Episode 33: Top 10 Tips for Law School Success

Lee Burgess: Hello and welcome to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today we are wishing a happy birthday to the Law School Toolbox with an episode about our top 10 lessons for law students. Your Law School Toolbox hosts are Alison Monahan and Lee Burgess, that's me. 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.

We're the co creators of the Law School Toolbox, the Bar Exam Toolbox, the Catapult Conference, and the Trebuchet Legals Career site. Alison also runs 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, and we'd love to hear from you. And with that, let's get started.

Alison Monahan: Welcome back. Today we're celebrating the fourth birthday of the Law School Toolbox, which is really exciting. And we've been reflecting over the past couple of weeks about the things that we've learned over the past four years from working with lots and lots of law students about how to be a happy successful law student and in today's episode we're gonna go through our top 10 list of things that you can do to make yourself a successful law student without losing your mind So Lee, what's first on the list?

Lee Burgess: First on the list is a throwback to one of our early podcasts, which is Mindset Matters Because in the law school experience we're all going to fail at some point, or at least stumble.

Alison Monahan: No, that never happens.

Lee Burgess: I know, I know. But I think everybody's at least going to take a stumble and get knocked down a little bit.

But while most people just focus on that failure or that stumble, what we've really learned is that it's what you do with that failure that matters, and that's one of the reasons why we talk so much about mindset.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think you can see this oftentimes, you know, when students approach us And they ask for help.

Even in those initial emails, you can almost get a sense of who's really gonna be able to receive that help in a way that really, you know, propels them forward. Like sometimes people send an email saying, you know, I just got my grades back and I feel really stupid.

Episode 33: Top 10 Tips for Law School Success

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: And, you know, that's kind of a red flag for us, because what does that mean?

That means that they have a fixed mindset about this. They're thinking, I'm stupid, I'm a failure, my grades are telling me that I'm bad at law school.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And I think sometimes when we'll have like an initial call with a student, and if they're reflecting on their first semester grades, you know, I'll say, have you had a chance to, you know, talk to your professors?

And it's the students who are like, yes, I already have appointments with my professors to review my exams and find out what happened. You're kind of taking this very proactive approach, and then again, you're like, Wow, this, this, this person is going to be able to take our advice. Probably incorporate it into their work, and thoughtfully examine what they do, and has a higher likelihood of success than somebody who says, No, I don't want to go talk to my professors, or no, that's going to be a waste of time.

There's no, you know, because that stuff makes you uncomfortable, and I think one of the things about the growth mindset is it, give you space to do some of the uncomfortable things without judging yourself.

Alison Monahan: Right and sometimes, you know, we'll talk to second or occasionally my third year students who have not been doing well.

And we'll ask them that question. Have you talked to your professors about your exams? You like, God, no. Like, why would I do that? That would be so horrible.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: And it's like, well, you know, who is it that's giving you these grades? You know, what, what can they tell you? And sometimes it's literally like you just a year long class and they have the same professor, You And I'm just like, what do you mean, like, you don't want input from the person who's giving you the grade the next semester?

This is, this is kind of mind blowing to me. Anyway, I get it. It's not fun, and, you know, it can be scary, and you think maybe they're gonna, like, say something mean to you, or just gonna make you feel bad, but the reality is, you know, just looking at it from a practical standpoint, This is the fastest way to get better, is to figure out what this person wants you to do and do it.

Episode 33: Top 10 Tips for Law School Success

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: So if you're not able or willing to do that, it's sort of hard for us to really help you.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, and anybody to help you. I mean, like, if you go to your academic support office at school and They will tell you also to go talk to your professors, and if you, you know, it's like, you can ask for all the help you want, but if you're not willing to kind of, you know, be, if you're not willing to put yourself out there and really ask the tough questions to change your situation, the likelihood that anything is going to change is not very high.

Alison Monahan: We've talked about sort of having to sit with that discomfort. Like no one, you know, we're not telling you that it's going to be like the most fun day of your life. That half hour that you spend talking to your professor about why you got a C- in their class. But that's also, you know, that information if you can take it in a growth way, you know, with a growth mindset and say, you know, I'm just here to try to figure out what I need to do differently and what I need to do better, that's incredibly valuable.

Lee Burgess: It is. And if you can work on this skill in law school, I mean, we all, you know, fluctuate, most of us, between the fixed mindset and the growth mindset. I know Alison and I do. We catch each other on it sometimes, you know, and have over the last three or four years.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, we're like, I'm just bad at this certain thing. It's like, well, this might not be like your most native skill set, but like, frankly, somebody needs to handle the payroll. Right, exactly.

Lee Burgess: So, you know, learn it, make it work. But you know, I think it's important to realize that you're actually cultivating skills for your practice of the law too, because every lawyer I know also stumbles and fails or makes a mistake.

And it is what you do with that information or that experience that is so important. I even remember being a clerk at the U. S. Attorney's Office, my first summer between my 1L and 2L year, and I'd made a mistake in pleadings. You could actually get certified to appear. And I was doing pleadings for misdemeanor cases, and I, I totally screwed up.

