# Episode 43: Getting Mentally Prepared to Start Law School

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

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

Lee Burgess: Welcome back. Today we're talking about how to get mentally prepared for the challenges of law school. These challenges might be academic in nature or more personal, but luckily there are techniques you can use on any type of challenge to ensure that you're moving forward and keeping things under control.

So first off, I mean, does this really even matter? Is law school that hard?

Alison Monahan: Well, I mean, we don't wanna scare people, so yes and no. I think law school is challenging and it's challenging in sort of very particular ways that people may not necessarily be expecting or be familiar with. Yeah, it's obviously not impossible.

Lots of people do it, right?

Lee Burgess: Oh, for sure. I think that one of the big issues is it's just a different environment than most of us have been in before, academically or professionally.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I saw some article today that you know, the most common grade given now in American undergraduate institutions is an A.

Lee Burgess: Really? I saw the headline for that, but I haven't clicked on it yet.

Alison Monahan: I haven't read the article either, but I saw the summary. We'll link to it in the show notes.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. We'll read it too. It'll be good.

Alison Monahan: I'm assuming that the chart was accurate. I saw it on Facebook.

# Episode 43: Getting Mentally Prepared to Start Law School

Lee Burgess: Nice.

Alison Monahan: As you do.

Lee Burgess: As you do. You know, I think so.

It is different and different schools have different cultures and histories, but I think it's-

Alison Monahan: Well, let's just back up for one second.

Lee Burgess: Yeah,

Alison Monahan: I the most common grade given in law school an A?

Lee Burgess: Ha ha ha. No.

Alison Monahan: Exactly.

Lee Burgess: Depending on what your curve looks like, your most common grade is not an A and sometimes not a B.

So it is very, very shocking for most of us to go to law school and not get straight A's anymore.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, because you're used to being a straight A student, and the reality of the curve is just, you know, I mean, the highest curve you see even at, like, you know, the sort of, like, fanciest schools, the highest curve is probably going to be a B+ which means that half of the class is getting worse than a B+ which doesn't sound that bad probably if your curve is a C, which is not uncommon, right?

But, you know, for somebody who's at a school like Harvard, like, you might not have ever gotten a B or B- in your life.

Lee Burgess: I think that's true. And You also have to remember that there's self selection for people who choose to go to law school. Most people who are choosing to go to law school think they're pretty smart and pretty good at doing academic things or they wouldn't have continued their academic education past their bachelor's.

And so you're also competing with a different pool of people.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. It's just typically it's going to be, you know, a higher stress, higher competition pool of people, and then you add the curve in, which basically

# Episode 43: Getting Mentally Prepared to Start Law School

forces, you know, X number of people to get a certain grade, and that grade is not going to be an A.

I mean, you know, it might not be that uncommon for people to go through their entire law school career and never see, like, an actual A.

Lee Burgess: I think that's very true for a lot of people, or at least until maybe they're taking seminars that you know, have different curves or something like that.

Alison Monahan: I mean, once you're outside of the curve, whatever, but in a curve, in a curved class, which most of them are.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And I think it's important to really think about what this means when you start to get those grades. Because I remember taking my fed court's class, and in that class it was very self selection who took that class.

Alison Monahan: It's like all of law review.

Lee Burgess: It's basically all of law review. So there were 2L's and 3L's.

Everyone Pretty much in the class, almost everyone was either on the law review or on the law review board, and then you still had a curve, so you're curving the law review board, you know, I've never been so proud to get a B+ in my life, because I was competing with the smartest people in my class and the class behind me, you know, and so you're just like, whew, all right!

Alison Monahan: Yeah, you have to sort of readjust your, yeah, you kind of have to readjust your expectations a little bit. Like, it's, it's just not realistic for people to think they're going to walk into law school and make straight A's. That is not going to happen.

Lee Burgess: Definitely.

Alison Monahan: And sometimes, I mean, people will lie too.

You know, I had someone who said, well, my friend who's at Columbia said that she's getting straight A's. I'm like, I went to Columbia and I can guarantee you that is not true.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: Like, I know the person who did, like, literally the best in my class and she did not make straight A's.

