Episode 29: Handling Pressure in Law School (Guest Dr. Hank Weisinger)

Alison Monahan: Hello and welcome to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today we're really excited because we have a special guest and we're talking about handling pressure. Our guest is Dr. Hank Weisinger, who is the New York Times bestselling author of Performing Under Pressure, The Science of Doing Your Best When It Matters.

And he's here to talk with us about stress and anxiety in law school. I'm Alison Monahan, one of your Law School Toolbox hosts, and if you enjoy the show, please leave a review on iTunes. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out. You can always reach us via the contact form on LawSchoolToolbox.com, and we would love to hear from you. And with that, let's get started.

Welcome back! Today we're very excited to have a renowned expert on handling pressure with us, Dr. Hank Weisinger. Dr. Weisinger is the New York Times best selling author of Performing Under Pressure, the science of doing your best when it matters most. Like, for example, in law school. Since one of the biggest challenges for many law students is handling stress, whether it's the day to day variety or specifically test anxiety, he's got a lot to offer for any law student.

So, let's get started. First off, I'm just curious how you became interested in this topic about handling pressure. What about this interests you?

Dr. Hank Weisinger: I actually got interested in the subject when I was a graduate student doing a clinical internship out at UCLA in the Brentwood VA Hospital. I was working on a ward that was exclusively designed for Vietnam veterans.

And this is all the way back in 1976. And I had one patient who I gave the task of calling his mother in Brooklyn. to tell her that he was ready to be discharged from the hospital. And I gave him 3 minutes to make the phone call. I said, if you can not do this in 3 minutes, I'll take the phone away. And after about 30 seconds, I could hear without a you know, the voice on the telephone I could hear his mother bombarding him with statements like, how can they be so stupid?

You're sick, you're disturbed. And literally, in front of me, he started to choke.

He started to physically become aroused. He started sweating, stabbing. I had to take the phone away. Now, I tucked that memory away over the next 10-15 years. inscription, but it always stuck in my mind of what was really happening to him, what was going through his mind.

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And then when I moved from L. A. to the East Coast in Connecticut, being a die hard Yankee fan, I started watching the Yankee games every single day, just like I was growing up. And I will tell you, if I was not an expert in anger management. I've written some books on that subject as well. I, I would've broken my TV set.

Alison Monahan: Wow.

Dr. Hank Weisinger: And because I saw this, I saw my favorite team always blowing games, striking out, and I started to wonder how come some people can rise to the occasion and other people always choke? And as I started to explore that really out of personal interest, I came across a few revelations. And one of 'em was the Yankee players really were not choking.

They just weren't very good. It would be like a, it would be like a C student taking his LSATs and getting upset that he has an average score. But that's what average students do.

Alison Monahan: Right.

Dr. Hank Weisinger: Average students do not all of a sudden do great. And that was a very important revelation.

Alison Monahan: That's actually a very interesting distinction, because you think like, oh, you know, you're gonna, everybody chokes, It's like, you're right.

Some people just aren't actually either that well qualified for what they're doing, Or they haven't prepared enough, Or, you know, they're just frankly not that good at taking the LSAT. So that is-

Dr. Hank Weisinger: It's, it's, yeah, go ahead.

Alison Monahan: Obviously, that is an interesting distinction because you think like, oh, it's always these high achievers.

It's like, yeah, maybe you're just not that great at this to begin with.

Dr. Hank Weisinger: I think that is a really important insight for law students, which we'll come back to in a sec. But what the finding was is that nobody rises to the occasion. The idea of thinking of like crutch, there was one of my favorite movies was called The Natural with Robert Redford.

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And at the end of the movie he's up, you know, in a situation all baseball fans Recognize, You know, it's the games on the line, the best players up, and in the movie he hits a home run. Well in the book, by the same title, he struck out.

That's reality. People do not rise to the occasion. A C student is never getting 1600 on their SATs.

But an A student-

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think that's one of the most interesting pieces of your work is that you do have this idea of like, oh, you know, if you just focus, you can do even better under pressure, but you're basically saying that's not really ever true, right?

