Episode 3: Mastering the On-Campus Interviewing (OCI) Process

Alison Monahan: Hello, and welcome to the Law School Toolbox podcast. 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 be. 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, 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 reach us via the contact form on LawSchoolToolbox.com, or by emailing Alison, A L I S O N, or Lee, L E E, @LawSchoolTolbox.com. And with that, let's get started. Over the next two episodes, we'll be talking about getting a Big Law Summer Associate position through on campus interviewing. Stay tuned!

Lee Burgess: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. For the next two episodes, we're going to be talking about the process of getting a summer associate position at a large law firm, typically referred to as on campus interviewing, or OCI. The details of the process are going to vary somewhat between schools, but the basics are similar across the board.

Alison Monahan: Right, so what typically happens at OCI is that a number of different law firms send representatives who conduct initial interviews with students who might be interested in summering there. What we mean by summering is that you get a summer job after your second year of law school working at the firm, and typically those jobs turn into permanent positions.

So this is one of the leading ways that people become associates at Big Law, I want to say factories, at big law firms after they graduate. So basically, if you're interested in getting a big law job, you probably need to be doing on campus interviewing if that's an option at your school.

And so these initial interviews tend to be fairly short. They're about 20 or 30 minutes each. Sometimes you have a tag team where you're interviewed by two people. Sometimes it's one. And depending on the location, the interviews might literally take place on campus, which is where the name comes from. Or if you're in a city, like New York, where I went to school, where space is at a premium, they're probably going to take place off campus at a hotel, which, as you can imagine, can make for some awkwardness when you're doing a law firm interview in a bedroom.

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Or slightly better, as they did at my school, In a suite where the bedroom is right next door and there's a kitchen. So, I don't know, Lee, what was your experience? Did you have these hotel room things or how did that work?

Lee Burgess:: No, we actually had them in the study rooms in our library. Our, our school had a pretty new law library and it had, In the basement, just these small group study rooms where you could get together with friends and study that kind of lined the full exterior of the building.

So there were maybe 20 these rooms and they would do the interviews in these rooms which was nice because you didn't have to leave campus, but it was kind of like doing these interviews in a fishbowl because people could walk by and see you interviewing and see who you were interviewing with. So that was a little bit weird.

Alison Monahan: And were they all on a certain day or were they spread out? How did it work?

Lee Burgess: You know, I think we did it over a couple weeks.

Alison Monahan: Oh wow.

Lee Burgess: But they were really, they went really quickly. I think because of the space constraints and the fact that they wanted to do it on school, you could only have so many firms there at once.

I feel like that there were, it really runs together, but I feel like there were just a couple weeks where I was wearing my suit all the time.

Alison Monahan: Oh, that's so interesting. Yeah. Because I mean, at Columbia, it was. I think just two days.

Lee Burgess: Oh wow.

Alison Monahan: Maybe three days, but I'm pretty sure it was two days. And they literally rented out basically the entire Doubletree Suites Hotel in Midtown Manhattan. And the whole hotel was basically like some really confused vacationers and all these really stressed out 2Ls from Columbia who are interviewing. I mean, you, well, it sounds like you probably wouldn't do a ton of interviews in one day.

Lee Burgess: No, I think the most interviews I had in one day were two or three.

Alison Monahan: Oh, wow.

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Lee Burgess: Yeah, and then, I think I did 17 total first round interviews, so they were just spread out over a couple weeks.

Alison Monahan: Oh yeah, see, we would do, people would do, you know, on average, probably 15 or 20 interviews, but you would do them in two days.

Lee Burgess: Oh my gosh, that sounds so exhausting.

Alison Monahan: It was totally exhausting.

Yeah, I mean, you would be there all day long, and you'd be doing, you know, a 30 minute interview with a 10 minute break and then another 30 minute interview and trying to keep all these firms straight, which is something we'll talk about later. You know, when you're doing back to back interviews, and they're all sort of fungible.

It was not that easy.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that is super challenging and really exhausting.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it's a total fishbowl, too. I mean, because everyone's like in the elevator like, How did yours go? How did you do? Like, oh, Lee, I like what you're wearing. I don't like what you're wearing. I thought it was pretty crazy. Okay, so I mean, you can see that the way that this happens varies a lot by school, and obviously you want to find out from your school, you know, sort of exactly what you're getting into. So this is another question for you. So when I was doing OCI, they also had these sort of hospitality suites and here's, these were where the recruiting coordinators for different firms would kind of hang out and they'd pass out swag and sometimes you can actually set up additional interviews there, or you could at least drop your resume. So you know if these exist at your school they're definitely worth checking out, because they give you some other options for meeting people and schmoozing, getting your resume. Do these exist at your school?

Lee Burgess: You know they didn't do it during the , OCI process because, I think one, there wasn't room and then we'd already dropped, but they would have, Like a big firm recruiter night or something like that, where I think it was the same idea. All the firm folks came together and they threw kind of an event and everybody had swag and they were Recruiters and associates talking to you about all the firms.

