

Introduction: Welcome to the Enchanting Lawyer Podcast, the show that walks you step by step to improving strategies you can use today to grow your business. We show you how being kind, useful, and, of course, enchanting will bring you more clients and build a thriving community.

Now here's your host from sunny San Diego, Jacob Sapochnick.

Jacob: Hello everybody, this is Jacob Sapochnick with the Enchanting Lawyer podcast, the show where we interview the most inspiring entrepreneurs, professionals, and a few attorneys about their journey and we learn from them and get inspired.

Today I have a special guest because I get a lot of emails from people that are not yet attorneys, law students, people that want to go to law school from all over the world, and they ask me to cover the area of what happens before law school, what happens before we think about this profession.

I know many people who listen to the show are not necessarily attorneys. They get different tips from our social media and other things. I wanted to get this today episode on the law students, people that are thinking about law school, and on the young attorneys.

I have an exciting guest, Alison Monahan. She's the founder of the Girl's Guide to Law School and the co-founder of the Law School Toolbox, the Bar Exam Toolbox, legal career site Trebuchet Legal. All these projects aim to demystify the law school and the early legal career experience and helps students achieve great results with minimal angst.

Alison is a graduate of Columbia Law School and spends several years working as a big law patent litigator. She also clerk for federal district court judge in Boston.

Alison, welcome to the show. I'm very, very excited to have you here.

Alison: Thank you. I am delighted to be here.

Jacob: Alison, you are in San Francisco right now, right?

Alison: I am.

Jacob: Excellent.

So, I gave a little intro about you. Why don't you tell our listeners just a little bit more about you, your blog, and the other things that you do?

Alison: Sure.

Well, I have a slightly unusual background for an attorney in that before I went to law school I had several other kind of career starts. My undergraduate work was in Sociology, I was also supposed to go to med school that didn't happen. I ended up going and get masters in Architecture and also working as a web developer, programmer for a couple of years before law school.

To be perfectly honest, I kind of went to law school without a real plan for what I was going to be doing. I just decided I wanted to move to New York. Somebody asked me what I was going to do there and off the cuff I said, "Well, I think I'll go to law school."

So, I can't really claim that I had the best thought out plan in the world for what I was going to do but six months later there I was. I was at Columbia. I did very well but I found it very stressful. I think I kind of lost my path a little bit along the way. I got kind of sucked in to the world of big law which might not have been exactly what I should have been doing, might not have been the best fit.

And at some point, when I was in law school actually, my third year of law school, I had the idea for what became the Girl's Guide to Law School. It was really an attempt to sort of -- I was frankly surprised by how gender the legal profession was.

So I was coming from a background working as a programmer and tech. It's very male dominated but it really wasn't an issue. No one really treated me differently or bothered me. I know that's not everyone's experience in tech but that was sort of my experience.

Then I get to law school and suddenly there's all this crazy stuff going on in these firms and in classes and at school and all the stuff. I said, "Wow! What is this about?"

So, the Girl's Guide to Law School is really my attempt to kind of make this site that I wished that I had had when I was starting law school that said, "These are some challenges you might encounter but you can overcome them. Other people have run into these things," and I tried to make it practical. Guys read the site, that's totally fine.

Jacob: Right.

Alison: Basically, after starting that site, I met my now business partner, Lee, who's in San Francisco. We actually met on Twitter. So let that be a lesson. You can have useful things happen to you on Twitter.

So we met on Twitter. We totally hit it off. She was working as a bar exam tutor at the time and her students were saying to her, "You know, I wish that I'd had

these tools that you're giving me the second or the third or the fourth time that I failed the bar. I wish I'd had these tools when I was a law student."

And so that's really what the Law School Toolbox is about is giving law students the tools that they need to do well from the beginning and sort of eliminate a lot of the stress and anxiety and all that stuff that happened in law school by just saying, "Look, this isn't really that hard. Here is sort of process that you can use on the bar exam to pass the bar."

So that's kind of what we do and sort of a little bit about how it evolved.

Jacob: You mentioned the bar exam and students getting frustrated. We just -- we're about, what, two weeks away from the results of the California Bar, the bar results.