# Episode 43: Getting Mentally Prepared to Start Law School

Lee Burgess: Yeah. So it's, it's just a harsh reality that I think a lot of people aren't ready for, and I think that the culture of law school, the fact that it is a bit more competitive, I think the curve creates this culture of, you know, you have to be compared to your peers, which isn't always the case in other academic settings, that can create a, definitely a different, more high pressure dynamic.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and also, you know, the reality is the job market is still tough, and people are competitive about that. You know, and also you're expected to be a grown up and be a professional, which I think for, you know, somebody who's coming straight out of undergrad and they haven't had a lot of work experience, that might be really unfamiliar and that might be a challenge.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think that's true. And then there's just the amount of work. Law school requires a lot of work.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, like you're not going to show up and, you know, cram at the last minute and do okay. It's, it's hours of reading most days of the week.

Lee Burgess: Right. And I think-

Alison Monahan: Just doing that kind of day in and day out and getting used to that level of difficult reading and like, it'll make your brain really hurt.

Lee Burgess: Mm hmm. It does. I mean, I remember being super exhausted at night after doing all of my reading because I just wasn't, I was working full time before I went to law school. So I was not using that much intellectual, like, power to do the work that I was doing. Don't tell my bosses, who hopefully are not listening to this podcast.

Alison Monahan: Right, because it's just different. Like, you know, if you're working, you might be working really hard. Like, you were a consultant, I was a programmer. Like, you know, we would work, I'm sure, hard for like, you know, focused periods of time and get stuff done, but it's just different than this kind of like day in and day out, like, sitting down for three hours every night and doing your reading.

Lee Burgess: Yep. And even I think sometimes going to these long classes, you know, a two hour class period where your professor is talking to you about property and remaining focused, I think, especially in this digital age where everybody's got AD, some sort of attention deficit issue of wanting to, you know, check our email, check our phones, like listen, go back to checking your phones.

# Episode 43: Getting Mentally Prepared to Start Law School

Alison Monahan: Yeah, this is like pretty old school. Goal. It's like you sit down and do a lot of like detailed reading and then you go to class and you talk about it.

Lee Burgess: Mm-Hmm.

Alison Monahan: And you take notes.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: You know, and they kind of, I think you're right, this sort of like always on environment. That's one of the things people can really start working on, you know, before law school.

And part of the mindset stuff is like actually sitting and getting used to doing that, you know, so instead of just reading, you know, the headline of the news on Facebook you know, maybe,

Lee Burgess: Take a deep dive.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I'm like, oh, I totally know what that article said. I looked at the picture. You know, maybe you sit down with a serious book over the summer.

And, you know, you just get more used to whether, you know, I don't know, pick your favorite philosopher. Like, I really want to read Kant this summer, you know, sit down and do that.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think it is really important to work on your own self discipline and also just start to become more aware, too, of how you work.

You know, some people really can't focus well for more than an hour without taking a break, and that's totally fine, but go into law school knowing that, and don't compare yourself to people who can sit for three hours and not move.

Alison Monahan: Right, I think, you know, the sort of like high level executive functioning, it can be hard for many students. It's just not something that you've really had the need to do necessarily.

So a lot of people just don't have really great planning skills. They don't necessarily have really great study skills. You know, it was enough to get to do well. in a less competitive undergrad, but you know, the reality is law school just doesn't have a lot of structure.

# Episode 43: Getting Mentally Prepared to Start Law School

You know, it's like one exam at the end of the class and it doesn't really relate that much to what you're doing in class. So the reality is you have to plan your time. You have to figure out if you're making progress. You have to decide what's most important. And that's a lot of responsibility.

Lee Burgess: It is.

You have to decide if you're lost. You have to go find the people to help you and ask those questions. You know, it's your responsibility to own. If you do not understand the material, nobody's going to check in with you about it. You have to go figure it out.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, you're not going to get like a pop quiz necessarily.

Lee Burgess: Right, right. And professors are willing to help you, but you still own this experience and you own your own process.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think, you know, thinking about how you're going to get mentally prepared to be in that environment is really valuable, and I think it's valuable to do before you show up for the first day.

So what are some things people really need to probably start thinking about?

Lee Burgess: I think thinking about your schedule of how you like to work, what you'd like your days to look like can be really important to think about. You know, if you've been working in a typical, you know, what, I don't even know what a typical work week is, you know, eight to nine, five, nine to five.