Episode 33: Top 10 Tips for Law School Success

Like, I just, I totally screwed up. I, like, didn't edit the document completely correctly. I didn't fully understand what my assignment was. My supervisor was super busy. She didn't catch it. And I got yelled at in open court.

Like, for a while.

And and I remember actually, like, leaving. And, of course, then my supervisor's like, He wasn't really yelling at you, he was really yelling at me. And I was like, I don't know, kind of felt like, he was yelling at me. But I did have that, you know, that crisis of faith of like, maybe I'm not meant to do this. I don't have a high enough attention to detail. How could I not, you know, do this pleading right. I mean, I was this law student, you know, I mean,

Alison Monahan: Yeah, like ultimately if you look at it objectively, it's like.

Yeah, like you screwed up, but ultimately that wasn't completely your responsibility.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: Like there's a reason you had a supervisor.

Lee Burgess: Right, exactly, and but I think the reality was is I started to go down that fixed mindset path, you know, maybe court's just not for me, you know, I'm, I didn't understand exactly what I was supposed to do, you know, I can't believe I got yelled at in open court, like I shouldn't be doing this, you know.

Yadda yadda yadda. And I actually remember calling my dad, who is a prosecutor, and I said, I got yelled at in open court. And he's like, great, you can check that off your list. And I was like, what? And he goes, everyone's been yelled at in open court. He's like, this is not the last time you will probably be yelled at in open court.

If this is what you decide to do with your life. He's like, so now it's happened once. You know, like-

Alison Monahan: Welcome to the club.

Lee Burgess: Welcome to the club. And it was just-

Alison Monahan: Well it's just, you know, it's the same thing in law school. Like everyone says something in class that they feel like is so embarrassingly horrible that they can't possibly live with it.

Episode 33: Top 10 Tips for Law School Success

But it's really just like, okay, welcome to the club. Now you have your story.

Lee Burgess: Right. Exactly.

Alison Monahan: You know, I've got a story. You've got a story. Pretty much everyone who's ever been to law school has a story about that time where you said this thing and, you know, usually it's your favorite professor and like, you know, you're turning purple and he's looking at you like, oh my God, this is the stupidest person I've ever seen in my life, or that's what it feels like, when actually he's just like, oh, okay, who might actually be able to answer this question and get me out of this problem?

Lee Burgess: Exactly. Exactly. So, we, this is, Mindset is a life skill to work on, and if you haven't listened to our podcast on Mindset, or checked out Carol Dreck's book which we think is a great read, maybe on one of your breaks, it's a quick read, I think I've read it mostly on an airplane.

Alison Monahan: Exactly, I read it on a flight, it's perfect for that.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, it's a great, it's a great flight book, but I think it's worth it, because it's something I think that will make you a better writer. Law student, but a better lawyer and a better career person no matter what you do.

Alison Monahan: Well, just a better person in general. I mean, I think, and one of the ways that you can practice this is sort of, you know, this doesn't have to be all, like, dire, like, oh, it's so hard, I don't want to do it.

You know, like, I think it's actually interesting, and I do this intentionally, to pick something that I'm not good at that I want to learn. You know, so, like, I've taken classes in throwing on the pottery wheel, you know, like, you're not going to be good at that the first time that you try it. But it's like, who cares?

It doesn't matter. Or like, I'm learning to ski or learning Spanish. You know, I think if, if you can put yourself in these sort of like not so weighted situations where you have an opportunity just to basically to play and to get better at something, it can be really useful to have those skills to carry over into your more serious, like, professional environment too.

Lee Burgess: That's right. Very true. So this was a big one. That's why I put it at the top of our list.

Alison Monahan: Right. And it's actually this conversation segues really nicely into number two.

Episode 33: Top 10 Tips for Law School Success

Lee Burgess: Oh, you'd think I planned it that way.

Alison Monahan: You'd think so, and I think this is absolutely accurate. You know, our second one on the list is that law school is a learned skill.

So, no one comes into law school, like, knowing how to read a case. No one knows how to brief a case. These are not skills you come out of the womb with. And, you know, the reality is that this stuff is hard, and this might be the first time that you're not the smartest person in the room, but you can learn how to do it.

Lee Burgess: Mm hmm. And I think we see this sometimes, too, with our Start Law School Right program that we run or when we talk to. 0 L's to 1 L's about what they are scared about is a lot of it is this idea of like well, I'm not going to know what to do on day one. And it's like okay, yeah, you can, you can do some prep courses.

You can get educated on what the requirements are of class, but still when you get to class you're not going to really know what to do on day one and that's okay. Right. You're not supposed to know. You're not supposed to. You know, you're not supposed to know how to write a legal brief on day one. You're not supposed to know how to do all your legal citations on day one.

It's, that's part of the process and I think you have to go into it knowing that there's going to be a journey and it's going to be challenging because the law at times can feel like you're studying a foreign language.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, in reality, the material you're learning is complicated.

It's not simple. And the way that it's taught is, frankly, not probably the simplest way to teach it. But yeah, I mean, you know, I think it's sort of, I mean, I think we have an episode maybe about being a professional, but this is the idea of being a professional. It's like, these are your tools, these are your skills, and you have to get serious about mastering them.

