison Monahan: It's their job, it's what they do.

Lee Burgess: Exactly, and so they'll just be like, well, I see you, you know, really didn't perform well this first semester in legal writing, and I knew that was coming, and I always had the response of, yes, that's true, but then I figured out what I did wrong, and then I, I scored the class second semester, as you can see on my transcript.

And then they look down.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly.

Lee Burgess: Okay, and you move on, you know, but if they can smell fear or that it's a a point of anxiety for you, then they're going to stay with it and they're going to, it's going to become a bigger deal and it might not reflect well on you.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean, if it's, if it, if you're not ready to talk about it, it's going to become very uncomfortable very quickly.

Lee Burgess: For sure.

Alison Monahan: You know, I had a weird educational background and every single person challenged me on it. And I said, yeah, you know, it isn't like, it is a very interesting and like unusual background, but I think it's actually beneficial to working as a lawyer. And here's why. And I had my two sentence speech ready to go and they're like, huh, that is interesting.

Great. Well, tell me what your favorite class was in law school, you know?

Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly. Or if you have a gap in your resume for some reason, or if you, you know, whatever it is, just make sure that you can explain it. You know, I have friends that it took a year to travel, which is totally fine.

Just make sure you know what you're going to say about it if they ask you what the heck you were doing for a year or two.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I remember I was clerking, and my co clerk says, you know, if you were a partner at a law firm, how would you look on someone taking a six month sabbatical to be a ski bum after their clerkship?

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And he just sort of looked at me, and he's like, I would make sure I had a lot of time to talk to that person. And that's sort of the point. He's like, he's like, I'm not gonna disqualify you based on that, but like, I would want to talk to you about what exactly you were thinking.

Lee Burgess: Exactly, exactly. Yeah, so just be prepared and practice these answers because, you know-

Alison Monahan: You know it's like, yeah, you want to practice them beforehand.

These are lawyers. It's not like they're not going to notice the one thing you don't want them to notice.

Lee Burgess: Exactly, exactly.

Alison Monahan: They're going to notice. They're very detail oriented people. Exactly. So, you know, I'd be sure you've got questions for them. You know, you want your two to three, four standard questions you can pull out and ask everyone because nothing looks worse than saying, so, you know, is there anything you're interested in learning more about?

And you say, no,

Lee Burgess: Right. That's one of my pet peeves, actually. It's like, really, you have no questions at all, at all, at all?

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Like you can't even ask me like, Oh yeah, I'd love to learn more about your typical day. What do you usually work on? Yeah. How hard is that? Exactly.

Lee Burgess: So don't do that. It makes you just look so disinterested. It's terrible.

Alison Monahan: And it's also like, great, now I have to kill more time. Like, why do I have to make the effort? Make this easy for me.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly.

Alison Monahan: Alright, well let's talk about some different types of interviews, because I know we've both been on, like, all sides of the table for a variety of different types of jobs.

Yeah.

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Lee Burgess: So, well I can talk about doing some of my public interest in government interviews.

Alison Monahan: I know you, because I think, you know, we've already done a couple of, a couple of podcasts on big firm stuff, so people can go and listen to that back in the beginning if they're interested.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, for sure. I think you know, public interest in government, again, know your audience.

You know, if you're going into kind of a policy setting, you're likely going to have a bit of a different tone than, again, if you're meeting with litigators. I mean, I did a summer at the U.S. Attorney's Office. I was fortunate that I grew up with a father who Was an assistant U.S. Attorney, so I knew what the vibe of those offices are because they, prosecutors have their own vibe.

Alison Monahan: Well, what is the vibe? You know, people are listening to this and you're interviewing to do like a D.A. or U.S. Attorney position. Like what, like what are you, what should you expect?

Lee Burgess: I mean, prosecutors and litigators are typically fairly charismatic and easy to talk to, but they also can have either a biting sense of humor, or they like to kind of challenge you because that's the world they live in, you know, that's-

Alison Monahan: Yeah, they're pretty aggressive.

Lee Burgess: They're pretty aggressive. There's a lot of conflict in their world and they want to see if you can participate in that world And so I think you definitely want to go in, you know ready for those hard questions, maybe But feeling like, you know, if you get it from the interviews and viewers energy that you can, you know, make some appropriate jokes or comments about things and have a laugh.

Alison Monahan: Carefully, very carefully.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, but also I have found that the oftentimes the more stressful the job, the more people want to know if you can like relax and Have a laugh and you know, be present in that way because it's really the only way that you can cope with dealing with really challenging or stressful things.