Eight to 10, whatever it might be. But think about when you work best. You know, are you a person who likes to get up early and start their day at 8:00 AM, and are you that person who likes to start your day at the gym? Are you the person who is a night owl and works late at night? I think it can be really helpful to think through that so when you're planning on when you're gonna do these hours of reading, and, and if you're not sure about it yet, it's gonna be hours and hours of reading a day. Then, you can sometimes do it at the wrong time of day and it can be really laborious and difficult to get through.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, like for me, the idea that I would wake up before class and do reading was laughable.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

# Episode 43: Getting Mentally Prepared to Start Law School

Alison Monahan: You know, I'm just not a morning person. I never have been. So for me, like I would do my reading, you know, sort of in this like three hours after dinner. Which would then cause problems with insomnia, but that's another issue.

Lee Burgess: That's another, that's another issue. I think for me, I like to do it in the middle of the day.

I would I had been working for a few years outside of, or before I went to law school. And so I kinda liked to make my days look like work days. You know, I wouldn't get to school super early because I'm definitely not that much of a morning person. I'm more of a morning person than you are, but I'm not that much more of a morning person.

But I would you know, I'd go to school from like 9am class and I'd maybe try and like stay on campus until like six or seven. And then maybe I do a little more work at home, but I mostly tried to get everything done during the day just so I didn't have to work at home.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, so that was totally the opposite.

I would basically like, go to class, and then like, in between classes or something, I'd go home, hang out, watch some TV with my roommates, maybe go to the gym, you know, get run some errands, and then late at night, you know, sort of after dinners when I would really start down, was actually able to focus and get work done.

Lee Burgess: But I think that's the important thing is now having known you for many years, like that's how you work.

Alison Monahan: Right. Exactly. It's like, I might not like that, but that's the reality.

Lee Burgess: That is reality, and you are very effective late at night, whereas I, especially now that I have a kid just, my brain is totally fried.

I can't, I can't think and do cognitively hard things really late at night. And so I think that it's just so important to evaluate how you're going to do that work. And when you're thinking about getting ready for law school too, you know, we've talked in other podcasts about, you know, are you going to commute?

And if you're going to commute, are you going to be able to study on your commute? You know, I had friends who used to take here in the Bay Area, it's called BART, and the longer commute train and would do an hour, an hour and a half of reading on the BART train. I would have been throwing up from like

# Episode 43: Getting Mentally Prepared to Start Law School

motion sickness if I did an hour and a half of reading on the BART train every day, so I could not have built that into my study schedule. So it's important that you just think about what your needs are. So you know you have an idea of, you know, where you want to start when it comes to planning your days.

Alison Monahan: Right, and I think it's worth doing in advance to sort of, you know, get your calendar and kind of rough out a weekly schedule of, like, what's a typical week going to look like, you know, and block in, like, I'm going to take half a day off on Saturday or Sunday or even the whole day off.

I'm going to do deep work. We've talked about this before. You don't want to just be reading for class, you know, block out a three or four hour block at least once a week where you're going to do this deeper thinking work so you're not just reading for class, you know, or you're going to read ahead on the weekends.

Like, I would do a lot of my reading on Sundays, so I might block off like four hours on Sunday to try to get ahead on the reading so I don't have to do it all during the week. Just, you know, go ahead and think about this so that when you're dropped in, you've already thought strategically about when you're, when you're going to be spending time and what you're going to be spending time on, and you might want to do some research to get ready to go.

Like, do you want to read some books or talk to some friends, that kind of stuff. But doing this stuff now, it kind of, obviously it'll change probably over time when you find out when your classes are and that kind of stuff. But the more you can think about this beforehand, I think the better off you're going to be and the more prepared you're going to feel.

Lee Burgess: And I think that's one thing that you know, some people like about taking like a pre law school program, or reading these about law school before they start, things like that, because it does give you a taste of what the work is going to be like. So when you go into it, you have an idea of like, this is what I'm going to be asked to do.

It might just be a taste, it's going to be so much more work when you get there, but just knowing what's coming helps you to kind of think ahead. Of course, it's fine.

Alison Monahan: And think strategically about, you know, what are, what are you looking for when you read a case for example? That's one of the things we talk about with our Start Law School Right students is that, you know, you're not just reading this for the heck of it, you know, like there are reasons, there are different things

you need to be looking out for, and the more that you can kind of know that, so that you don't feel so just like totally overwhelmed and lost when you get your first case, I think the better off you're probably going to be.