If I remember correctly, it maybe was either at the end of the year, like before the summer, so before OCI started, to give people an opportunity to meet other

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firms. But I think they also had one where you could also just drop your resume if, say, a firm hadn't picked you, or you hadn't had an opportunity to set up an interview.

But they didn't do interviews, like, on site. They didn't have the right people there to do that.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, no, so I think the takeaway message here is it really just depends. I mean, some schools, I think at least, you know, when I was doing OCI, like certain firms would invite people to dinner. I mean, like all this stuff.

So it's going to vary a lot. And probably with the economy as well.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, for sure.

Alison Monahan: I'd imagine some of the extreme excess has probably been dampened

Lee Burgess: it's possible.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, maybe not. I don't know. Maybe not.

Lee Burgess: I heard some summer associates were recently going horseback riding on the beaches of Malibu.

So it can't be-

Alison Monahan: Really?

Lee Burgess: Yes. So it could not be all, you know, cut out.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it's not all austerity.

Lee Burgess: No, exactly.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I don't know, I mean, my firm, they flew everyone to Switzerland to go day hiking.

Lee Burgess: Okay, that's a little more extreme.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think, I think that probably goes down in history as actually one of the more extreme summer associate events ever.

It was definitely, an experience.

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Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Okay, well, one of the things we wanted to talk about briefly before we get too into this is your resume and your cover letter. What are you hearing about these?

Lee Burgess: Oh my gosh, I hear that people are still submitting resumes and cover letters with mistakes in them and typos.

If you remember from our previous podcast, we were talking about being on the Law Review and how you can tell, you know, if a comma is italicized or if it's a dash versus an end dash and all of that stuff.

Alison Monahan: Oh god, don't get me started.

Lee Burgess: Oh, I know, right? So if we notice that stuff, you can be sure recruiters and folks who work in big law, most of whom were on the Law Review, are going to notice that when they see your resume.

Alison Monahan: Spacing. Spacing after a period. Please make it consistent.

Lee Burgess: Exactly.

Alison Monahan: Preferably one. I'll live with two spaces as long as it's consistent. I would prefer one. But if you have one and two and three, it's going to make me jump out of the window.

Lee Burgess: I know. And you know, if one thing is bold, you know, make sure that the next thing on that list is also bold.

Alison Monahan: Or small caps and not small caps.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. I mean the detail.

Alison Monahan: Alignment, people who like align dates to the right but they don't like, right justify them.

Lee Burgess: I know. And see, the thing is we sound really neurotic right now, but we're just as neurotic as the people who are, you're going to be interviewing with.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. And I think, you know, for a lot of people, this is sort of the first time that they've done a very professional resume and it's, you know, it's different. I think,

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you know, what people need to do is talk to your career services, get whatever advice you can get from them, but then also evaluate whether that what they're telling you makes sense.

And I think the more eyes that you can have on your resume and your cover letter, the better.

Lee Burgess: For sure. I mean, we oftentimes read our students resumes when they're getting ready to go into OCI, our tutoring students, because, you know, it's a fresh set of eyes. And, it needs to be Like, in a very small, four corners approach, the most professional representation of yourself and your experience that you can make, because these folks are making these decisions just off of paper in the beginning.

So, they will throw you in the trash if, if you have mistakes in them, because they don't need that. They have a whole stack of qualified people that they can interview.

Alison Monahan: Right, and what's one of the highest, I mean, you know, anytime you look at a hiring committee or you ask someone who is hiring in a big law job, what are you looking for?

Guarantee you top five, attention to detail. What's the easiest way to show that you do not have attention to detail? Having typos in your own resume.

Lee Burgess: Right. I mean, I'll be honest, we, get resumes for people who want to work for us. I'm not going to interview you if you have typos in your resume. I'm not going to do it.

Alison Monahan: Make a note. If you're sending us resumes, make sure you don't have typos.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. I mean, because to me, I need to know my folks either have a high attention to detail or are wise enough to get somebody else to proof it for them.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and the other thing I think, I always recommend people put on their resume if you're interviewing for summer associate positions, is to include some sort of interest section at the bottom, and I had never really seen one of these on a resume until I went to law school, but from having done a bunch of interviews as the interviewer, I can tell you it's extremely useful to have something interesting to talk to someone about. And, you know, it doesn't have to be like, I'm into skydiving.

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Maybe you're kind of boring, and you like to read a lot. But don't put reading down as an interest. Tell me what you're reading. So I have something to talk to you about.

Lee Burgess: Now Alison, what about kind of censoring yourself, or not necessarily censoring yourself, but being thoughtful about those activities?

You put down there, because I think a lot of times, especially with social media, we get so comfortable sharing all the things that we do in our lives. So like, what are some, like reading, you know, reading novels or reading biographies is a good one, or travel, but what are kind of some other interests that you think are resume appropriate interests?

Alison Monahan: Well, I think, you know, slightly sporty is typically good. Although, you know, I like to do yoga, but I'm probably not going to put that on a resume in New York City. No, I mean, I would put it on a resume in California, because in California, everyone does yoga. They think it's normal. In New York, people are like, Ooh, I don't know.