And, you know, it's not that you're going to walk in and be like, oh my god, I'm so awesome at, like, you know, extracting the law from a case. Like, that's probably not going to happen initially. But you need to be sure that you, A, recognize that that is something you need to be able to do, which is sort of step one, and then practice doing it, you know, whether it's, you know, sitting in class and, like, paying attention and making sure that you're actually getting the legal rules that your professor's talking about when you read a case, you know, getting

feedback, talking to your friends, all these things, like, you just have to have a plan for how you're going to learn these things.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, and I think this idea that it's like a three year journey if you're a full time law student, that by the end you're going to be so much better at law school than you were in the beginning, and that you want to get you know, to make these strides as soon as you can, because it often correlates to how well you do with your grades.

But you know, it's still, it's a journey. It's a learning journey. And when you exit law school, you're going to leave with an entirely new set of skills. And that's how it's supposed to be.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. It's like, if you don't, if you don't change or grow in the process of three years in law school, like what are you spending $200,000 for?

It's so true. Like you're, hopefully you're going to learn something.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Exactly. And if you are struggling and you're not sure, you know, how to better these skills, that's when you need to ask for help. And we're going to talk about that as one of our top 10 things too. But, you know, you don't have to go through all this growth alone. There are plenty of resources.

Alison Monahan: Right. That's not very efficient.

Lee Burgess: Right. There are plenty of resources at your fingertips. That you can use to make sure that you're getting the assistance you need to be as successful as possible. You're not an island. You're not supposed to do this on your own.

Alison Monahan: Right, and sometimes I feel like students feel like it's somehow like cheating themselves that they don't figure out everything on their own.

It's just, you know, like I went to architecture school. The thought that you would build a building without blueprints is like, why would you want to do that? That seems impossible. It's kind of the same thing. It's like, yeah, I mean, you could just throw a pile of like construction materials in front of your contractor and be like, okay, see you in a few months.

But I mean, it's like, why would you do that? You know, it's like, why would you show up to law school and just be like, oh, I'm going to figure out everything on my own. Here are some books. I'll take an exam in a few months. Like, that's not a very good approach.

Episode 33: Top 10 Tips for Law School Success

Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly. I 100 percent agree. So besides just thinking about, you know, three years is this kind of arc for being a better law student, we also think, and this is item number three on our list, that you have to think about your career from day one.

And that does not mean that you have to know exactly what you want to do from day one.

Alison Monahan: Right, it doesn't mean that you have to be out like greasing palms with your other classmates at orientation doing like, yeah, hi, I'm going to be your lawyer for life.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. But you do want to Realize that part of the journey, since this is a professional school, is to figure out what you want to do professionally and to lay the groundwork so when you're ready to seek job opportunities or, you know, internships or whatever you're looking for, that you have that network to pull on.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and a lot of this is about relationships. So, you know, you don't want to be that smarmy guy who's like kissing up to everyone at orientation, but at the same time, you don't want to be hiding out in your room and not going to like, you know, the big events that the school is throwing. You know, ideally, you need to make friends in your classes because these are the people that you'll know throughout your career.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I refer people to law school classmates. For legal services all the time.

Alison Monahan: Oh, yeah. Absolutely. Absolutely. Yeah. And, you know, I think you're right about, you know, other sorts of networking. Like, things like getting involved in school clubs or involved in the Bar Association early on. You know, your school might pay for you to go to a conference.

That would be awesome. You know, you have these opportunities that I think sometimes it's easy to overlook. If you're just like head down I need to study, and of course you need to study, but that's not all you need to do, you know, I think at a minimum, even a first year student should be spending, you know, five or ten percent of their time on a weekly basis thinking about job stuff, and no one does that.

Lee Burgess: No, and, you know, that includes refining your resume and making sure you always have a resume to send out.

Episode 33: Top 10 Tips for Law School Success

Alison Monahan: Right, exactly.

You know, because we, you know, we get calls from students who are like, You know, I just have an opportunity to apply for an externship for the summer with a judge who turns out to be a friend of somebody that I know.

Like, do you think I should do that? I need to send it in today. And it's like, well, yes. Good thing we looked at your resume like last month.

Lee Burgess: Mm-Hmm.

Alison Monahan: Because I do think you should apply for that.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly. And also if you're not sure what type of law you wanna practice, you want to keep in mind that you're searching for your passion as you select classes, as you volunteer for events, as you go hear speakers, you know, as you go to Bar Association events.

Alison Monahan: Pro bono work.

Lee Burgess: Right. It's, it's your job to think about, you know, exploring the different options, you know, what clinics do you apply to? All of that stuff is going to help you lead to the point where you can decide what path that you might want to take, or at least the first path that you might want to take.

Alison Monahan: Right. There's a lot of this iterative, you know, you think like, Oh, that sounds interesting. And you go to a couple of meetings of like, you know, the real estate law society, and then you realize you're bored out of your mind. And you're like, Hmm, maybe that's not the right choice for me. Or, you know, you take a pro bono case, and it turns out you hate doing divorce litigation.

You know?

Lee Burgess: Exactly, exactly.