Dr. Hank Weisinger: Exactly. That, first of all, you can't do better than your best anyway.

Alison Monahan: Right.

Dr. Hank Weisinger: And what, what happens to many people is they start to think, oh, I have to prove myself. Now I got into this school, now I have to show that I am worthy of, no, you've already done that. That's why the person has already gotten in. So what I found is that when you look at athletes such as Michael Jordan, nobody does better under pressure.

It, it, it impacts our cognitive success tools, judgment, decision making, memory, attention, you know, I think all of those are critical to be successful in a profession such as laws. More so even in law school probably than in the practice of law, where you have more time. So, people do badly, poorly, less than, under pressure.

So the goal was to help people not do better than their best, but to immunize themselves to the negative effects of pressure. 'cause that's really the best that, that you can do. And once I made that-

Alison Monahan: Right. So our goal, is basically like not to screw it up. It's not to go to some next level where I'm gonna be like the A plus student.

It's like, well if I've studied really hard for this exam, I know everything that's on it. My only goal in terms of the pressure aspect is to not screw it up.

Dr. Hank Weisinger: Exactly. It's like if you're getting an A on a practice exam, in the final exam, it's gonna basically be the same thing. The choke would be all of the sudden you get a C.

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It's like when I say, well, you know, it's like a kid who graduates first in his class, and then he takes the high school, and then he goes to college, and he graduates first in his class in college, and then he takes his LSATs, and he gets the highest mark, and people say, wow, he really came through. He didn't come through, he's just doing what he always does.

Alison Monahan: He's been pretty consistent. Yeah.

Dr. Hank Weisinger: Exactly. So that's, that's the, the key. And when you make that distinction, It takes a lot of pressure off because you stop trying to exceed your capabilities.

Alison Monahan: Right. I mean, for me, the worst grade I ever got in any school I ever did was second semester of organic chemistry, where I think I, I mean, I think I got like a D plus on the final and like a C minus in the class or something, but I was frankly happy I passed it because I just stopped studying halfway through it. So I was like, yeah, of course I can't expect to walk in there and get an A. Like, I was really just happy to get out alive and decided not to go to med school.

But yeah, no, I, I mean, I think that's an interesting point because I think people in law school, particularly, they put so much pressure on themselves about like, because it is, you know, it's a very, I mean you probably know this, but it's a very strange educational experience in that you're getting basically no feedback, you're typically not getting, you know, your whole grade is based on this exam at the end of the semester, and you're not really practicing for that typically.

And so people are like, you know, half, and then of course it's graded on the curve, so you're competing with all of your classmates. So I mean, it's inherently a very high pressure, high stakes situation, and some people have scholarships they're dealing with, and they know that jobs are going to ride on the outcome of this exam.

So, It's kind of the perfect storm, really, for like, you know, people having just total crack ups and breakdowns.

Dr. Hank Weisinger: You know, one of the ways my nephew went to law school, and I took a lot of pressure off him right at the beginning when I said, you got to know two things. One, you're never going to argue a case before the Supreme Court.

You know, It's not as is zero chance that you are in the top 10 percent of your graduating class. and once he recognized that the mission became just get through pass the bar and get a you know a job that he was interested in and that was good. I feel sorry for those kids who are driven and think that they're going

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to law school, then they have to be, you know, number one, I know it's counterintuitive, but one of the ways that I found most effectively, and not just for law school students, but also for med school, you know, as, as well, and, and undergraduates, whether they're undergraduates in, in college or you know, in, in high school, is you have to forget about the grades.

Right. The more you think about grades, and the more important you make them, ironically, the more pressure you create, the worse you do.

Alison Monahan: Right, and that's one of the things we talk to students with fairly early on is, you know, we give, like, our tutoring students, for example, we give them a sort of an intake questionnaire and it is this thing about the more they're like, you know, like, what are your goals?