Alison: They came out the week before Thanksgiving which is probably the worst timing possible.

Jacob: Right. They always do that.

Alison: They always do it. It's so weird.

Jacob: And I heard that this year, it was one of the lowest passing rates in recent years?

Alison: Yeah. Pass rates are way down across the country. In California, I think, they are down 7% or 8% which is huge. So it was a really tough year for people.

Jacob: So why don't we talk about that for a second. I know that some of these people that are listening to this and they are maybe in law school that are about to take the bar the first, second time, why don't you talk about the -- What's happening nationwide as far as the exam. Is there a reason why is it getting tougher and tougher every year?

Alison: Yeah, it's a great question. I've seen different theories on why this particular -- the July bar rates were so much lower. You know some people say -- so the people who are taking the bar maybe weren't as qualified.

My personal theory, actually, on what happened is I think the reason for the MBE, the multiple-choice drop, might actually have been a weird one off and that they were testing civil procedure questions which are going to be on the test for real in February but weren't in July. And at least a couple of students have actually said to me, "That really threw me off. Even though I knew it was coming, seeing these questions, like, really rattled me."

So that's my personal theory. I haven't actually seen anyone else express that as a theory but I don't know what's happening.

When the schools are upset about it, they're asking the bar examiners to sort of look into why the pass rates drop so much. I don't think anyone really has a great answer at this point.

Jacob: And so what are some of the states that is really getting so hard right now? Aside from California, obviously we know, it's one of the ...

Alison: I think almost every state solid drop and a lot of it was due to the MBE scores dropping. So that was really across the country. I mean there are also were issues with ExamSoft crashing and people getting really stressed out. I know one girl who didn't go back after the first day because she was so stressed out about the computer crash.

Jacob: Right.

Alison: So all kinds of stuff. But, yeah, I think it's a great mystery, actually, at this point exactly what happened.

Jacob: Well, my theory is that the legal market nationwide is so, so competitive and, I think, maybe there's pressure also on the bars to say, "You know what, we need to stop getting all these lawyers license because it's going to crash the system." Look at Japan.

Alison: Yeah. I think it's also a possibility and I think -- There's kind of tension between the schools who want to get all their students licensed and part of the accreditation is based on their bar passage rate. And then the people who already admitted into the bar, they have an incentive not to admit more people. So, I think there's a lot of stuff going on and I think you're right, a lot of it has to do with the difficult job market.

Jacob: Absolutely. It's very, very difficult.

We'll come back to this point maybe later on but I want to take us to kind of a more of a general question and say -- If I ask you, if somebody ask you right now, why should I go to law school right now? If somebody comes to you and say, "You have all this knowledge about the bar and you've been interning yourself, why would I even go to law school? People tell me I should go to law school." What would you say somebody who ask you that question?

Alison: Well, in my response to people who come and, you know, people ask me this all the time like, "Should I go to law school?" And my response is really what are you doing there? Do you have a clear path that you can see yourself being happy?"

And so I always encourage people, "Look, you can't just make this decision. I mean you can but it's probably not going to end well. But, you know, if you want

to make sure that this is actually something for you, try to get experience. Even if you're working as a secretary in a law firm or whatever, at least you're seeing the day-to-day of what a lawyer does."

I mean people have no idea when they go to law school. I had no idea what lawyers actually do all day. I don't think it was law students, frankly. You might know a little bit but you don't really know. Like what does a prosecutor do all day? At this point, I have no idea. I have friends who do this work and I don't know what they do.

So I think the point is you really "I'm not good at law school, I think" unless, A, you actually want to be a lawyer and you know what that means. And you're pretty sure that your talent and your skill set are actually suited to this.

You know, I have a different Masters degree in Architecture. I was a terrible architect. There was no way I was going to succeed in that profession. It just wasn't what I was good at. And, unfortunately, I think sometimes people go to law school and it's just actually really not where their interest in skills lie and they're doing it for some other reason. And ultimately, I think, that just gets really frustrating.