Alison Monahan: But you can't know that. It's much better to try that out when you're in school than when you graduate and you take your first job and suddenly you're like, wow, real estate finance really is boring. Better to know that in advance.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. So it's not to stress you out about jobs through your entire, you know, three years, but it is that you went to law school likely to practice law.

So you want to keep that on your radar throughout your entire legal career.

Episode 33: Top 10 Tips for Law School Success

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. And again, this is sort of the growth mindset. Like, you don't have to approach it as like, I have to find, like, the right career for me right now. It's just like, it's an opportunity to explore things and see how you like them and to pay attention, you know, and, you know, to really think about like, is this something that I would be happy doing over the long term?

And ideally you can kind of narrow in on that through exploration.

Lee Burgess: Yep, exactly.

Alison Monahan: But only if you actually do it.

Lee Burgess: Right, which leads us to our next thing on our list, which is number four, which is that you're gonna need to hustle. So Alison, you're a big champion of the hustle. In fact, didn't you declare one year in the last few years the year of the hustle?

Alison Monahan: I think I did with one blog post. I'm not sure I ever followed up on it because I got really busy. Yeah, I mean, by hustle, like, we're not talking about, you know, shaking people down or anything like that. It's like, it's just this idea that, I mean, essentially it's the opposite of entitlement. Nothing's going to be handed to you and nothing should be handed to you and you can't expect life to be handed to you.

It's up to you to make your decisions about, you know, your career path and how you want that to fit into your life and how you're going to make it happen and. You know, it's, you know, it's the same sort of thing that goes back to talking to your professors. You might have to put yourself in situations where you're not totally comfortable yet.

You know, you may have to show up to a bar association event at some specialty bar that you're interested in and actually talk to strangers. I mean, shocking, right?

Lee Burgess: So true. So true. Or, you know, you might have to go to volunteer to help organize the, you know, moot court arguments and then you meet a bunch of practicing lawyers and, you know, you're, you find them intimidating or judges or something like that, you know, it's, but all of those are opportunities for you if you see them that way in fact, my moot court judge at law school my first year ended up being on my callback for my law firm job.

Alison Monahan: Ah, how handy.

Episode 33: Top 10 Tips for Law School Success

Lee Burgess: Yes, so she couldn't quite place me until finally she realized that she had judged my argument and it was a good thing I'd won because she was there. But, you know, every opportunity you kind of have to be thinking about, you know, your professional persona and connecting with people. It's just part of the hustle.

It's not going to be handed to you anymore. That's just the realities of the new economy. The fact that you're going to need to have to work to get the career that you want.

Alison Monahan: Right. And a lot of it's about being strategic, and I think it is about being professional, and it's about creating these opportunities.

I mean, sometimes people come to us and they're like, well, I don't know if I should bother going to this networking event because I'm not sure I'll meet anyone. It's like, well, you might not. It might be a waste of two hours. However, you might meet someone who turns out to be extraordinarily useful to your career path, or to your life, or you might meet, you know, your next husband or wife.

I mean, hopefully your first husband or wife, but, you know, I mean, you just never know, and that's the whole point. If you're not putting yourself in the situation where good things can happen, they can't happen.

Lee Burgess: It's very true. What if we had never went to coffee?

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. What if you had never tweeted me that link because you were like, oh, she wrote a similar article.

Maybe I should like build a relationship with this person. You know, we wouldn't be having this podcast. This business would not exist. I mean, certainly if you, you know, no one could have predicted that one tweet would lead to, you know, an entire business.

Lee Burgess: No, but the only way you can guarantee that it won't is by not doing it.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. People are like, oh, social media seems like a waste of time. And it's like, well, maybe it is. If you don't use it, you know.

Lee Burgess: If you don't use it to strategically meet people and engage.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, if you're just sending out like, you know, things about how awesome you are all the time, it's like, yeah, then maybe it's a waste of time. But if you, you know, with any of these things, if you use it in a sort of open way where you're,

you don't actually know what might happen, but you're setting yourself up for opportunities.

Lee Burgess: Yep. It's so true. So true. All right. So let's move back to the academic realm for our next This is number five, which is one of my personal favorites. Practice, practice, and more practice.

Alison Monahan: Yeah.

Lee Burgess: In fact, it's bar season, and so we're just telling people to practice. All the time, but this is really the biggest, I think, stress point around law students and you know, they want to move forward in their academics.

They want to be better prepared for exams, but they do not want to sit down and do the practice because it makes them uncomfortable. It can be frustrating and it really alerts you to the fact that you may not have a mastery of the material, and so they just don't do it, and that is a huge mistake.

Alison Monahan: Huge mistake, and this, again, goes back to mindset. It's like if you take a practice exam and you miss something, and your response is, oh my God, I should drop out of law school, I'm stupid. Maybe that's not the best use of your practice.

Lee Burgess: Yep, exactly. So students either don't want to do the practice or they do the practice, but they don't want to get feedback because they don't want to get negative feedback.

They don't want to rewrite it because they think it's a waste of time, which is absolutely not. Or they think there's no way they can get feedback, which is totally untrue. Your school likely has teaching assistants, academic support offices, you know, there are private tutors like what we do.