And if they tell me their goal is to get an A in every class, it's like, well, you need to have a serious conversation with someone about this because A, that's not going to happen. And B, it's not helpful, like, you control your inputs, you don't control your outputs in this situation, so. You know, you can control something like, I want to study X number of hours per day, or I want to feel well prepared when I walk into the exam, but you can't control the grade your professor gives you.

And it's just sort of pointless to even think about it.

Dr. Hank Weisinger: Absolutely. It's out of your, because what happens is the more you start thinking about your grade, and you start thinking about, what if I don't do well now? I'm not going to get that internship. I'm not going to get that job. I have no chance of making law review.

You're thinking of all those what we call worry thoughts, worry cognitions, when in reality your energy would be better off studying, you know, studying your homework.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly.

Dr. Hank Weisinger: That will have a much more powerful influence. So it's very counter intuitive but one of the ways, that one of the things I want people to remember is to minimize the importance of the situation.

Minimize or shrink the importance of the test. Many students deal with what I call primal pressure they have equated at some level that if they don't get a great grade, they will quote, be weeded out, which becomes exaggerated and

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they think their life is over. It's like the high school student coming home, oh, I've only got six 90 on my verbal SATs. I'm not gonna get into Harvard. My life is over. And we tell. If it's our kid, as I've told my kids many times, you stop catastrophizing, your life isn't over. This would be the same thing if they didn't get invited to a party. My life is, is over.

Alison Monahan: I think lawyers are particularly bad about that. I mean, I have a friend who works with, who's an ex lawyer, who works with people who want to transition out of the law, and she says, you know, it's crazy, but these people who are incredibly capable, highly educated, you know, have tons of skills they can use in all different ways.

And inevitably they come in and they say, I can't stop being a lawyer because I'll end up living under a bridge. And she's like, you're not going to end up homeless. Like, can we have a conversation that's actually rational here? Like, I understand the fear, but we kind of have to deal with this fear that you're going to literally end up living under a bridge despite all evidence to the contrary.

Until you can actually do something about, like, what you want to change about your life.

Dr. Hank Weisinger: That's right. And you know, another important thing I have found is that many people confuse pressure and stress. They are not the same.

Alison Monahan: Tell me more about that.

Dr. Hank Weisinger: The, I would say, and I find that when you do confuse the two, and I'll distinguish, is that your life is on high alert 24-7.

Now, during the semester, A law student is under a lot of stress, which basically means there's a lot of demands made upon you and you don't necessarily feel you have the resources to respond. So if I have five exams, you know, all in the course of a week, That week is very stressful because a lot of demands on me and I don't have the resources ie the amount of hours maybe to respond, so I'm feeling overwhelmed.

When people say they're stressed out, that's what that means they're feeling overwhelmed and usually feel a sense of exhaustion and you can get irritable very quickly.

Alison Monahan: Yes, definitely, and there are a lot of irritable people running around in Law Schools.

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Dr. Hank Weisinger: Thats right.

Alison Monahan: For sure.

Dr. Hank Weisinger: That's right. So, so you got, you got a bunch of tests and they're all very, it's, it's stressful.

But pressure is when you actually go in the classroom and you have to now deliver the goods.

So pressure is a situation when you have something on the line and the outcome is based on your performance. And I'm saying that in those situations, people usually do below their capability. For many reasons.

One is because you're thinking about the grade and the negative consequences. What if I don't do, what if I don't do well? If I am taking a final exam on contracts, the only thing I want in my mind, which is the memory, which we call working memory, it's like having an iPad. Now some people have bigger iPads than others.

So, if you have gone, I'll tell you one thing, if you have gone to like, and ivy league law school, then I would be willing to bet that the students who go to an Ivy League law school have a bigger iPad, more cognitive horsepower than the student who goes to a second tier or third tier law school.