I mean that being said, there are lots and lots of different ways to be a lawyer. And, you know, I think sometimes people who are not happy in one area of the profession, they might be very happy doing something else. Like I was a litigator and I had friends who were litigators and some of them eventually realized, "You know, I don't really like fighting all the time." That should have been obvious but nobody asks you when you're in law school like, "How do you feel about conflict?" That should be a question you ask yourself before you become a litigator.

So some of these [unclear 00:10:19] transition into different roles, say, corporate counsel at a startup or something and they love it, you know? They're doing something that they're building -- they're helping someone build something. They're not fighting all the time.

So, I think, just being really aware of what your personality type is. Some people really, really like to fight and they like to win. You might be really happy being a litigator, but if that's not your personality, it's probably going to become a drag.

Jacob: Right. And you know, Alison, I think that -- and I found a very interesting section on your website -- Actually, I was doing a search because question people ask me and people always say, "I want to go to law school because there's so many things that I can gain by going to law school." And you have the section there that talks about the myths.

Alison: Right.

Jacob: They're very, very interesting and I think I want to go over some of these points.

I talk to attorneys who are not happy and I say, "Why did you even go to law school? I mean, you've been doing this three years." "I thought lawyers make a lot of money. I didn't know what else to do."

Alison: Right.

Jacob: Some of the things that you have there is the perception that attorneys are successful, they make a lot of money which, obviously, is not the case. Some lawyers are successful just like any other business and some lawyers are not.

Alison: Right.

Jacob: What do you think is that? Is it because of the media or --

Alison: You know, I think it's a lot of things. I think a lot of it is people's parents, frankly, still have these misperceptions.

Generation ago, when law school was pretty cheap and jobs were plentiful, somebody could go and take out minimal debt and graduate and get probably a pretty decent job. But what you see now is really this kind of bimodal salary distribution where you get a certain degree -- certain small number of graduates are making a lot of money at these big firms. They're making \$160,000 to start plus bonuses and that looks fantastic. Your parents are like, "Awesome! My kid's going to be making six figures." But the reality is only a very small, handful of people get those jobs and then, frankly, most of those people hate them and end up quitting in the first five years anyway.

And the other set is that, you know, it tends to cluster around \$50,000 or \$60,000 which, in certain parts of the country, is frankly not really that much money, particularly not when you're talking about having an average debt load of \$100,000.

So I just think the economics of this are really skewed. I think there's better information now than there was, say, five or ten years ago about this, but it just hasn't -- Particular parents, like the perception just hasn't caught up with the reality that this is actually a pretty risky financial decision if you're going to be taking out loans and particularly if you're not sure that it's actually a career that you're suited for, and, frankly, if you don't like to sell things. I mean lawyers typically are not -- they don't think of themselves as sales people but ultimately that's really -- in some sense -- it's what you are.

Jacob: Right. Exactly.

The interesting point is that people look at this as a money-making opportunity but also one of the things that was mentioned in your article is a law degree is kind of like a golden key to opportunity. It opens the door for different things.

And I wanted to talk to you about this because the question is what can you do with a law degree if you're not going to be a lawyer? And I think people are wondering, "I have a law degree and I want to be a lawyer, what else can I do with it?"

Alison: Yeah. Well, if you have a law degree there are lots of things you can do. That being said, I don't think you should necessarily go to law school expecting to do something else with it. In my opinion, I've sent some very specific other circumstances. I do not think people should go to law school unless they want to be a lawyer.

That being said, it is a sort of training that can be helpful other places. You know, it does teach you to think more rigorously ideally. Teaches you to write clearly and think clearly and these are skills that you can transfer. The flipside of that though is that, you know, a lot of businesses either -- I don't know if it's a misperception but they have a certain perception of what a lawyer is. I think I have an article somewhere about this that they don't necessarily want to hire that person, you know.

If you're a business person, if you're an entrepreneur, you might not want the person who's really risk averse and is always looking for problems which is what you're trained to do in law school. I mean that is useful but at the same time you didn't --

We hire lawyers now so there's certain situations where now I'm an entrepreneur, I'm hiring a lawyer, and they're telling me these things and I'm like, "Okay, I hear what you're saying but I'm going to make a different business decision than the legal advice that you're giving me." I mean this is not, like, major stuff but, you know, places where there are, like, "I don't think you're going to get this trademark," or something. And I'm like, "Okay, I understand why you think that but I'm going to file for it anyway."