There's so many options. for you to get help to facilitate this work. And if you are not doing that at this point in the semester, whenever you are listening to this podcast, you should be practicing.

Alison Monahan: Exactly. Unless you're in like week one.

Lee Burgess: Unless you're in like week one.

Alison Monahan: But we'll let you go until like week three. Week three you should be practicing.

Episode 33: Top 10 Tips for Law School Success

Lee Burgess: Yeah, by the time you're in week three, week four, there is something you can write about. There's absolutely something you can write about. And by losing those opportunities, you're just setting yourself up for not being prepared and not being able to compete with people who have been practicing the entire semester.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, because the reality is, like, you know, like we said, this is a learned skill.

How are you going to learn that skill? By practice. End of story. Game over. Next one.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Alright, so, and this is a, it's sort of a continuation in a sense, but number six on our list, and we see this all the time, is please, please, please do not wait for the bar exam to solve your academic problems.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, Heartbreaking.

Yeah, so it is, we are recording this during bar season, and so many folks who struggle with the bar exam are struggling with the exact same things that are 1Ls and 2Ls and 3Ls that we work with are struggling with, you know, doing legal analysis, working with the facts, you know, issue spotting, writing under time pressure, like, right, using IRAC,

Alison Monahan: Organization,

Lee Burgess: Organization,

Alison Monahan: Headers,

Lee Burgess: Headers, like, anxiety,

Alison Monahan: Tone.

Lee Burgess: You know, all of the stuff that everybody struggles with in law school, it, the bar exam takes all of those issues and typically makes them worse. Yeah, it's like a pressure cooker. It is. It's a pressure cooker. The time management piece is usually much more condensed. The stakes are so high. The anxiety is so much more.

You study, most of us, for months on end to get ready for it. And so, and then if you failed once before, you just add in another layer of baggage because you're

dealing really with a type of failure that most of us have maybe been fortunate enough not to have to struggle with, so-

Alison Monahan: Right. I mean, you think it was bad to get like a B minus and you're one L Torts class,

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Like, try failing the bar.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. And I remember after I'd been working with bar students for a few years a student came to me and said, you know, I so wish I had learned these lessons in law school. Because I would have gotten such better grades. Yeah. And I think that is so true. You know, the writing is on the wall for most people who study, or who struggle with the bar exam, because they struggle in those 1L classes.

What they typically do is then they stop taking exam classes, which helps their GPA. They start taking paper classes and seminars, and so they just, they maybe don't take a lot of bar electives, and then their GPA steadily goes up. So they feel like, well,

Alison Monahan: I'm getting this.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I got this. Like my, you know, it's a learned skill. I am golden.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, my professors are giving me better grades. I must know what I'm doing.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. And so then the problem becomes that the first time you do some practice for the bar, you are like catapulted back to where you were 1L here and you're struggling with all those same problems. So just don't ignore these academic problems, there's so many opportunities for help. The longer you wait, the harder it is to undo some, you know, really bad habits that you've created for yourself. And the pressure just is on by the time you get to the bar. You cannot practice law.

Alison Monahan: And there's so little time.

Lee Burgess: There's so little time and you cannot practice law without passing that silly test, so.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think, you know, I think the reality is if your law school grades are not great, that's a serious sign that you need to deal with this before the bar exam

Episode 33: Top 10 Tips for Law School Success

because there's a very tight correlation between particularly first year grades and not, not passing the bar.

Lee Burgess: Yes. Absolutely.

Alison Monahan: And this, this is true at every school, like, you know,

Lee Burgess: Mm-Hmm.

Alison Monahan: If you look at the bar results by school, it does not matter what school you went to. Someone is failing the bar in states like New York and California.

Lee Burgess: Yep, absolutely.

Alison Monahan: Harvard, Columbia, Yale, somebody there is failing the bar.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Stanford. You know, some years Stanford has done really poorly and I think this past year actually wasn't at Hastings that did disastrously poorly compared to where they should be based on their rankings?

And so, you know, no one is safe You need to take it seriously but look for those warning signs and just fix the problems people fix them

Alison Monahan: Yeah, fix them and this is this on to number seven, which is ask for help when you need it.

Lee Burgess: Please just ask for help. There is no judgment that comes from asking for help.

Alison Monahan: And it doesn't have to be specifically academic.

You know, we've talked about, you know, a few minutes ago, we talked about getting help academically, but we're also talking about other aspects, too. Like, if you, you know, I did a podcast the other day on pressure with someone who said, you know, can you talk to me about test anxiety? And he said, look, most people who struggle with test anxiety, they struggle with anxiety.

Like, it's not test specific. It's not like in every other aspect of their life they're doing, you know, totally cool on this. He's like, they need to go deal with the anxiety, and then the test anxiety will take care of itself. You know, so this emotional support, you know, therapy, like one of the best decisions I made.

I mean, I guess it was a decision. It wasn't really totally, totally optional since I was clinically depressed. My first year was to go get a therapist and that was

Episode 33: Top 10 Tips for Law School Success

scary. And I was like, oh my God, you know, like, I can't believe I have to do this, but it was one of the best choices I ever made.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And I think just being open to support, you know, even if you're just struggling with the fact that you really want to exercise, but you can't make yourself do it.