However, if that first tier law student chokes, performs below his capability, he or she is now equal to the student who's in the second tier law school who can really handle pressure. And that is an interesting point for people to remember because what happens is as soon as I sit down and the professor gives me the test, I look at the first question, and I say, oh, I don't know this, I'm in trouble, now I don't get that job, I needed an A, all of a sudden time is passing away. And I'm wasting all those minutes on worrying about something that is actually in the future, rather than taking a deep breath, remaining focused, clearing my mind, following my testing strategy.

That's what I need to be doing, that's one of the reasons people perform below their capability in tasks that involve judgment and decision making and information processing. They're thinking about other things, so part of learning how to deal with pressure is to minimize distracting thoughts, in the moment of truth.

Alison Monahan: I'm curious about that. I mean, that sounds great. In theory, if I'm listening to this as a law student, I'm like, I'd love to be able to just go and sit down and not

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think about anything else. But I mean, do you have any suggestions on how people can actually do that?

Dr. Hank Weisinger: I do. I do. And the first, so first I want people also remember the difference between stress and pressure.

And a good take out is this, that any time you're feeling, oh, I'm under a lot of pressure, ask yourself, do I feel overwhelmed, or do I feel I have to deliver a particular an effective response? And if you're feeling overwhelmed, you have a lot of different strategies. You can relax, you can take a break. You can't take a break during an exam.

Alison Monahan: Well, you can take a little break. Take a break. You can take a bathroom break.

Dr. Hank Weisinger: A mini break. Yeah, it's a kind of break. But you're not gonna go out for a walk.

Alison Monahan: No, no. But I do think it's actually some people, you know, sometimes people have like a four hour test and they think like, I can't go to the bathroom because I'll run out of time.

It's like, you know that five minutes that you, or four, you know, two minutes, whatever. It'd actually be pretty helpful.

Dr. Hank Weisinger: It would, it would be, it would be very helpful, not just pretty helpful. It would be a very helpful, but what happens is you're right. People in their mind, I can't take the five minutes and so on because they are equating it as a do or die situation, which for your ancestor was true.

Your ancestor, if early man didn't perform in a do or die situation, he died.

Alison Monahan: Right. You're not going to take a bathroom break, like a lion's chasing you.

Dr. Hank Weisinger: That's right. But if you get a C on a test, It might feel like you're dying, but the reality is you will live to take another, you know, to take another to take another test.

Alison Monahan: Okay. So you're talking about dealing with stress. I think that's really helpful to people. So you can do things, you know, yoga, mindfulness, like running, whatever.

Dr. Hank Weisinger: Exactly. It , so, so don't treat every stressful moment as though it's a do or die moment. That's what I want people to you know, to realize.

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How many times have I come home, oh, I've got to get to the cleaners before they close at 5 o'clock and I'm driving myself nuts until I realize, you know what, I don't need those clothes now, I'll get them tomorrow.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think that's a lot. I mean, law students have so much on their plate and I think they tend to be sort of type A overachieving types anyway.

I remember, for example, once I had this day that was just like completely insane. It was like my busiest possible day, you know, from like 7 in the morning until literally like 10 or 11 o'clock at night. I was completely scheduled. I was running events. I had like, you know, all this stuff. And I got horrible food poisoning the night before.

And I ended up spending the entire day at the, like, health clinic getting an IV drip because I was so sick. And, you know, all this stuff happened anyway. I didn't actually need to be there for any of it. And, like, not only that, I ended up getting called on in, like, two different classes randomly. And, you know, my roommate was just like, hey, she's, like, really sick.

She's getting an IV. And they're like, okay. You know, so it's like, we put all this pressure and, you know, I don't know, is that stress or pressure? I guess we put, we put pressure on ourselves and cause stress. Is that how it works out?

Dr. Hank Weisinger: Yes. Oh, no, no. We put, we experienced stress and we call it pressure.

That's the, that's the thing. So you think that every stressful moment is that you have to perform to do or die. Your life is, is dependent on it. So what, it's, it's not a pressure moment that, that I get a paper done tonight if it's not due for another week. So if I just relax a little, I'll end up actually doing better and easily meeting the deadline.