It seems kind of flaky. You know, in New York, I would put my also interest in squash. I would, I would not put squash on a California resume.

Lee Burgess: No, because you know what? When you said squash, I literally was like, summer squash? I had some summer squash for lunch. It was very good.

Alison Monahan: A friend of mine, a friend of mine actually on that note put cheese on her resume as an interest, and she's like, Every single person I interviewed with, all we talked about was cheese.

And that's not a problem. You know, she got tons of offers. They liked her. It was interesting, but you know, be aware you might be called upon to talk about what you put on your resume.

Lee Burgess: It's true. I always like to talk about travel. If you like to travel, everybody seems to have a good travel story or two.

So sometimes that can be a nice thing to put on there.

Alison Monahan: And again, you don't put travel, you put the countries that you've traveled in. Yeah. Because seeing like, oh, Austria, that sounds nice. Tell me about that. Versus like, oh, you like to travel. Great. Yeah. Okay. Do you like business travel? Because there's gonna be a lot of that.

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Lee Burgess: Exactly. Exactly. So, you know, be honest, but be thoughtful, because if somebody's gonna ask you questions about what's included on your resume, that's very important.

Alison Monahan: Oh my god, do not put in interests that you don't actually have. Oh yeah. I was doing an interview once with this poor kid. I don't think he'd ever had a real job before.

And, you know, I'm his resume, frankly, there was, it was pretty thin. There was not a lot on it. I'm casting around for anything we can talk about for the next 20 minutes after the, you know, like, so how do you like law school? And he had baking on his resume. And so I'm like, great, you know, what do you like to bake?

And he sort of looked at me blankly and I looked back at the resume and looked back at him and said, you did write this right ? And he says, well. I guess it's more like I like watching TV shows. Like, I aspire to bake.

Lee Burgess: Wow.

Alison Monahan: And I was like, yeah. Ok.

Lee Burgess: Just like he aspired to be a summer associate?

Alison Monahan: Yeah, suffice it to say, that offer was not forthcoming. But I mean, honestly, he could have put that he liked watching TV shows about baking, and I like, oh, okay, that's interesting, tell me about that.

Lee. Burgess Right.

Alison Monahan: It doesn't matter what it is.

Lee Burgess: Just so you can talk, because the other thing I think that people forget is, you know, in these interviews they want you to be someone they can talk to because they are interviewing you as somebody they're going to spend a lot of time with at the office.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely.

Lee Burgess: So, you know, you want to be able to dialogue with them about something.

Alison Monahan: If you can't talk about something on your resume, that is a serious problem for your social skills.

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Lee Burgess: For sure.

For. Sure. That is not a good call. Okay, so, and guys, like the recruiters, they do read this stuff really carefully.

We were both just talking about how we have recruiter friends who on Facebook complain about bad resumes and cover letters they get, say, with the wrong firm name on the cover letter. Classic mistake.

Alison Monahan: Or their name being misspelled. No one ever forgets that.

Lee Burgess: No, nobody does ever forget that.

So, please, please, please, attention to detail.

Alison Monahan: Or in the case of, of Lee. How many times have you been referred to as he?

Lee Burgess: Oh my goodness, yes. Many, many times.

Alison Monahan: Check the internet.

Lee Burgess: Yes, it is often fascinating how many people will meet with us and talk about how much they appreciate our website and the work that we do, where we have a picture of the two of us all over our website.

Alison Monahan: Lee does not look like a man.

Lee Burgess: I do not look like a man in those pictures, and, they still are shocked to find out I'm a woman. So that is not a good call when it's come time to interview. So if you interview, especially with someone, or you're writing to somebody with a name that could be, you know, a gender neutral name, Google them.

All these people you're writing to should be Googleable.

Alison Monahan: They have LinkedIn.

Lee Burgess: And they have LinkedIn.

Alison Monahan: It has photos.

Lee Burgess: Yes, so you can figure it out. But yeah, that's it. That's not a good mistake to make. Yeah, and don't misspell. People also write to me and misspell my name all the time, which is fine, except my email has my name in it.

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Alison Monahan: Yeah, they also misspell my first name, which can be a problem when they're trying to email the wrong first name. 1 L, not 2.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that too. Exactly. So anyway, guys, be really thoughtful and careful. It may seem like you spend a lot of time working on these little details, but they can make or break your summer associate opportunity.

Alison Monahan: Absolutely.

Lee Burgess: All right. So, now, there are tons and tons of firms, some from all over the country, that will come to these OCI interview days, and, students generally have to bid, or we called it resume dropping, to the firms that they want to interview with. Here, each school is going to have a different process.

Some schools, you can bid on whatever firm you want to, and others, there might be GPA requirements, or the firms might be able to veto a bid if they think it's pointless to talk to you, or they might just be able to select students they want to talk to out of a pool. Alison, how did it work at Columbia?