Lee Burgess: I think that's true. And the other thing that is important to think about when you're thinking about this is, Kind of the entirety of the semester is you know, what's the end game at the end of the semester? And I think a lot of law students are unfamiliar with what even a law school exam typically looks like.

You can just go back to some of our old podcasts as well, where we walk through an actual exam answer and an exam question. But I think you need to know what the end goal is, so you can prepare for it the entire time. You don't want your first exposure to a fact pattern to be like a couple of weeks before exams.

Alison Monahan: Definitely not.

Lee Burgess: You know, so whether you do that over the summer or whether you do that as part of a course or whether you read books about it, I think it can just help so you think about how. law school works, you know, what the lectures are really there to teach you, what the readings are really there to teach you, what's on your shoulders, what's your responsibility to teach yourself, and how that's going to get you to the end of the semester.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, because you want to be focusing on what really matters and not necessarily on what feels good or maybe even feels easy, you know, like doing your reading for class is kind of a bare minimum, but that's not the only thing you need to be doing. And being busy just isn't necessarily better. You know, you can drive yourself crazy like running around doing all this crazy stuff and blah, blah, blah, but like really you need to be focusing on what actually is going to get you to the point that you want to be at.

Lee Burgess: Yep.

Alison Monahan: And that's another thing you can start thinking about now is where do you want to be?

Lee Burgess: Hmm, yeah.

Alison Monahan: You know, really think about what success looks like for you. Not for some generic law student. You know, you can do a lot of reading on the benefits of internal and external motivation, and I think this is something that is great to

# Episode 43: Getting Mentally Prepared to Start Law School

think before you start law school. Like, what are you doing there? Why are you doing this? And if the answer is because my parents want me to, or I think it is prestigious, or whatever, that might not be, you know, it'd be better probably for your ultimate long term success if you could connect to some more internal motivations.

Like, I'm curious about this, or I want a job where I can, you know, have a, make a difference in the world, or whatever it is.

Lee Burgess: I mean, hopefully there was some truth in your law school application essays.

Alison Monahan: Exactly.

Lee Burgess: About why you wanted to attend law school. A grain of truth. That maybe you can pull from, but actually one of our tutors I think she's written about this, but she suggests even writing a letter to yourself about why you're doing this and what your goals are so you can refer back to it for motivation. I think that's a really great idea to come at it from this positive, hopeful place at the beginning of law school. That that is something you can revisit when the times might get a little more challenging.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. You know, you can, you know, when you're mid-semester and everything, you've just gotten your midterms, you're not happy with it. You know, and you might be like, oh, I don't even know what I'm doing. I've given up my job. I've given up my life. I'm in this crazy situation. I'm not having a good time.

The weather's getting bad. It's getting dark. It is beneficial, potentially, to pull out that letter and be like, oh, yeah, right. Like, this is what, this is why I decided to do this.

Lee Burgess: For sure. Because hopefully you did, you know, want to become a lawyer or thinking about it or, you know, I mean, there's, there should be some reasons why you wanted to go down this path.

And that can help in the dark times, but it's also important when you're making decisions throughout law school about activities you want to participate in, or classes you want to take, or internships you want to take, to go back to those kind of core ideas and say, you know, is this still why I'm here?

Is this still what I want to do? So I can make decisions based on that. It's almost like making a mission statement for your law school career.

# Episode 43: Getting Mentally Prepared to Start Law School

Alison Monahan: Yep, that's exactly where I was going to go with that.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: I know you've talked about this before, you know, sort of like what are your values? What are your goals? You know, why are you doing this? I mean this can sound kind of hokey. but there's a reason businesses do this type of stuff is so that you have that framework for, for evaluating decisions. You can say, you know, does this align with my values, or does this align with my ultimate goals and it can actually really simplify the decision making process.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, 100%, I mean for for instance, one of our pillars of our business is we want it to be virtual.

That, you know, that's like part of one of our core pieces of our mission, and so if there's a decision that doesn't align with that, it's very easy for us to say, nope.

Alison Monahan: And for you in law school, you know, it might, I mean, you know, everybody has their own motivations. We're not, we're not passing judgment on what your motivations are.