Now that set aside, there's two types of pressure I think that a lot of students experience. One are daily feelings, even when they're not taking in exams. Just relentless. And, and I think that is also what most people in the corporate world are experiencing. And any attorney who is in private practice is feeling that because the pressure is I gotta feed myself.

Alison Monahan: Mm-Hmm.

Dr. Hank Weisinger: I have to give more clients. So they have everyday pressure feelings. And then there were the pressure of the moment. In terms of the first one, I want the

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students who are listening to think, why did you go to law school in the first place?

Alison Monahan: I'm not sure a lot of them could answer that.

Dr. Hank Weisinger: Well, yeah, I mean, I've heard all sorts of answers, but I like to think the answer is, well, they want to be a lawyer.

And then what happens is they lose sight of that, and everything becomes grades, grades, grades. So, if people remember their purpose, and what their mission is, is to be the best lawyer possible, I have found everything else starts to fall into play, and you lose a lot of those daily pressure feelings.

So that is one thing, is that it's also a way to renew your enthusiasm. And also, I found that law students should be focusing on their interests as well, not necessarily their, their grades. I mean, I don't want to offend anybody listening, but I've met many top people, many people, my friends, and other people in social situations who have gone to great law schools, and they don't know what they're doing with their life.

So you got to remember what your interests are, because when you focus on what you're interested in, what part of the law are you interested in, then you become more and more curious and learning then becomes a sense of fun, not necessarily a sense of, I have to. I have to do this. I have found that the best students at the best schools many times do not even consider it pressure because they're doing what they are interested in. The third thing I want them to remember is most law students are very competitive because they're trying to beat the other guy.

I once said to my kids you know there's always somebody that's smarter, there's always somebody prettier, there's always a better athlete, there's always somebody who has more money. So comparing yourself to how other students are doing, and you can't control that. I can not control whether the kid next to me is gonna study 15 hours a day, all I can do is focus on myself.

So a big differential for people who can actually enjoy law school, which for most people, they think that's fantasy.

Alison Monahan: Impossible.

Dr. Hank Weisinger: They can actually thrive in it rather than be depressed by it. It's to focus on your own excellence rather than ranking yourself to other people. It'd be like me, I'm

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with my book, comparing myself to other people whose books are more successful and will always be more successful.

That will make me miserable. But if I focus just on doing the best I can, writing the best book that I can do, then I actually end up feeling good about myself and probably making a better work to begin with. Now that's set aside for those daily strategies. There's some very specific evidence-based solutions that I think can help all law students when they have to take a test, when they have to give a presentation, when they have a mock trial.

And the first one, which will sound kind of hokey. is actually very effective, and that is, before you have a, a big test or a presentation, to literally the night before, write down your anxieties and concerns on a piece of paper.

Alison Monahan: Huh. Do you think that actually helps? I know sometimes people are sort of afraid if they give voice to something, like, I don't know, it'll make it real, or they'll have to really acknowledge it.

I mean, is that the point?

Dr. Hank Weisinger: The, the main explanation, you got to get them out of your system. Those are worry thoughts.

Alison Monahan: Right, they're going to be kind of amorphous until you really define them.

Dr. Hank Weisinger: How many times have you had a problem, you talk about it to one of your girlfriends, one of your friends-

Alison Monahan: Your therapist.

Dr. Hank Weisinger: You're talking about it for the whole day, and then you reach a point where, you know what?

I don't want to talk about this anymore. I'm sick of talking about it. That is the logic. That you have gotten those worry thoughts out of your system. So in the moment of truth, because you've already exhausted all these anxieties, all these fears, there are less likely to surface in, the moment. And also, as you pointed out, it allows you to challenge them.

You know, well, I'm afraid if I don't do this, I won't get that summer intern job. Yes, so? You know, is that why is that so important? Oh, my parents will be disappointed. And law students get a lot of pressure from their, their parents, especially if your parents are paying the bill.

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Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think a lot of people are sort of used to looking for that external validation.