Alison Monahan: Well, at Columbia, everyone is a special snowflake, so there were no limits on what firms you could bid on. Yeah. And they had to talk to you. We, dropped resumes in, like, a pool, and they got to pick who they wanted to, so. Yeah. I actually had this conversation with one of the people I was interviewing with, he was like, I don't know why they do this.

He's like, it's so pointless. Why do I have to talk to these people that I know I'm not gonna hire based on their grades?

Lee Burgess: Yeah. So again, stuff's gonna vary school to school. So you need to understand how the bidding process works so you can optimize your opportunities. You can. Think of the process a bit like law school admissions.

It's wise to have a target of how many firms you want to reach out to, and, you know, what are your ideal firms? What are maybe your reach firms? And then what are the safety firms on your list? So you can make sure that you have a good pool of choices for, your summer admissions.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think it's important for people to understand realistically what their options are likely to be.

Lee Burgess: Right.

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Alison Monahan: Because, you know, even in a school like Harvard, you know, there are certain firms that some people are just not going to be competitive for.

Lee Burgess: Mm hmm.

Alison Monahan: And there's no harm in including a few of those. If it's your absolute dream firm, like you're dying to work at, I don't know, Skadden Arps or whatever. Or Wachtell, even better example. You know, Wachtell does not hire very many people from any school. But you know, if you want to throw your hat in the ring, go for it. But don't pad, you know, don't make your entire list out of firms that you don't have a realistic shot at. And, you know, typically you're going to get something from your school that's going to help you figure this out because the reality is it's pointless for the school to have you interview with a bunch of places that you're not going to get an offer at either.

So, I know, I think we were given, like, spreadsheets of typical GPAs or GPA ranges that firm, different firms had hired from. Yeah, I don't know, you know, do you remember exactly what you got?

Lee Burgess: I think we got some sort of, like cheat sheets where it was, you know, this firm will only take you if you're in the top certain percentage of the class or GPA range or if you're on the law review.

I mean, they did have kind of their must haves list and it was your option. And you could. You know, put your resume in the pool for any of them, but, you know, if you weren't at the top of your class and if you didn't have things like law review on your resume, they probably weren't going to talk to you.

You might get one or two, but you weren't going to get all of them.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. And, you know, I think you just want to make sure that you're giving yourself as many decent options as you can. Mm hmm. And, you know, talking to people in the classes above you could be a really good way to get information.

If you're in clubs, like certain clubs will actually have, kind of like pre OCI meetings for strategy, you know, if you've been accepted to the Law Review, they'll sometimes have information or people will be willing to talk to you, so what are some other things that people should think about as they're bidding?

Lee Burgess: Well, you definitely want to think about location. I know, you know, I was schooling in the school in the Bay Area and I wanted to stay in the Bay Area for

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the summers, so You know, I didn't actually submit any resumes to firms locations outside of San Francisco. Alison, but you considered going lots of different places, so I think you had a lot more location possibilities, right?

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean, I wouldn't say a lot. I basically did most of my bidding in New York, and then I also bid on a few firms in San Francisco. I kind of accidentally interviewed with a DC firm because I got confused, which made for a very awkward interview. And the, you know, interviewer turned to me and says, "so why DC?"

And there was this, like, slightly too long pause where I said "DC. Right, um, yeah, you know, I really love the government", and I'm thinking to myself, why am I here at an interview at a firm in D. C.? Whoops, I checked the wrong box, I guess. Those are the things that happen when you're doing like 20 interviews in two days.

I also somehow had an interview with Wachtell, which I'm pretty sure I did not actually sign up for, because there was absolutely no way I ever would have wanted to work there. And that was a really weird one because, you know, similar thing like "Why Wachtell?" and in this case, for whatever reason, I decided to be completely honest and was like, "You know, to be perfectly honest, I'm not sure how this ended up on my schedule and I really don't have any interest in working here."

At which point, he said, "Well, why?" And I said, "Because I think you worked too many hours. I think you're crazy." And then he spent the next 20 minutes trying to convince me that actually I did wanna work there.

Lee Burgess: That's hilarious.

Alison Monahan: And then they did not give me a call back.

Lee Burgess: I think you know, I also think people get caught up in the idea that you need to have as many interviews as possible, but they forget to think about what the actual firms do. I mean, I remember, I maybe liberally dropped my resume, and then by really getting into researching the firms before the interviews, I remember one specific firm where they basically did tobacco litigation.

Alison Monahan: Oh god.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, tobacco litigation defense. And I remember prepping thinking, I do not want to do tobacco litigation defense. That is not something I'm going to feel

good about going to work every day. And I went in, went to the first round, but I remember sitting there, just, I was trying to actually come up with anything else they might do that would interest me, and then I realized that everybody ends up at one point or another working on tobacco litigation defense, and I was just like, okay, this is not a good fit, you know, should I have wasted their time? Probably not.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think looking, you know, looking at the websites of the firms that you're considering bidding on, Really thinking about practice area. I mean, in a minimum, hopefully at this point, by the time you're doing these interviews, you have some conception of what you might want to do, whether it's just, I want to do a litigation or I want to do corporate work.