I don't really didn't, you know, couldn't care less, but it's good for you to be able to identify those motivations so that you can make decisions based on them.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I actually had a a law student reach out to us. Who basically said, I'm doing pretty well in law school, but my goal has always been to be at a big firm in Washington, D.C., and I know I need to have these grades, and this, you know, these, you know, be in the law review, and all of these things to be competitive, so those are my goals, and I'd like you to help me get there, and I'm like, go you! May not be my choices, but this person knew what they want, they were educated about it, and they basically said, I want to make sure that I get to my goals.

I think that that's great. You know, that person is just going to be able to make strategic decisions based on those goals. Now, if that doesn't work out, I'm sure that he can create other goals, but, you know, it does simplify the decision making. You know, does this move me towards that goal of doing the work that I want to do in the location that I want to do?

No, then I'm not going to do that.

# Episode 43: Getting Mentally Prepared to Start Law School

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely, because there's so many options that are going to come your way, and so many choices you're going to have to make about what to do, that really getting clear on what you want, what does success look like for you, can just, you know, it's just a good checkpoint to have in terms of knowing when to say yes and when to say no.

Lee Burgess: Yep. All right. What about Mindset, which is something that we always love to talk about. We've got a podcast on Mindset if you haven't listened to it yet and you're thinking about going to law school, we highly recommend it. But you know, this goes back to a book that we think is a really great read for your summer before law school, which is Carol Dweck's Mindset Matters.

We have really seen talking to law students over the year that whether or not you approach law school with a fixed mindset, which can be one that's very negative, you know, I got a bad grade, so I must be stupid. I'm not smart enough to do this. I'm always going to be a failure versus a growth mindset, which is I didn't do well on this exam, but I'm going to go visit the professor and I'm going to learn from it and I'm going to make sure that, you know, I do better next time, can make a huge difference in how you perform and also your mental health in law school.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. I think one of the problems is that a lot of law students have always just been told that they're smart, which is great. You probably are smart. Great.

But if you see being smart as a fixed attribute, whether you're smart or you're not smart, that can cause some real problems when you get into this more competitive law school environment because suddenly there's, you know, you're unlikely to be instantly the smartest person in the room, and even the smartest person in the room has to do a lot of work.

So, if your response is, oh, I must not be as smart as everyone told me because I'm struggling, that's obviously going to lead to a different path than saying, like, wow. Yeah, I'm a smart person, but everyone around me is smart, too, and they're working really hard, so I'm going to have to figure out how to approach this.

That's a more action oriented growth mindset. So we're not going to recap that entire podcast. You can go listen to it if you want.

Lee Burgess: Right.

# Episode 43: Getting Mentally Prepared to Start Law School

Alison Monahan: But, yeah, definitely recommend it, and it's something, you know, you can even catch yourself in in the small moments about what stories are you telling yourself.

And this is something that Brené Brown talks a lot about. She's got a book out on failure. She's also got some great stuff on vulnerability. But, you know, what story are you telling yourself? And this is something the mindfulness people talk about all the time. Like, you know, things happen, and like, you know, they might be good, they might be bad, they might be neutral, but then we make up all these stories to tell ourselves because that's what we do. We're human.

Lee Burgess: Right. Yes.

Alison Monahan: But, you know, this is what cognitive behavioral therapy is about. You have a choice, basically, in what story you're telling yourself. So, I had a bad day in class. What can I do with that? Well, I'm stupid, everybody knows it, I should just quit law school, I'm never going to be a success anyway, my parents never said anything about that, or you can be like, oh, I'm glad that I made that mistake now instead of on the exam.

Each of those is a valid response, but one of those is probably a lot more productive than the other.

Lee Burgess: For sure. And I think what's so powerful about Brené's work, and if you haven't been exposed to her work, I think this is something else that's great to explore over the summer. She's not a lawyer. But she is super smart.

We have seen her speak in person. She's an incredible speaker. If you've not watched her TED talks, I would highly recommend you Google her TED talks, but one of the things I really respect and love about Brené's work, I love how I talk about her. Like, she's my girlfriend. Like, we're going to go off coffee afterwards.

I'm like, well, Brené and I are just like, out for coffee at Four Barrel and we were, yeah. But but one of the things I really like is she writes very honestly about her own stories and thought processes that she struggles with. And this person,

Alison Monahan: Yeah, she's very successful.

Lee Burgess: She's very incredibly successful.