Jacob: Right.

Well, like I said, it's something that even though we have all these information available ten years ago, 15 years ago, I understand. We have limited amount of knowledge out there and people that are still kind of relying on their parents or myths. But now it's all over the news. I mean we see attorneys who are not doing well, we see a lot of problems with this profession and yet law schools are still -- they have waiting list of people who want to become lawyers.

Alison: Yeah, it's kind of crazy. Yeah, it really is. (Laughs)

Jacob: It is.

Alison: I think that law certainly can still be a very notable profession and the irony is that there's a huge unserved market of people who need lawyers for really legitimate reasons: they can't afford them.

So it's a very interesting question because you've got this huge, unmet legal need, you've got all these underemployed or unemployed attorneys and in the question of how do you pair these people up. And then the problem, of course, is the debt load because people can't just not pay their student loans back. I mean it can but, you know.

Jacob: Of course.

Alison: It's not an ideal solution.

Jacob: Right. I think this question is going to be debated for years.

Alison: Mm-hmm.

Jacob: And, you know, it's interesting because I -- and another thing that I'm still -- I don't have clear answers on that. Probably a year ago, even before, there were these lawsuits of students who are suing law schools because they claim that they promise them a job at the end of their degree but I couldn't find.

Alison: Yeah.

Jacob: What do you think of this state of mind of "I'm going to sue my law school because I didn't get a job but they promised me."

Alison: Yeah. I mean I can see both sides of this. I don't think it's the best use of anyone's time to be suing their school. You could probably be spending that time work productively starting your own solo practice or whatever.

I mean that being said, I do think there was a period of time when the schools were probably intentionally hiding data, shaping data in ways that weren't really accurate. I think there is better data now. I mean there's a project called the Law School Transparency Project that started maybe five years ago and they've really done a lot to sort of advance the cause of good data.

But, I mean, the problem, none of these figures are audited. The school's job numbers are not audited. They can be making stuff up and in some cases they were making things up. I think that data is better now although, honestly, I don't

think a lot of income the students look that carefully at it. I would encourage them to do so.

Jacob: It's interesting because the way I look at it -- there was an interesting article by Kevin O'Keefe, the guy from LexBlog?

Alison: Yeah, he's great.

Jacob: He's an amazing guy and I really like the way he thinks about the profession. In his article, he was talking about why it's the best time to be an attorney and what law students can do in law school to still be able to get a job, even before they graduate.

Alison: Mm-hmm.

Jacob: And what I like about this approach is that -- I agree with that. There's so many things that law students can do while they're in law school to make their chances so much better to get a job. And I just wanted to get your take on what you think they should be doing and then I'll kind of add some of my thoughts as well.

Alison: Yeah, and I think that's right. I think there are huge opportunities to build networks while you are still in school in ways that did not exist even when I was in law school.

So, I graduated in 2006 and, at that point, Facebook didn't exist; LinkedIn, I don't think existed, maybe; Twitter didn't exist. They're kind of traditional networking things which, I think, are absolutely critical for students to be doing, joining the bar association in the town. Pretty clear if it's where they want to work. Building those relationships are, like, going to things, going to events, like getting out and -- It's easy getting to know your professor is getting to know your classmates, getting to know people in the administration. These are the people who are really going to help you find that job.

And, I think, sometimes you just think, "Oh, just go to on-campus interview thing and that will get me a job." It works for some people but, frankly, not for most at this point. I don't think people -- A lot of law students don't really have the skill set to get out there and hustle but that's really what they need to be doing.

Jacob: Right.

Alison: There are ways to do that. They're not so threatening to your self-esteem or whatever. How hard is it to show up as a one L at a networking event for the city bar. That's not really that big of a deal. You need to be able to do these sort of things.