I think, I don't know, have you found that?

Alison Monahan: Right.

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Lee Burgess: People who work in think it's high stakes jobs.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. No, I think it's sort of a gallows humor. Mm-Hmm. And they want to know, you know, can you participate in that or not.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I agree. But I think, you know, public interest can be a little bit different.

Especially I have attorney friends who. You know, maybe work in policy or work in state government offices. Those are not necessarily the same as prosecutors. You know, they are not, they, the energy-

Alison Monahan: No, no, no, that's like a super different, very different energy.

Lee Burgess: It's a very different energy, typically a more mellow energy, sometimes a bit more serious depending on what's going on.

I think if you're not sure what the energy is like, it's a really good idea to ask around. I mean, especially if you are interviewing for a government agency job in the town where you're going to law school. It's possible that another student at your school may have done an internship there or may even work there after the fact, and just see if you can get an idea of what the culture is.

Just so you can be ready for it when you walk in.

Alison Monahan: Right, you can also think about people you know who have worked in that setting and, you know, how do they compare to people who have worked in a different setting those are the people you're likely to be interviewing with

Lee Burgess: Exactly. So, you know, I think that's kind of again, thinking about who these people are and read up on your interviewers it's another thing to maybe get a bit of a hint about you know, what's what the dynamic might be like.

You know, does this person say on their bio that they, you know, hike all the time, and they love to drink wine, and go wine tasting in Napa Valley, you know, or, you know, that's gonna maybe give you some hints to what they might want to talk about, versus somebody who either doesn't have any personal information about themselves on their website, or says something like that they just like to read books and go to their book club.

No judgment. It's just going to be probably a different vibe.

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Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think that's a key point, is that to the extent you can get the list of people you're going to be talking to before you go in, that's extremely valuable information, and you should definitely do your research.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. What about clerkships, Alison?

I know I didn't go through the clerkship process, but you've done both sides of the table.

Alison Monahan: I have. I mean, they're definitely, people get really freaked out about clerkship interviews because they wonder, like, is the judge going to ask them about like specific cases and things like this? I think typically the answer is no.

I mean, again, like they're looking for someone that they're going to work really closely with. If you're a judge, you're hiring, you know, somewhere between two and four people a year. So if you screw that up, you have a really serious problem on your hands. So they're looking for someone who is, you know, extremely competent and can get work done.

But also as someone that they don't mind spending late nights with or working really closely with and that they think will get along with the other clerks. So I think being personable there is extremely critical. And again, doing your research, you know, basically to the extent possible, I had talked to people who had clerked or at least interviewed with almost all the judges I was interviewing with.

So I knew, for example, that the judge that ended up hiring me. was the one person who actually did a more substantive type of interview. And actually, hopefully he never listens to this, but one of his former clerks actually told me in advance what his interview question was. So you can imagine that was a huge advantage when he asked me this, like, pretty aggressive, substantive question.

And I was able to calmly like give him an answer that I thought about the day before.

Lee Burgess: That's a really good point. It just shows the benefit though, of doing your homework before you go in and trying to get as much information as possible.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean, in terms of being on the other side, you know, we, we basically just, you know, I think, again, like we were talking about at the beginning of the interview, we were there, the clerk interviews were there for red flags.

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We weren't going to be like, judge, you should hire this person. I think that would have been totally inappropriate, but we definitely, in certain cases, were like, yeah, I would have reservations.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that's interesting. Well, I mean, I think for law firms, we've done other podcasts on that, so if you're interested, you know, in law firm details, go listen to other podcasts, but you know, what about other businesses? I mean, we've learned a lot just interviewing and hiring for our own business.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, definitely.

What are we looking for, Lee?

Lee Burgess: Does anyone want to work for us? Here you go. Here are your inside tips for the next round of hiring. But I think now that I have, you know, been sitting on this side of the table and really looking for the right fit, I think for me a lot of it is an excitement about the type of work that we're doing, you know, and that somebody seems genuinely interested and that they're going to enjoy the work, and I think I always kind of knew that was important, but I think even now I find it more important.

Because you know, our work is very personal to us. We've built this business from nothing. And so I only want folks working on our brand that share our excitement about it. I think even in a law firm or any sort of corporate environment people can often want people who find what they do interesting and exciting.

Do you think that's kind of become important to you since we've been on this side of the table?