But in her most recent. Work about failure. She talks about, you know, failure of her first writing, you know, failure that she experienced professionally, failure personally, and how she, you know, pulls herself out of that.

# Episode 43: Getting Mentally Prepared to Start Law School

Alison Monahan: I mean, like her first several books.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Basically like, I think the first one, she didn't even have a publisher.

Lee Burgess: I think she was Self-Publishing.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, she's self published. I mean, it's like, you know, you hear about this now, like, and this is, you know. It's like you look around at law school and you're like, wow, these people are so successful. They're always perfect. It's like, no one's perfect, you know.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, and, you know, she's honest about her relationships and the stories she tells in relationships.

And I think it can be very powerful to just also realize that people who are at the top of their game, and I would say Brené Brown is at the top of her game at this point,

Alison Monahan: Absolutely.

Lee Burgess: You know, still stumbles and falls in lots of different ways and has to reach out for help and has to check their own stories.

I think that that's really I went through a period of time in my 20s where I spent a lot of time reading biographies, and I did that because I just found people's stories and their paths so fascinating. I was commuting a lot, so I was looking for lots of books to read on the train, but I thought it was just very interesting to learn about people who had been so incredibly successful, what their path to success was, because it was so often not what you assumed it was, and so learning these lessons and kind of gaining examples of people who are famous or accomplished or smart or that you respect and realizing that it's not a straight line, that there are gonna, you know, have stumbles along the road, it's It helps when you stumble, because I think you can then reflect on that and say, hey, you know what, I stumbled, but everybody stumbles.

Alison Monahan: Right, and I think the reality is, you know, having worked in fancy law firms with very, like, high profile people, or, you know, worked with, like, you know, I was a research assistant for professors and a TA and things like that, and you realize, like, These people don't have it totally together either. You know, you might look at them from the outside and be like, wow, like, this person is so impressive.

# Episode 43: Getting Mentally Prepared to Start Law School

Like, everything they do is so amazing. Like, they're so great and I just want to be just like them. And then you work with one of these people and, you know, you see that they're basically as vulnerable about their work as anyone else is. You know, you get this email from, like, a really famous person who's like, you know, this is just the first draft of this article and, like, I know it's not going to be very good and please go gentle on it, you know, and everybody has these things.

Lee Burgess: Mm hmm. Do you know, I was just reading a book that was basically published, someone's commencement address, and Seth Godin, am I saying that right?

Alison Monahan: I think so.

Lee Burgess: Who we're fans of as well, wrote the intro to it. And he was talking about failure. And he actually said that when he wrote his first book he sent it to somebody really famous that he respected to write the foreword.

Have you heard the story?

Alison Monahan: I have, because I've read this book.

Lee Burgess: Oh, okay. Yes. And And then he sends it to the person and the person says, you know, the book is great. And I would totally write the forward, but you misspelled forward. And so I will not write the forward for it. And, you know, and he's just like, it was the ultimate, you know, slap down that he's made this mistake and he's like, you know, altered the path of this book. And I mean, here's somebody who's incredibly successful again on the top of his game, super smart, well respected. We all make mistakes. It's what you do with those mistakes. He did not close up shop. He didn't not publish the book, you know.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, he published it and was like, well it probably won't be successful, but I'll do it anyway.

Lee Burgess: I'll do it anyway. You know things happen and I think it's, It's important to, if you haven't learned those lessons yet in your life, to at least learn more about those lessons so when those opportunities come and you can learn them, that you have some tools to move past the failure.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think one thing that people are talking about a lot now that's worth giving some thought to is this idea of grit. You know, like the people who are most successful are not necessarily the ones who are most successful straight off the bat, or most talented, or smartest, or you know, whatever it is, it's those are

# Episode 43: Getting Mentally Prepared to Start Law School

the people who keep going. And there's some very concrete things that you can do to help yourself develop that sort of mindset. I mean, particularly the millennials have this reputation for being so fragile. And I don't think that's necessarily true at all. But, you know, if you know that you're someone whose parents maybe, like, did a lot of stuff for you when you were a kid and coddled you and didn't really let you have that experience of failing, It's something that you can start to develop, actually, you know, and it doesn't have to be, like, this scary thing, it can be something, like, you decide you're going to take up a sport or, like, learn to play an instrument that you know you're not going to be very good at, just because you're interested in doing it, but also because it's a good way to fail.