You know, I mean, firms specialize in different areas, you know, the firm that I summared at as a 2L was mostly known for corporate work and I wanted to do litigation and, you know, they sort of convinced me like, no, no, it's fine. But the reality is, the firm is oriented towards corporate work Right? And as a result, you know, I go to the library and like they wouldn't have books that have more litigation oriented firm would have.

There's something wrong with that. It just wasn't the right fit for me. And I think it's easy to just sort of get caught up in, like you know, Oh, these firms are all the same, and you know, they are similar in a lot of ways, but they're definitely not the same.

Lee Burgess: No, and I think, you know, we can talk a little bit more of this in about this in our next podcast.

We're going to talk about callbacks, but callbacks become a really I think that's a really great time to talk about what is the work that's actually going on in the individual office, because you know, websites can tell you all sorts of things, but for instance, when I was at my firm, I worked primarily in an office that had been absorbed by the big firm a number of years before, but they were a boutique product liability firm when they'd been absorbed, and so they still, their bread and butter was still pretty much product liability.

I was okay practicing product liability, But if I hadn't been, that would have been really problematic, and when I went on my callback, it became very evident that that was the type of practice they were doing. So, I think, it's just something you really do want to keep in mind to learn more about. If you don't like the type of law they practice, you should not work there, because you will not be happy.

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Alison Monahan: Yeah, and you're not going to get to do the work that you want to do, and you know, if a firm does, say, 80 percent bankruptcy and then a little bit of other stuff, like, you probably should not believe them when they tell you that, oh, yeah, of course, like, you'll be able to do this other stuff, because it's probably not true.

Lee Burgess: No, especially when the economy gets rocky, you're going to be doing whatever they need you to do, whatever they can bill you at as, basically.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, whatever comes through the door, and that's more likely to be the stuff that they're known for than this thing that, you know, some partner picked who lateraled over happened to bring with him.

Lee Burgess: Yep, exactly.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean, as you're going through this process, too, there are certain guides you can look at. I think Vault has a guide to summer associate programs, but obviously you want to think about more than that. They've got a guide to mid level associates, I think Above the Law is doing some work on this.

We can put them in the show notes.

Lee Burgess: Great. All right. So other than looking at the websites, You know, how many firms do you think you need to drop resumes for an interview with to get a summer associate offer?

Alison Monahan: Well, I mean, obviously we know the answer to that is it totally depends, right?

Lee Burgess:It's their answer to everything. Sorry, guys.

Alison Monahan: Right. We're lawyers. But in this case, it's true. I mean, you know, it depends on everything from how prestigious is the school that you're going to, where are you in the class? I mean, those are the two big ones. And then also, I think, where are you interviewing? Certain cities are notoriously more difficult to get positions in, like it's much easier typically to get.

A summer job in New York City than it is in San Francisco, just because San Francisco is a small market and highly desirable. So, you know, if you're bidding, even if you're coming from a school, you know, very fancy school, but you're bidding only in San Francisco, you probably need to do more interviews than you need to do if you just want, you know, a job in New York, because there are more of those jobs available.

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Lee Burgess: Yeah, I agree. And I think, I also think that one thing that makes you more competitive that a lot of people don't think about is whether or not you have work experience before school. Yeah, very good point. Yeah, I worked for a number of years. Before school as a high tech consultant doing client facing work, and the firms really loved the fact that I had already done client facing work in a corporate environment versus someone who had just gone straight through.

So, I think in some ways I was a more desirable candidate because I had that work experience. And so that's another thing you can keep. You know, in mind, as you're doing these interviews, if you are someone who is coming straight through school without a lot of corporate experience, or any corporate experience, then I, I think you want to drop more resumes, because I think it can be a little harder to compete with people who have more work experience.

Alison Monahan: No, I think that's right. I mean, there's always gonna be that question if you're interviewing someone who's 23, 22, you know, would I feel comfortable putting this person in front of a client a year from now, two years from now? And it's not to say that you won't get hired, but you know, I think there, you're gonna have to overcome that barrier.

Lee Burgess: And, you know, when you first get these, your first corporate job, you make some silly mistakes. We all do. And if you've had one of these corporate jobs before, you've maybe made some of those mistakes already, so.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. And you know, some people come off as more mature than they really are, and you know, that's a factor to consider, too.

I mean, some people come off as less mature than they really are. I mean, even if you have, you know, work experience, but you know that you come off as, you know, Much younger, much more immature than you really are, you might need to do more interviews.

Lee Burgess: Yep, it's true. So just don't get overconfident, make sure you have plenty of options, and realize that you're going to learn a lot through the interview process.

You're going to learn more about the firms than you could just gain from their websites, and you never know which firm is going to be the best fit.

Alison Monahan: Sure, and at the same time though, I think it's important not to go totally crazy.

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Lee Burgess: Agreed.

Alison Monahan: You know, if you are like on the law review at Columbia, you probably don't need to interview at 40 firms to get a job in New York City. Like, that's just overkill. You're being paranoid. And granted, that's what got you where you are to begin with. But, you know, there is a point of diminishing returns where if you are so exhausted, instead that you can't function in an interview. It doesn't make sense to do it.