Like, try and find a friend to go run with you.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, or join a class. Join a class. Get a trainer if you can afford that.

Lee Burgess: Exactly, but you know, doing, doing things to reach out for support. I was having coffee with a, of mine who's a coach who isn't, she doesn't coach lawyers necessarily. She coaches corporate clients.

But I was asking her, what are the main things that you see? And she works with a lot of people who are in middle management trying to break into upper management. And she said that oftentimes, people either don't know how to ask for help, or they just can't imagine asking for help in their network.

You know, they're struggling and they just can't admit that they're struggling and need help to get to this next level. And it's like how sad that is, you know? Because you are losing opportunities to better yourself, you know, and be more successful just because you won't admit that something's hard.

Alison Monahan: Right. And I think, you know, people, this can also be hard, but I think it's critical, you know, to ask for help in your personal relationship.

Lee Burgess: Mm-Hmm.

Alison Monahan: So, you know, if you have a significant other. who's alongside you while you're going to law school. Like, you can't just pretend that everything's okay. You know, like there probably are times where you're actually gonna have to reach out to that person.

And, you know, law school is really hard on relationships and it's really hard to, you know, to go to somebody you care about and say, look, I'm really struggling here and I need your help. But that's the only way that things are gonna get any better.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And I think you have to realize that everybody's struggling.

Episode 33: Top 10 Tips for Law School Success

There is a, I'm, I'm on these mama groups on Facebook where people pass around all these you know, funny quotes or whatever to entertain mamas. And one of them was, you know, the woman who looks perfect and is, you know, has done her hair and has makeup on and is walking around with her infant. She is struggling just as much as you are.

She's just learned to cover it up better than you have. You know, this idea that like everybody has their own, you know, pile of crap that they're dealing with.

Alison Monahan: Right. It's like you're comparing your inside feelings to someone else's outside appearance. And it's like, you know, that. The a perfectly coiffed person who shows up in class everyday looking beautiful, like, they may be dealing with all kinds of stuff that you have absolutely no idea about.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly.

Alison Monahan: And this might be their armor for the world, is at least I'm going to pull myself together and like put makeup on.

Lee Burgess: Right, exactly. I'm going to shower. It's going to be awesome.

Alison Monahan: You know, so, you know, you just don't know, and I think, I mean, I think, you know, this isn't just law school, it's life.

Like, everybody has something that's not going so well, probably.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And we've, and our, one side note to that, and we've talked about this in, I think, another podcast, but social media does not feed into this.

Alison Monahan: No. It's like everything's perfect.

Lee Burgess: Everything's , everything's perfect. You know, like-

Alison Monahan: Like, oh my God, your child's so adorable.

It's like your child just threw up on you.

Lee Burgess: Right. Exactly.

Alison Monahan: Right after this photo was taken and people are being adorable. Exactly. You know-

Episode 33: Top 10 Tips for Law School Success

Lee Burgess: Or you know, you see somebody is, you know, on some meditation retreat and it's so zen and you're like, that person is still struggling with whatever they're struggling with, too.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, they're putting this out there to make themselves feel better. Like, it's fine.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, so, you know, I think there's, everybody has to kind of check themselves when they read social media to make sure that you're not saying, well, nobody else is struggling. Nobody else is asking for help.

That's just not true. They're just not talking about it.

Alison Monahan: Well, at law school, it's like everybody else is going to get an A. It's like, actually, that's just not statistically possible.

Lee Burgess: Exactly.

Alison Monahan: You're all in the same boat.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And I think number eight kind of relates to this a little bit, but as a process of maybe asking for help, sometimes you have to define your own definition of success or create your own definition of success because so often you can drive yourself crazy trying to strive for something that isn't authentic to you.

Alison Monahan: Right. And I think law school, you know, certainly attracts people who are perfectionists. And I think some of that is that a lot of people who are in law school maybe had parents who really pushed them to be perfect all the time. You know, to get the straight A's, to always have the perfect report card, and at some point, you know, and for some people they've already realized this, some people don't realize it until they make partner, but these external validators of success actually aren't that satisfying.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: I mean, I can totally speak to this, you know, I was top of my class at Columbia and I was still clinically depressed, you know, like.

Lee Burgess: And I think the earlier you start to think ahead about what success means to you you know, and what you want your future to look like, you know, how much money do you need to make to create the lifestyle that you're excited about, you know, or what do you want to spend that money on, or do you want to have

money to travel, then you, you know, If that's a priority, then you better find a job that's going to support you taking off time to go travel.

Alison Monahan: I was gonna say, it's not a question of having the money to travel, the question is the lawyer having the time to travel. And that's really, I mean, ultimately that's the trade off that lawyers deal with, you know. They're pretty, there are lots of studies suggesting that lawyers who make less money are typically happier.

You know, but you certainly don't get that impression from like the average OCI at an Ivy league institution.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm.

Alison Monahan: No one's telling you like, oh, maybe you want to go off and do something that's a little bit more authentic to you instead of taking this big firm job.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm.