Lee Burgess: It's true.

Alison Monahan: You know, like, I'm learning to ski, and that's not something you just, like, roll out of bed and get good at one day.

Lee Burgess: That's true, yeah.

Alison Monahan: And part of the reason I'm doing it, you know, that I do things like that. is so that I have that experience of ongoing failure and, like, getting better at something because it can remind you, you know, like, oh, this is, I've done this before, like, I've figured out a strategy to learn something before I can learn law school.

Lee Burgess: And I think we get a lot of us are perfectionists going to law school as well, and I think that that sets us up for really not wanting to, you know, to do anything wrong, which is a problem, and I think you have to deal with your perfection, how do you even say that? Perfectionalism?

Alison Monahan: Like your perfectionist tendencies, I might say.

Lee Burgess: Thank you, okay, perfectionist tendencies.

Alison Monahan: Come on Lee, you're so bad at this.

Lee Burgess: Oh, I know! I should just, I should just stop this podcast right now. Exactly. but I think that we have to give ourselves space to not be perfect and just roll with it, you know, and realize that when you learn something, it's not gonna be perfect.

I've learned so much by watching my toddler learn new skills and learn language and he makes mistakes all the time and he makes mistakes and then I correct

# Episode 43: Getting Mentally Prepared to Start Law School

him and then he like listens and he keeps trying until he gets it right and he doesn't have any self conscious responses to that. You know, that's just how he's decided that he's going to learn things.

And we lose that as we get older and we start getting so worried about what people think of us. So, you know, if we can just remember that we are meant to, you know, try, try again it can really make you be in a much better place to succeed in law school.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. And I think some of this is about being self reflective and realizing where you might need support or where you might need help. So, you know, if you know, for example, you have, like, a lot of perfectionist tendencies, you know that you're not comfortable when something goes wrong maybe, you know, you know that you suffer a lot of anxiety or something like that, these are things that people can help you with, and I think it's really important to try to get that support network in place now rather than having these sort of meltdown situations where you wait until you're totally in a crisis situation.

So, you know, it can be everything from friends and family or mentors, you know, who are people that you can start to cultivate these sort of more mentoring relationships with. Like, they're not really friends necessarily, but they're people you can go to for advice, you know. Sometimes people frame it as like a personal board of directors.

You know, thinking about getting those people in place or different types of coaches, you know, life coaches or like. Physical coaches, you know, if you wanna try to stay in shape and

Lee Burgess: Mm-Hmm.

Alison Monahan: You know, maybe you wanna go see a trainer you know, people like therapists. If you know that you really need to work on some of this stuff, you can probably actually get free therapy through law school.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Which is definitely worth looking into. 'cause it might really help. You know, doctors, whether they're physical stuff or other things. But all these sort of things, like these are the, like, now is the time to start thinking about what you're gonna do. rather than waiting until you're really in a crisis.

# Episode 43: Getting Mentally Prepared to Start Law School

Lee Burgess: For sure, and having those, you know, safety nets is just so important. I mean, we talk about it and I think we talked about this during one of our episodes on lessons we've learned from running a business. You know, I was doing a tutoring business on my own before I met Alison, and when you have a business partner and somebody who you can like, when one of us stumbles, the other person can just be like, oh, it's fine.

We're fine. Like, let's just fix this and move on. We're good. You know, or one of us says, Oh, no, this isn't going well. And the other person's like, no, we're good. But having that support network has made it easier for us to just keep rolling with the punches that, you know, inevitably come down the road.

And, you know, anytime you have that person to help you get picked back up, whoever that person is for you is really important, and sometimes those people aren't in the school, and so I do think it's, it's a good idea before you enter the law school bubble to look for those people in your life outside of the school, because I think they might have a lot higher value to you because they're not part of the school machine.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and one thing I've seen that's interesting as a technique, which is apparently very effective, is actually to have a plan now for exactly what you're going to do if specific difficult situations arise. So, for example, like you have a really terrible day. In November or October in law school, like just really awful.

Like the worst, you know, you've like bombed, you're like, you know, everything you've said in class was totally stupid. You got called on, like, you basically leave in tears. Like, who are you gonna call?

Lee Burgess: Mm-Hmm.

Alison Monahan: You know, like, have a plan for that now. Like, have a list of people that you can go down, because when you're having that bad day, you're not gonna wanna call anybody.