And I think one of my personal feelings because so many people kind of end up in law school as a default. That they haven't really, it was intriguing what you were saying earlier about like, think about your motivations. And you know, I sort of joked that well, most people couldn't tell you, but I think there's some truth to that because really it's like, oh, well, you know, this is just something either someone else thinks is a good idea or it seems like it would be prestigious, like, they're, you know, law, lawyers and law students are obsessed with prestige, which is basically external validation.

Which, you know, as we're talking about, you don't really control, and I mean, I can tell you from experience, is not actually something that's really guaranteed to make you happy. You know, my first semester, I did really well. I was, like, top of my class. And then I ended up clinically depressed. So it's not like, you know, and I think part of that was the stress and the pressure, but also it was just a sort of realization, like, hey, you know, getting an A in CivPro actually did not make my life better.

You know, I'm not a happier person because of that. I'm actually more stressed out because of it.

Dr. Hank Weisinger: Well, yeah, you know, once you get one A, it also creates the expectation there should be more.

Alison Monahan: Oh, no, that was what, I mean, that was straight up what it was. It was just like I had a complete breakdown, basically stopped going to class because I couldn't handle the idea that I was supposed to continue doing well.

Dr. Hank Weisinger: Right.

Alison Monahan: And because I had no, you know, I had no real idea, like, what I was doing in law school anyway. It was kind of a snap decision to go. So it wasn't, you know, I look at my law school roommate who was really into public interest work and actually didn't even look at her grades after the first semester.

She just had a friend check to make sure she didn't fail. And she was doing what you were talking about, you know, she was following her interests, she was taking classes that she found really interesting and that she wanted to know, and so she was very internally motivated. And the result was probably one of the happier people I knew in law school.

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Dr. Hank Weisinger: And that reminds me of another good strategy based on what you are saying that I think is very important because in the law school culture, everybody gets so used to finding their self worth around grades. So another very important strategy that's shown to be very effective is before you have a deep pressure moment, is to step back and remember that you have worth as an individual irrespective of what you do on a test. I made it a point always to tell my kids that their grades had nothing to do with how I value them, how much I loved them, and whatever. And that's very important to remember, so when I would give a presentation I used to say, you know, even if I screw up this presentation I'm still a good person. Too many people they think that if you get a bad grade I'm of failure.

If I get a good grade, I'm a you know, wonderful, wonderful person. And it's very important not to hook your self esteem and self worth into the outcome of your performance. A lot of people in law school make that mistake because everything, again, revolves around the grades, but the grade, it only revolves around the grades if you make them the most important thing in the, you know, in the in the world.

Alison Monahan: Right, exactly.

Dr. Hank Weisinger: So that is another, that is another strategy. I think another good strategy for people is when they're in the moment, taking a test because many people may get rattled and they're really nervous. is to take a few seconds right at the beginning to tune into your senses. Start to pay attention to your breathing.

You know, when people start to panic, the fastest way of regaining control over yourself is to start to control your breathing. One of my favorite, I won't say one of my favorite movies, but a good movie to illustrate this was that movie with George Clooney with Emma Rund and Out of Space with Sandra Bullock.

And I forget, oh, gravity. And she starts flipping out as the astronaut, and the first thing he says to her is breathe, same thing Navy SEALs would tell somebody.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, same thing a yoga instructor would tell you.

Dr. Hank Weisinger: That's right, same thing. So when you sit down at that desk and you open that test booklet, it's a good idea to sit back and start to regulate your breathings and to look around because if you look around the room and concentrate on what you are seeing, it will keep you in the moment.

You can't be in the moment, and simultaneously worry about failing.

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Alison Monahan: I mean, do you think people should practice these techniques? I mean, how do you suggest, say, say you're someone you know, you know, we get a lot of students or questions from students who are like, I know I struggle with test anxiety.

What do I do? I mean, should they be doing mindfulness practice? Like, should they be taking practice tests?