Alison Monahan: No one is saying that.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And a coach once recommended to me, and I think this is something that comes out of, you know, the 10 tips for highly successful people or something like that.

But is the idea that you should take time to write your own mission statements?

Alison Monahan: Mm-Hmm.

Lee Burgess: For your life, you know, or your career, but really for your life? Like, what are kind of the core values or pillars that you want your life to be measured against? And you can use those pillars to make decisions.

You know, if, you know, I think for Allison and I, when we think about our business, one of our things was we want our work life to be virtual. We wanna be able to work from anywhere. That was when we got together and created this business. That was one of our main things. I remember talking about it, and so-

Alison Monahan: And we've done that,

Lee Burgess: And we have done that, but we have had to make strategic decisions, you know, to say all of our tutoring will be done remotely. All of our, you know. And, you know-

Episode 33: Top 10 Tips for Law School Success

Alison Monahan: We do not have an office phone number. We do not have an office fax number.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. You know, there are, and there are those moments where, you know, maybe opportunities come up where you start to question things, but then we always go back to like, nope, that was one of our, you know, pillars of what we wanted out of this business.

And I think if you do that for your own life, you know, think about, and summers I think are great times to do this when you're not on the hamster wheel of school, but just take some time and sit back and say like, what do I really want in my life? What do I want space for? And then you can define success based on those kind of qualities that you think are going to be so critical to your happiness.

Alison Monahan: Right. And I think it's really critical to pay attention to your reaction to these summer jobs. You know, like looking back in retrospect, it was totally apparent that I was not well suited for any sort of big law job based on the experiences I had over several summers. I was a summer associate three times.

You know, great hobby, really well paying. But you know, I was doing things that, you know, like, you know, literally hiding in the library because I didn't wanna go to my office. Like that's probably a sign that this was not gonna be a great career path for me, but I ignored it.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: You know, and I took the job anyway because everyone told me like that's what I needed to do.

Lee Burgess: Yep. Yeah, I mean, I had this consulting career where I traveled all the time and it worked all the time and I was really unhappy. So I went back to law school and then I took a big corporate job where I worked all the time. I mean, and it, when I was like. I kind of had that moment of, of like, you know, doing the same thing over and over again and wanting a different results.

It's the definition of insanity.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and you're like, wait, this is starting to feel kind of familiar. I've been here before.

I just spent two years trying to get away from this.

Episode 33: Top 10 Tips for Law School Success

Lee Burgess: Right, you know, so I think it's, It is really important that you spend more time thinking about that. And I think I did at that point, you know, after graduation, but I kind of wish I'd thought a little bit more about that earlier.

Alison Monahan: Right, and it's easy to fall into the same pathways that got you to law school to begin with. You know, if you've spent your entire academic career trying to be at the top of your class and doing really well and getting A's, like, it's just really easy to continue doing that. And, you know, and it takes a lot of sort of self awareness to, to resist a lot of these pressures to do certain things that are, you know, validating for your school.

Like, your school wants you to get a job. Your school prefers that it be highly paid. Therefore, your school has an incentive to help you get a highly paid legal job that may not be the job you actually want.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, no, a hundred percent. And so while you're doing all this stuff, number nine on our to do list, or our top ten list, is you have to take care of yourself.

And I think this is one other area that law students really struggle with, is They think they can just plow through this experience that's high stress that, you know, takes a lot of mental and emotional energy and they can not sleep, eat like crap, not exercise, and then they'll manage to still be successful and not get sick and not suffer from things like anxiety and depression.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, probably not so much.

Lee Burgess: No, that's why lawyers are alcoholics.

Alison Monahan: Yeah.

Lee Burgess: They have really high rates of depression.

Alison Monahan: Well, and it starts in law school, you know, by the end of the first semester, something like 30 percent of law students are clinically depressed, and that's, that's not healthy.

Lee Burgess: No, and I think some of that is avoidable through just respecting yourself and giving yourself some space to be a human being and take care of yourself. You know, do nice things for yourself. And that's not just like you have to go running. It's giving yourself space to take walks and go to movies.

Episode 33: Top 10 Tips for Law School Success

Alison Monahan: Yeah. And, and it's like, maybe like running is like a, you know, exercise is another source of stress.

It's like, well then just stop doing it for a while.

Lee Burgess: Right exactly.

Alison Monahan: Like you won't, the world wont end if you just don't decide to go running for the day.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. You know? But getting outside, moving your body away from the computer, going in, if you're into art, going to an art show, all that stuff, it like clears your head and, you know, dust out the cobwebs.

Alison Monahan: Or even just taking a nap.

Lee Burgess: Oh, yeah, naps are great.

Alison Monahan: So, yeah, I mean, yeah, it's like this, you know, this sort of driven type A personalities end up in law school, you know, where suddenly like relaxation becomes something that's scheduled and like we're, we are, don't get me wrong, we are fans of scheduling relaxation. We're fans of scheduling exercise, but it has to be done in a way that doesn't create more stress.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And if you do get sick, you have to listen to your body and get better. I mean, I remember I got the flu in law school second semester, early on in second semester, and I was sitting in class. I was still in class, by the way, and my professor, I started seeing double, and I turned to my, my best friend in law school, and I'm like, I'm seeing two of Professor Caswan.