Lee Burgess: Yep.

Alison Monahan: So, you know, if you plan ahead, I mean, a bad day, like doing poorly on a test or something like that. You might call a different person in that situation.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think that's very true. I think the more that you can set yourself up for not having to make those decisions in the moment, you know, it's like, oh, all this bad things happened.

# Episode 43: Getting Mentally Prepared to Start Law School

Like, who's my person I call? Oh, good.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I know. And it doesn't have to be like academics have it. It might be like, your car breaks down. Who are you gonna, who are you gonna call on? Like, you get really sick. I think, you know, who's going to drive you to the hospital?

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: Hopefully that doesn't happen, but you know, or like you run out of money.

I mean, the money thing is actually huge for a lot of people.

Lee Burgess: That's very true.

Alison Monahan: You know, that's one of the things that causes people to have to drop out, is like, you know, I think certain schools are even starting to provide like, you know, small loans to people. Cause I, again, like what if your car breaks down and you're using that commute and you don't have the 500 you need to fix it?

You know, these are scenarios that happen. And I think the more you can plan ahead for them, the more effective you're going to be when that actually happens.

Lee Burgess: I think that's very true. That's a really good thing about the car. Yeah, car, many things always happen. Like, where's, who are you going to call on to, like, help you buy a new computer if your computer completely melts down?

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean, the harsh reality is some people don't have people to call on, you know. This is a very, like, class based issue. It's like, you know, if you're the first generation, to go to college or to go to law school and you really don't have these sort of family resources that other people might have, you know, that's when you need to even expand your network and like look for alternatives and befriend people at the school who you can go to if this sort of situation happens.

Be like, look, this is a situation, like, is there anything that people can help me with?

Lee Burgess: Mm hmm, agreed. Yeah, I think that makes a lot of sense to try and outline that. And, and I think if you don't have that support network in your, you know, in your family or in your close friends, then you really want to reach out once you get to school and find your community, you know?

# Episode 43: Getting Mentally Prepared to Start Law School

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. Like, whether it's affinity groups, people who get what you're going through, You know, people in the administration who might be sympathetic that you can call upon as a mentor or someone to go to as a resource because, you know, everybody struggles, and certain people, frankly, you know, if you have more resources, lucky you, but if you don't, that's when you can find yourself in like kind of a downward spiral situation.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, agreed.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, because the point, your goal here is to really simplify your life so that you can focus on school. And if you have all these external distractors, it just makes it harder to focus. It's not to say that you can't do it. Tons of people have but everybody's going to need some help, and we're all going to face challenges in law school.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: So, you know, the more that you can sort of plan ahead, but also, you know, look into these books, look into these ideas about mindset and grit and failure and that kind of thing. Because getting help when you need it It's not a sign of weakness. It's a sign of intelligence, actually.

Lee Burgess: Absolutely. And I think being honest about your needs and what you need to set yourself up for success is really what makes you successful.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, you know, and it's funny, like, I remember interviewing, you know, with a judge who had a picture of her study group from her 1L year up in her office, and she's like, you know, these are the people who got me through. Like, I look back fondly on this experience of, like, going through the crucible with these people.

So. It's not that asking these people for help was a bad thing. These became her lifelong friends.

Lee Burgess: Right. It's very true.

Alison Monahan: And that's, you know, that's really a lot of what Brené Brown talks about is like showing that vulnerability to other people is actually what allows you to create real relationships with them.

# Episode 43: Getting Mentally Prepared to Start Law School

Lee Burgess: Yes. And I think that's where you become an authentic person and that authenticity can really help you in your career too, you know, when you are comfortable being vulnerable and admitting what you need, of course, not like to opposing counsel and stuff like that, we're not talking about that, but you know, when you-

Alison Monahan: Trusted people.

Lee Burgess: Trusted people, but when you can, you know, when you can do that and be your authentic self, you have a higher satisfaction for your job.

And you are likely going to, you know, be happier and perform better for your clients or your government agency or wherever you're working.

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

And be sure to subscribe so you don't miss anything. If you have any questions or comments, don't hesitate to reach out to Lee or Alison at Lee@LawSchoolToolbox.com or Alison@LawSchoolToolbox.com, or you can always contact us via our website contact forum at LawSchoolToolbox.com. for listening and we will talk soon.

Good luck in law school.