So you've got to sort of, you know, even then you still have to strategize about what are my highest priority firms.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, so what if you're not at the very top of your class and you're not on the law review? You know, sometimes students can wonder if doing the legwork to drop resumes for these firms that come for OCI is even worth their time.

What do you think?

Alison Monahan: Well, I mean, I typically advise people to just go ahead and do it for a couple of reasons. I mean, one, if you do get interviews, it's good practice, you know, you're going to, you're going to be doing job interviews for some sort of legal job at some point. So there's really no downside to just sort of viewing it as, you know, I'll take my best shot, but at least I'll learn something.

And also, you just never know, you know, if you have a very compelling personality, the certain interviewer really hits it off with you, you know, they might be willing to overlook the fact that your grades aren't that amazing. Or if you have other skills, you know, you have something else interesting on your resume.

I mean, the problem, of course, is it could be a total waste of time and a real downer and a huge time suck. But typically speaking, I mean, I say just throw your hat in the ring and go for it. What do you think?

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think so. I mean, unless you go to career services and they tell you it's a complete waste of time.

Alison Monahan: But even if they do, I mean, I've had, you know, I know I've had students come to me and they tell me they didn't do OCI and I'm like, well, why not? Well, you know. I really got discouraged by the career services people, and it's like, okay, that might be in their best interest to tell you not to do this, but it's probably not in your best interest to have not done it, because you just don't know.

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Lee Burgess: It's true, and your resume needs to be flawless, and you need to have a good solid cover letter anyway, so, Whether or not you do OCI, those two things need to be saved on your computer somewhere, so a lot of the legwork needs to get done anyway. I don't know that putting your hat in the ring is going to be all that much more work.

If you get the interviews, they're more work, but if you, you know, but if just throwing yourself into the process, I'm not sure. Is all that much more work?

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it's just like, why not try it?

Lee Burgess: Yeah, you never know. You never know. Okay, so we've decided now how we're going to bid. We've got a bidding strategy, and it was successful, and we've got some first round interviews, now what do I have to think about before I walk in?

Alison Monahan: Well, I mean, a lot of stuff, obviously. You know, you're training to be a lawyer. I think the first step is you really need to do your research. And one of the things is you've got to keep track of these firms. You need to know why it was that you bid on these places.

You need to know where they are. You need to know what type, you need to know, I'm speaking from experience, you need to know what type of work they do, and one way, there are a couple of ways you can keep track of this. Old school people will just use index cards. So each firm gets an index card when you look at their website.

If you know who you're going to be interviewing with, you write all the stuff down in the five minutes before you walk into your interview. You know exactly what you're going to look at. You can review everything. You can also use one of our favorite tech tools, which is Trello, T R E L L O, and that's sort of a virtual bulletin board.

So what, what kind of stuff should you be looking for here, Lee?

Lee Burgess: I mean, you definitely want to, you know, look at the website and make sure you don't ask questions that are easily answerable on the website that's going to make you look like you're not a very good researcher.

Alison Monahan: Right, like, oh, so where do you have offices?

Lee Burgess: Right, exactly. Seriously? What are your primary practice areas in those offices? Usually it says that on the website. Yeah. You know, you need to think about why

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you want to work at this firm and in this location or in this specific office, you know, if you've done your research, you should have a few reasons why you want to work there.

Of course, if you don't have those reasons, maybe you shouldn't be interviewing there.

Alison Monahan: Or maybe you should make them up.

Lee Burgess: Or make them up. Yes, that's true, but yeah, just have a good general idea of the type of law they practice and what, you And if those things align and if they don't align, if you would like the opportunity to work there, you should make them sound like they align.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, because I mean basically, what's the first thing that, you know, I mean, we've you know, we've done these interviews on both sides of the table. The first thing or one of the first things someone's going to ask you is basically, So why firm X?

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: And you need to have a pretty solid answer to that.

It doesn't have to be revolutionary, but it needs to be something along the lines of, well, you know, I'm really interested in doing patent litigation and I know that you guys are really strong in this area. I like the fact that you have small teams and I would get to work closely with the partners or whatever.

I mean, you could say that basically about any firm. They all think they have small teams. You know, and these are the sort of things they're going to ask about. You know, there's stuff they're going to ask about, you know, frankly, most of these interviews are pretty softball. It's a lot of, oh, how do you like law school?

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: Guess what? The appropriate answer is not, I don't. Which I have had people tell me. Yeah. And it's just like, okay, next. You know, you can certainly finesse the answer. Like, oh, you know, I found it really challenging, but I certainly learned a lot. You don't have to lie outright, but you know, use a little discretion.

Lee Burgess: Exactly.

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Alison Monahan: I mean, what else should people be aware of? Basically, if there's anything that's strange on your resume.

Lee Burgess: Or transcripts. Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Or your transcript. That's a good point. Or one bad grade, you need to be ready to talk about that. And you need to have your story. ready to go in a way that sounds convincing.