So I feel like maybe I should go to the health center. And she's like, please leave. I'll give you all the notes. Just please leave. She's like, I don't want to sit next to you. Like, you have a fever, get out of this room.

Alison Monahan: I remember in architecture school, I had. A stomach bug. And I was throwing up in the depart in the grocery store trying to buy something that would make me stop throwing up.

And then I went to my studio where I was working on this project and I'm puking in the, like, you know, the trash can right beside of it. And it's the same thing, you're like, I have to keep going. And this friend of mine came up and she said,

Episode 33: Top 10 Tips for Law School Success

There's only one thing I can say to you right now that's going to make you go home, so I'm going to say that.

And I was like, no, I'm fine. And she's like, you're going to destroy everything you've been working on if you puke on it. And I was like, oh my God, she's right. And I left and I went home and went to bed.

Lee Burgess: Yep. Yeah.

Alison Monahan: But you just go, you get crazy.

Lee Burgess: You do. And you think, well, there's no time for me to get sick.

And it's like, well, it's true. It's not a great, it's not great to get sick, but you know what you really have no time for is to be sick for two weeks because you refuse to slow down and take care of yourself.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and it's not like, I mean, if you're already sick, too bad. Sorry, like, it's not a choice.

Lee Burgess: Yes, it's definitely not a choice.

Alison Monahan: Already happened, deal with it.

Lee Burgess: Alright, and now we're to our final one. Our number 10 on our top 10 list for law students is to try and keep everything in perspective.

Alison Monahan: Easier said than done.

Lee Burgess: Definitely easier said than done. We've all had our moments because law school's stressful, but in the end, it's a voluntary experience, and it is just school.

Alison Monahan: And it's a privilege.

Lee Burgess: It is a privilege.

Alison Monahan: You know, think about all the people in the world, you know, I'm not going to give you starving children in China, but you know, how many people in the world would love to have this opportunity?

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Episode 33: Top 10 Tips for Law School Success

Alison Monahan: And it should not be, like, day to day misery, and if it is, you know, either this is not the right thing for you or you need to figure out how to make it not so horrible.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, it's so true. And sometimes life will create reality check moments for you, you know, sometimes things will happen. That might snap you back to reality. Sometimes they can be really sad things that happen. Sometimes they can be really good things that happen, but you know, I think one of the ways that you can manage you know, staying in touch with reality is by hanging out with people who are not in law school.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Another great thing I think is doing some pro bono work.

Lee Burgess: Mm-Hmm.

Alison Monahan: That can be a huge source of per, you know, perspective when you're stressing out about some stupid thing. You know, you go to meet with your client who, like, has been denied unemployment benefits, for example, and they're wondering how they're going to feed their child and keep a roof over their head, and it's suddenly this moment of, like, oh my gosh, wow, my problems don't seem so bad right now.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, or domestic violence clients who are trying to get their kids away from abusive partners and are worried that the INS is going to come after them. I mean.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean, it's like take your pick, you know, social security benefits, I can't pay my rent, I can't eat, like. Yeah. I mean, pretty much anything you do as a pro bono case is going to provide some sort of perspective.

I mean, landlord tenant stuff, like, these are, these are, like, real problems.

Lee Burgess: And sometimes even just by spending time with your friends that aren't in law school, you know, going out talking about what other people are doing in the world just reminds you that law school is not the end all be all of everything.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I remember I had lunch or dinner the night before my very first exam with a friend of mine who has nothing to do with the law. And I did it because I didn't want to think about or talk about the exam anymore. And he was just like, I don't care about your torts exam. I don't even know what a tort is.

Episode 33: Top 10 Tips for Law School Success

Like, come back to reality. Let's like talk about, you know, a movie I saw or a book I read. I was like, oh yeah, right.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I still remember when I went to go sit for the bar exam, I stayed at a hotel and my husband. Who was not my husband at the time. He took me there to like drop off all my stuff and he's walking around somebody who's not connected with a lot going, everybody here looks incredibly mentally ill.

And I was like, no, what? Everybody's fine. I don't know what you're talking about.

Alison Monahan: You're like, this is normal. He's like, yeah, this is not actually normal . This is not how much the world really lives their lives.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. So you know, it is just important if you can keep things in perspective. You know, it's easier to keep the growth mindset.

It's easier to manage the stress and it's easier to become successful because you remember that this is, you know, a voluntary experience. It's a privilege and it's just school. And if you work hard, you can probably be successful.

Alison Monahan: Exactly. And with that, we are out of time. If you enjoyed this episode, please take a second to leave us a review and rating on iTunes because we would really appreciate it.

And be sure to subscribe so you don't miss anything. Our episodes typically come out on Mondays. If you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to reach out to us at Lee@LawSchoolToolbox.com or Alison@LawSchoolToolbox.com, or you can always contact us via our website contact form at LawSchoolToolbox.com. Thanks for listening, we'll talk soon, and thanks for four years.