I think, to Kevin's point probably I'm guessing, using things like social media and blogging to make a name for yourself or just to make these connections. I mean students reach out to me on Twitter or through our Facebook page or even through email and I'm always happy to help them. I'll never not respond to an email because I see that as a service that, you know, I'm just doing for the world.

But, you know, not that many people reach out even when you tell them like, "Hey, I'm on your team. You can reach out to me." But if someone does and they say, "Hey, I really enjoy this article that you wrote. Here's a follow-up question I had. Do you have anyone I could -- any resources you can recommend about this particular topic?" I'm not going to respond to that. That's a way to start building relationship.

Jacob: Right. I think, you know, now it's so easy to do that and before it was much more difficult. You said you go to the bar association's networking and it's kind of hard because you don't know the people but today you start building your Twitter follower from day one from first year. Start making connections, start making comments. Like you said, give you opening on an article that another attorney wrote and building your platform while you're in law school.

At the end of those four years, you come out of there and you have followers on Twitter, you have a Facebook following and you have something to show when you go for a job interview so, "You know what, I'm already connecting with all these people. I can bring something to the firm."

Alison: Exactly. And that's [unclear 00:20:54] that young lawyers, I think, can be extremely beneficial [unclear 00:20:58] if people graduate and I think, "Oh, I don't have anything to offer." But if you know how to use these tools and you know how to build a following, that's incredibly valuable for a small firm that might want to hire you. Like, you know, maybe they want you to take over their social media and you know how to do that. You understand how to build those connections. That's incredibly valuable.

Jacob: There's a recent example from Michigan State Law School and they kind of considered to be one of their more active schools online where their students are using social media without the direction of the school to kind of brand themselves. They're connecting with influencers online, LinkedIn. They start building followers individually and the school has nothing to do with that. It's the students' idea to do this because they want to be creating themselves a platform before they graduate which is remarkable.

Alison: They have a couple of really innovative people there; they're doing some interesting work. And I think they're building that type of community where that sort of thing is seen as valuable. I'll give you an example.

I was back at Columbia maybe a couple -- a month or so ago. I just happen to be in New York. I met in a meeting with an old client professor of mine and she just -- It was actually lawyering the digital age clinic and it turned out there was this project that I had worked on that I didn't even know then implemented. She's, "No, it's used around the country," and I was like, "Well, did you have other projects like this? Do your students do things that are actually, like, out there in the world?" She's like, "Oh yeah." I'm like, "Do they promote them in any way?" She says, "Well, we could really do a better job at that."

You use this platform that I have and I'm happy to have your students write a guest post about this amazing tool that they built for the court in New York City. This is information that should be in the world but also it's great for them to have that out there with their name on it and someone googles them and they send in a resume and you see, "Wow! They worked on this really cool project. I want to find out more."

Jacob: Right. It's an opportunity that the students that are failing to take advantage are really going to be missing out especially when they graduate because it's going to be very difficult to pick it up afterwards.

Alison: Yeah. I think people get so focused on their grades and doing well in exams and that's important. But, at the same time, that is not all that you need to be doing when you're in law school. If you're spending 95% of your time focusing on your academic work, unless you are literally like the top of your class, it's really not what you need to be spending all of your time on, you know? Particularly, as time moves on, you spend more time your first year on your classes but by the time you're a third year, you should be spending a pretty good chunk of everyday doing something about your career.

Jacob: Right. Absolutely.

Talking about this, what are some of the tips you can give young lawyers who just graduated, passed the bar, hopefully, and they're starting their career search. What are some of the -- maybe -- let's focus on five points that you can share.

Alison: Sure. I don't know if I can do it five in a row but we'll just chat.

Jacob: Well, you know.

Alison: (Laughs)

Well, I think a lot of people don't necessarily have a lot of -- I think, for this, you're assuming that they don't have a job yet, is that right?

Jacob: Correct. Absolutely.

Alison: Okay. Yeah. So you passed the bar, you've just been admitted, you're four months, five months out of law school, you don't have any real career prospects, what do you do? And I think the key thing is that you've got to start relying on the resources that you have available to you and really pulling those resources in.