So Lee, you had a sort of situation like this, right?

Lee Burgess: I did. So my first semester, I got a disappointing grade in my LRW, which is our legal research and writing class, and of course that's going to be glaring on a transcript, but lucky for me, the second semester I high scored the class. So yes,

Alison Monahan: That gives you a pretty good storyline.

Lee Burgess: It does, but you know, you'd think they would notice this, but I did have plenty of smart alecky, you know, folks, lawyers, especially the litigators, who love to say things like, well, how can you explain this grade in your legal research and writing class? And I had to have the shot back that said, well, I realized there was a learning curve.

And if you could notice my second semester, I high scored the class. So I seem to have learned my lesson. And, and most of them got a chuckle. And then it was like not a ding on my interview at all. But if I had sat there and gotten very embarrassed about it, Especially in front of a litigator, because I too was interviewing mostly with litigation firms.

Alison Monahan: Who would go for the jugular.

Lee Burgess: They will go for the jugular. If they can see that you're nervous and that you feel bad about this grade, we would have had a very long discussion about it. They didn't ask why I got the bad grade. My explanation was basically like, it happened, I fixed it. Is there anything else we need to talk about?

No? Great, let's move on. And they like that approach. So, if there's something that you do need to explain away, just make sure you have your story, you've practiced it, and don't get caught off guard, and don't let them see that vulnerability, because they are not going to appreciate that, and they will go for the jugular.

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Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean, I was also interviewing most youth litigators, and, you know, my resume is weird. I went from Sociology to Architecture to Programming to Law School. Like, that's pretty weird. And every single person I interviewed with looked at my resume, looked at me, and said, "So, explain that to me?" And, you know, fair question, right?

But I had my, I told the exact same story a hundred times, saying, well, you know, there's not really a big difference between designing a brief and designing a database, it's all the same way of thinking, you know, this is why it's valuable. And again, like, that satisfied them. No one actually cared.

Lee Burgess: No, you know, and they'll ask you all sorts of things.

I had one person in a callback interview look at my resume and say, wow, you change jobs every couple of years. How do I ever think you're going to work for me longer than a year?

Alison Monahan: Well, that would have been a fair question as it turns out.

Lee Burgess: It turns out it was a fair question since I did leave the firm.

Ironically, that question was not presented to me at the firm I did choose to leave. But hey, Alison, this job is my longest job ever. So, you know.

Alison Monahan: Wow.

Lee Burgess: I know.

Alison Monahan: Probably me too, actually.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, look at us. Okay, so that's all very important, and rehearse these things. You know, practice it in front of the mirror, practice it talking to your cat, whatever you need to do, but get comfortable talking about these things that are going to come up.

Alison Monahan: And these are lawyers. It's not like they're not going to notice something that you don't want them to notice. They're going to notice.

Lee Burgess: Yes. And then, I think it's important to think about what you're going to wear. I think that sometimes the law schools can give you some pretty gnarly advice about especially what women are supposed to wear.

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Again, really? Come on. No one has advice for women on what to wear. No. Oh my gosh. Some of it really kills me. Again, it can be regional specific. I think things back east can be a little more formal than things in California.

Alison Monahan: Well, or the south. South is different.

Lee Burgess: South is also very different. So, talk to folks about what are the norms, but you should, you know, wear something conservative, but something that reflects that. It's you and your style, but don't be distracting. So for instance, I personally hate collared button up shirts. I think they look terrible on me. I do not wear them. I do not wear them. I went to every talk on what you're supposed to wear to OCI, and it was basically like if I didn't wear a button up collared shirt under my suit, that I wasn't getting an offer.

Alison Monahan: Game over. Totally.

Lee Burgess: Game over. Right? I managed to get plenty of offers not wearing a button up, because I look silly in them. They just do not work well on my body type. And so you need to think about what is going to look good on you, and invest in a few outfits. You know, I personally like the two suit plan.

I had a first round interview suit and I had a callback suit. The callback suit was gray. I had the interview suit was navy blue. And I had a few different shells that went underneath them, but then none of them were flashy. You know, they were white or blue or something that looked good with my eye color or whatever.

But you know, I just looked clean and pressed and nice, and that was plenty. You don't have to own a bunch of different suits. You don't have to have lots of complicated outfits, a few pieces, even that you can mix and match a few different shelves that can go underneath things can make it very economical.

But, you know, again, they're looking at you as a colleague, you need to look clean and pressed. I think other things for women, careful with the big flashy jewelry. That's also not necessarily what you want somebody staring at. Big statement necklaces probably shouldn't be on your resume.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, this might be your time for pearls.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, like pearls, like simple hoop earrings, things like that.

Alison Monahan: A little silver chain.

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Lee Burgess: Yeah, I also think women, , you have to think about if you have long hair, making sure you don't have your hair in a way that you fidget with it all the time.

Alison Monahan: At the same time, you don't absolutely have to put it back.

Because I have longer hair and people are like, oh, you've got to pull it back. And I'm like, I don't, I don't like wearing ponytails.