Alison Monahan: Oh, absolutely. And I think I definitely had that sense even when I was interviewing for jobs myself. It's like, you know, if somebody goes in and they're like, yeah, this is, you know, I know what type of law I want to practice, these are the things I'm interested in, I'm interested in this case that you worked on, like, can you tell me more about that? I mean, some of that you can just fake through practice and like research, which is great. But some of it, you know, you actually have to have a genuine interest. I mean, hopefully if you're interviewing for a job, you're interested, but maybe not always. But you should at least try to make it appear that you're interested.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. For instance, if somebody sends me a resume and addresses it to Mr. Burgess , I'm not going, they're, they're not. I'm not gonna think they're going in

the reject pile. Right. I'm not gonna think they're that interested enough to have looked at our website, which if no one has looked at our websites, you can, and there are pictures of us all over them. And so-

Alison Monahan: And Lee is not a man.

Lee Burgess: And I'm not a man. So, you know, it's just one of those things of like, I really admire your work. I'm like, you clearly don't, because you've never read-

Alison Monahan: You don't know what it is.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, anything that I've written that has my picture next to it.

So, you know, little things like that. It's like, just be genuinely interested, or fake it, and learn something about the business and the people that you're interviewing with so they think you're interested.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean, no one wants to hire someone that's, like, gonna be bored with the work and unhappy doing it.

Like, you're looking for someone who actually wants to do it, and you need to convince them that you are actually that person.

Lee Burgess: Agreed. Yeah, agreed. So, another good point is, if you don't find the work interesting, or you can't bring yourself to read a website before you go and interview for a job, maybe you shouldn't be interviewing for that job.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, maybe you should just save everyone a lot of time because it's just not the best fit. Before we wind up, let's talk about really briefly, like, what do you think people should do to practice for these interviews?

Lee Burgess: I think that's a really good question. I mean, I think you can you should definitely practice, especially if you're not an experienced interviewee.

You can actually write out answers to common questions and really think about them or make bullet points for yourself, so you kind of have them memorized, your canned answer.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think this goes back to what we were saying, anything weird, you need to have basically a canned answer ready to go.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, and some schools even do mock interviews. So you can practice with, you know, somebody in career services or professors or things like that. So that's

another way that you can kind of vet these answers to make, especially if you're dealing with something wonky on your resume that you're trying to explain, it could be good to vet those with someone else or a mentor or something like that.

You can definitely practice, but I think you can even practice with friends and just role play interviewing just so you feel a bit more comfortable about it.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think a lot of this is just getting practice like saying the stuff that's a little bit unnatural and making it sound natural. You know, you can practice in a mirror and you can even ask friends to film you, which is painful, but extremely useful.

There's no excuse. I mean, we all have, you know, our phones that we'll do record video. Just do the interview and set up the video and watch it later. I can guarantee you, you will learn a lot.

Lee Burgess: But I also think, you know, now that we've been doing some audio work ourselves, I think even recording yourself audio, if watching yourself is just too much, I know a lot of people struggle with that.

I mean, Alison and I talk about the first times we started to do either recorded classes or lectures. You know, I'll be honest, they were a little rough.

Alison Monahan: We have improved.

Lee Burgess: We have improved. But it took listening to some of those early ones to really recognize what we were doing. And to get comfortable, you know, being on, you know, on a recording or talking to nothing, you know, just your computer.

Alison Monahan: Right. I mean, you see yourself, you know, you hear yourself with all the ums and the likes and the pauses, and you're like, wow, that is really something I need to try to stop doing.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. So I think audio is another thing you can do to just kind of hear how you sound to somebody else. I think it's an, it's an important thing.

And maybe some day, or maybe not, we will do an outtake of what some of our early videos sounded like, because they were just-

Alison Monahan: Maybe not.

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Lee Burgess: Maybe not. Maybe not. But, you know, it's, it's, it's definitely sobering, and, and I think it's important that people know that even, you know, we practiced this to be able to get to this podcast.

This podcast was something we talked about doing for a long time, but I think we really needed to feel comfortable with it, so we could deliver in this medium, so.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean, the bottom line is you've got to do whatever it takes to be prepared, so, you know, whatever, whatever that means for you, that's what you need to do.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly. And we won't make you listen to our bad old stuff, that wouldn't be fair. Anyway so do what you need to do, be prepared evaluate, you know, how to present yourself, because it's oftentimes just a one shot thing to make your first impression and you want it to be a good one.

Alison Monahan: Absolutely. And with that, we are out of time. If you enjoyed this episode of Law School Toolbox podcast, please take a second to leave a review or rating on iTunes. We would really appreciate it. And be sure to subscribe so you don't miss anything. If you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to reach out to Lee and 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, we'll talk soon and good luck on your interviews.