Dr. Hank Weisinger: Well, all that helps, but what I want people also to remember is that a lot of people who have test anxiety actually have an anxiety disorder. So they are behind the eight ball to begin with. You know, it's like, if you can't handle I had a friend once in graduate school, he couldn't sit still. He was always getting up.

Now, I met him in graduate school. He was really an undergraduate, but he had been in the you know, working world, came back to school. And one day, we're all sitting around watching a football game, and he comes in, and this guy could not sit still for two minutes. And the first thing he says is, I decided I want to go and be an air traffic control. We all became hysterical.

It was like, are you out of your mind? So a student, first of all, who experiences a lot of stress and anxiety, I don't even think that they would have the option to get into law school, because if you're experiencing a lot of stress and anxiety to begin with, I don't think it's, it's very hard to be a good student.

So that changes everything.

Alison Monahan: You know, I think for a lot of people, is they get through to a certain point, so they can get to undergrad and, you know, they're not taking classes that have a lot of tests. They're doing papers and things like that. And so I think what happens sometimes is they get to law school and suddenly they are really confronted with the limitations of, you know, their kind of nature in a sense. I mean, do you think these people should just avoid law school entirely and look for a lower stress career?

Dr. Hank Weisinger: I think in their best interest, you know, to me the most important thing is to enjoy what you're doing. And then you can always figure out how to make money out of it. It is the advice I gave my nephews. One is a lawyer, one is a physician. The difference is the one who's a physician loves being a doctor.

The one who's a lawyer feels a little differently about his, his occupation. That's a whole other podcast. So I think that's become, I think that's a tough, I think

you need to go into the situation knowing that you're gonna have to have a lot of support groups and you're gonna have to manage that anxiety.

But remember when anxiety is uncertainty. So if a law student said to me, they have test anxiety with this test coming up, I point out, well, anxiety is uncertainty. So what are you uncertain about? And then the person will say, well, I'm uncertain about how you're going to do it. Okay, then study more. And practice.

Most law students do not know how to practice for a case presentation or for an exam.

Alison Monahan: Oh, they never, I mean, it's unbelievable. I'm like a broken record on this.

You know, we're like, you gotta practice. Oh, but I don't know enough of the law to practice. It's like, no, you have to practice. That's how you learn this.

Dr. Hank Weisinger: Yeah. And it's not only the act of practicing, it's mixing it up. Abraham Lincoln was a great lawyer because he knew his opponent's case better than the opponent. I used to work in when I was out at UCLA with some of the law students getting ready for a bar. And I would say, okay, look, present a case, and then rip it apart, And then to be able to present the other person, your opponent's case, better than your opponent.

Is that the key? Cause if you can do that, then there is zero anxiety So people have to mix up their practice. It it If you're used to making point 1, point 2, point 3. Start with point 3. Start with point 2. It's like anticipating. You know, they always say, you know, don't ask a question for an attorney that you don't know the answer to. So that becomes another thing. Anticipate, anticipate, anticipate. I used to love taking, when I was in graduate school essay exams. Because I anticipated every possible question they could ask.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly.

Dr. Hank Weisinger: And then I could-

Alison Monahan: Yeah, you know, we encourage people to get your professors, get your professors old exams. If you look at five of them, you basically know 80 percent of what they're going to ask you because they can't come up with any new questions. So at that point, stop worrying about it.

You know what they're going to ask you, you know, just do it.

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Dr. Hank Weisinger: Exactly. And, and so, you know, when you say what is the best thing for, for people to do, you obviously have to learn how to regulate your emotions. I think law students and everybody are better off, you know, you talk about mindfulness of being able to tune in to how you're talking to yourself.

So five minutes before you are having a mock trial or taking a test, are your thoughts helping or are they making it, are they making it worse?

And because most people are not tuned into listening to themselves, they become oblivious to that. And as a result, their thoughts start to work against them. And not to be too self promoting, but I do have a online course that-

Alison Monahan: I was just going to ask you about that.

So if somebody's listening to this and they're like, this sounds great, I really want to learn more, where can they look?