Lee Burgess: No. Yeah, and I even love wearing ponytails, but I would never wear a ponytail during an interview.

Alison Monahan: Right. Exactly. I mean, in normal life, sure.

Lee Burgess: Right. But, but you know, I think, like, sometimes if you know that you are one of those women who constantly is pushing their hair behind their ears.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, oh God. If they're like twirling, the twirling in interviews drives me nuts.

Lee Burgess: Just make sure that you either use a bobby pin, clip it back a little bit, but make sure that, you know, you're don't enable yourself to do some sort of a fidget that, you know, can be distracting.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, put something in your hands, you know, carry your, your portfolio with your extra resumes or whatever, and just literally hold on to it if you know that you're a person whose hands, like, do things that are really distracting.

Lee Burgess: But I think it's worth it, if you can, to invest in at least one really nice suit. I'd rather you have fewer items of clothing and have them be a little bit nicer. I know a lot of folks, including myself, I think for my birthday that year, I asked for a suit for my birthday.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and it doesn't have to be like super high end.

I mean like something from like Banada Republic is fine.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, Ann Taylor.

Alison Monahan: Ann Taylor, Brooks Brothers, you know, I mean, none of these are like, you're not gonna look amazing in any of these, but that's fine. You'll look suitable.

Lee Burgess: Right, and that's, and of course you're not gonna like, they don't need to last forever. So it's okay, but you know.

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Alison Monahan: You do want to think about this in advance. You don't want it to be like two days before you realize you don't have shoes.

Lee Burgess: Oh, shoes are another thing. You don't need a bunch of pairs of shoes, but you better be able to stand in them and wear them a lot, because you're gonna be in them a lot.

So, if you do not know how to walk in stiletto heels, and they hurt your feet, don't wear stiletto heels that hurt your feet.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly, like, I mean, you know, you've been getting dressed your whole life, you know kind of how to dress, but it's also, you know, if you're someone who's Like for me, like I don't like shopping.

I don't particularly like care about clothing that much, so it's worth it. It can be worth it to just go to a store and have one of their, one of the salespeople help you. You know, if you go to a department store, I think you could even get a personal shopper, like Banana Republic type places sometimes.

And they'll literally pull stuff for you and say, you know, try this, try this, try this. And sometimes it's stuff you wouldn't have thought about that actually ends up working out really well.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, Nordstrom also has a great personal shopping program, so it doesn't cost you anything else.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it's like, they just want you to buy stuff, like, it's free.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, you make an appointment, you go, and yeah, they're gonna make sure that you have options, and you can say, I need, you know, three outfits.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and this, I mean, this is an investment. It's gonna cost money. That's just, unfortunately, the reality of it.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, but if you get one of these jobs, you can pay off that credit card bill.

Alison Monahan: Exactly.

Lee Burgess: So yeah, so just think through it. Don't leave it to the last minute. You know, if you're doing, um, OCI interview is coming up and you don't have an outfit, set aside some time. Men, I think it's a little bit easier for you because you need to wear a tie and a jacket and a suit.

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Alison Monahan: That's pretty much it, you're done.

Lee Burgess: That's pretty much it.

Alison Monahan: And shoes, make sure your shoes look nice. And a belt, you need a belt.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, you still need to have it all put together. Alison, here's another regional thing that, though, too, and, you know, it can be hard that we have to talk about this stuff for women, but what about things like manicures in back east in New York?

Do you need to have, like, your nails done and things like that to go to these interviews?

Alison Monahan: Yes. I mean, you don't necessarily need polish, but at a minimum, you need, I mean, I think it's preferable if you have a full manicure, but it's, you know, at a minimum, you should not go in with, like, a half, like, pulled off manicure and, like, raggedy nails, like, at a minimum.

You know, take off any polish you had, file them down so they're short and not distracting. I think that's fine.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: But preferably, yeah, you would have a manicure. And the same thing with makeup. Like, if you don't know how to wear makeup, I mean, I took makeup lessons, Lee took a makeup lesson. That's, I mean, unfortunately, sometimes those are the things we kind of have to suck it up and do.

Lee Burgess: Yep. But again, just make sure that nothing that you're doing is distracting. You know, you don't need to have hot, like, hot pink nails.

Alison Monahan: No, no. Pale, neutral, neutral colors.

Lee Burgess: But you do want to have it be put together and, you know, we can talk all day about whether or not it's fair that all these requirements are out there, but, you know, this is still a game that we kind of have to play.

Alison Monahan: You're playing the game, and so you need to look like you belong. Well, with that, unfortunately, we are out of time. Tune in next time, and we're going to be talking about callback interviews, which these are the ones you do after your

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initial round of on campus interviews, if all goes well. And if we have time, we'll talk a bit about the non OCI job search, too, just in case things don't work out.

So if you enjoyed this episode of the Law School Toolbox podcast, please take a second to leave a review and 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 us at Lee@LawSchoolToolbox.com or Alison@LawSchoolToolbox.com.

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