Dr. Hank Weisinger: They can follow me at PressureTweets.com for more information. And they can check out the the page that describes the course at a Pressure.HendrieWiesingerPHD.com.

Alison Monahan: We'll put all this in the show notes.

Dr. Hank Weisinger: That would be, that would be great. I, I think people find it very enjoyable. And you know what? Because I want, as a psychologist, my mission is to actually help people, it is priced so low that people cannot afford not to not to take it.

Alison Monahan: And they can also check out your book, right? That's on Amazon or wherever.

Dr. Hank Weisinger: Yeah, and they can check out a book. They have enough things to read. The, the course is very entertaining.

Alison Monahan: Oh, good.

Dr. Hank Weisinger: In terms of some of the videos and it's self paced. And, and plus there's a money back guarantee. I don't want to sound like a lawyer, but you get your money back, you know. I found that one of the things law students have to remember is they're going into a profession, unlike many others.

You know, you get a new car. If you don't like it, there's a part, you get a refund. The great thing about a lawyer is even if you lose a case, you don't have to give a refund. I think that's one of the great things. The great things that-

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Alison Monahan: And ideally you get paid up front too, so there you go.

Dr. Hank Weisinger: Exactly. Especially if you're, especially if you are a criminal attorney

Alison Monahan: Or a family lawyer.

Dr. Hank Weisinger: And look, the other thing I would, I would tell, and, and I don't want hear people saying that they don't have time or whatever. When you're a law student, what of the things that you are reading are not necessarily for fun?

They're not necessarily the. the most interesting things, you know, my nephew told me the first year of law school was basically all rope memory in terms of the learning. So you know, John Grisham's got a great book out now called The Rogue Attorney, and I find taking a break and reading a fun novel about an attorney can be inspirational, give people a fresh perspective on their life, and add some enjoyment. Every law student has the right to be confident, optimistic, and enthusiastic.

Alison Monahan: And one of the things we sometimes say is like, look, this is a privilege, you know, so many people in the world would love to be doing what you're doing and to be there and be so miserable and, you know, so stressed out and feeling all this terrible pressure and choking, like, you know, this is a privilege to be in law school.

Like, you've got to figure out a way that, you know, you've got to figure out techniques basically to help you be okay, because this is not something, you're not being tortured. No one's forcing you to be there.

Dr. Hank Weisinger: Exactly. And I think that, you know what, I'm glad you said that, Alison, because the biggest difference between people who do well under pressure and people who perform below their capability is how they perceive it.

Is that people who do well perceive it as an opportunity, and that's what fund and a challenge and people who do poorly perceive it as a threat.

So, you know, for the first year law student you're coming in, some law students see, oh, this is threatening. It's so competitive. I gotta be on high alert. Those are the people I would predict are not going to do their best person who goes in and has that attitude, man, this is a privilege and opportunity.

And I'm in a great place. And I'm going to really have fun learning. Those are the students who tend to do the best.

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Alison Monahan: Yeah, I try to look at exams as a game. Like, this is a puzzle I have to figure out, you know, what are, it wasn't like, I mean, of course, like I wanted to do well, but ultimately when it sat down, it was like, this is just a game.

This is a game I'm playing. And I have to figure out, you know, the best way to do it.

Dr. Hank Weisinger: Yeah, exactly. Because you're seeing it as a, as a, as a challenge rather than something's threat. That is really a great point. a great mindset to, to have and other students would pay key to model that.

Alison Monahan: Well, unfortunately with that, we are out of time.

Thank you very much, Dr. Weisinger. And if you enjoyed listening to this episode of the Law School Toolbox podcast, please take a second to leave a review and a 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, don't hesitate to reach out to me at Allison@Law School Toolbox, or you can always contact us via our website contact form at LawSchoolToolbox.com.

And if you'd like to reach Dr. Weisinger, you can visit his website at HankWeisingerPHD.com. We'll put that the show notes so you can spell it. Thanks for listening and we'll talk soon and don't let the pressure get you down.