So, a lot of people, you know, they'll sometimes email us and they'll say, "I can't find a job." I'll say, "Well, have you talked to your school?" "Well, why would I do that?" "Go and talk to your career services people." Even if you've graduated, they should still be there to help you. It's in their best interest to help you get a job. These are people who are connected. I'm not saying they're going to magically produce a job for you but, you know, this is a really good resource.

Similarly, like, people -- there's tons of information online about sort of -- Not necessarily just in the legal context. I think most kind of career advice is probably better outside of legal context. There aren't too many people writing really specifically about legal careers. The girls got -- we have a five-part series by Katie Slater which is awesome about how to get a job. I highly recommend people to read that.

But, you know, like really drawing other people into your job search and just doing the research. There are a lot of really great books. There's a good book [unclear 00:25:22] who wrote it but called -- something about like turning lemons into lemonade; about doing a legal job search in a bad job market. He has some great tips in there about what to tell people when you're networking so they can actually help you and things like that.

I think they need to draw in the resources and they have to really get curious about what the process of finding a job looks like. And I don't think a lot of people then taught that in law school, you know? It's like, "Oh, you didn't get a job at OCI. Too bad."

But, you know, there's a whole process and it might take a while but it's stuff like doing pro bono work in the bar associations. You can find mentors. Starting a blog on the topic of interest so that you can start meeting influencers. Things like this that frankly, you know, they take a little bit of courage to do but they're not totally impossible. And it's really just about getting a lot of kind of pieces out there because you can't tell what's going to end up resulting in a job.

Jacob: So, you feel pretty optimistic about chances of young lawyers to really land good jobs if they follow some of these tips.

Alison: Well, I mean, to be honest, it's a tough job market. I think the thing is -- Also, people have to look at it a little bit longer term. I think this can be hard because it's disappointing, right? It's disappointing that you've gone to three years of law

school, you've done pretty well, you spent all those money, you've passed the bar, you've become a lawyer, you expected that you're going to get this \$100,000 job and you have nothing.

And so, I think, kind of sitting with that and really not ruminating on, like, "Oh, I'm such a failure but just saying, "Wow! This is disappointing. I acknowledge this is disappointing but I'm still going to take steps to make things better.

I started these sites three years ago. So, there's some people who wrote me in year one and they were in total disarray. "I can't find a job," "I should never have gone to law school, "Everything's a disaster." And then sometimes those people write back a few years later and they say, "You know, things are looking a lot better."

So, I think there's got to be some sort of patience. The millennial generations and people think that they're entitled. I'm not sure that's exactly true but I think there is a sort of perception that, like, "Oh, I have earned this or I deserve it." It's difficult to say, "Wow! Really I'm an entry-level person. I don't actually know what I'm doing. I don't know how to be a lawyer. This is going to be really tough for a while."

I certainly don't think there's going to magically be like "Yey! Everything's awesome."

Jacob: Right.

Alison: But I do think, you know, reality is as a lawyer, you're a member of cartel. So, yeah. You can take advantage of that. Worst case scenario, you are entitled to hang out a shingle and start getting clients and that's possible, you know? And the resources, it will help you if that's what it comes to you. But, you know, I think people just have to be ready to hustle and that's not something that they're really getting a lot of instruction in.

Jacob: And also actually having a plan in mind. You know, sometimes things will -- Just like being an entrepreneur. Whether you're going to work for a firm or you're going to start your own solo practice, it's not always going to be a smooth ride.

Alison: No. It's just like you've got to do something. Sometimes we get people riding us who are just like, "Oh, nothing's going to work out for me." It's like, "Well, yeah. If that's really what you believe, you're right. Might be you're not in a great situation but you've got to do something and there are options."

Jacob: Right. Keep moving forward.

Alison: Yeah, just do something. Try it out. See if it works. If it doesn't work, do something else. I mean that's the life of the entrepreneur, right?

Jacob: Exactly. Excellent advice.

Alison, I have this question for you. I always like to ask successful attorneys like yourself. What is a predominant characteristic of attorneys whom you admire? I'm curious about that.

Alison: That's a great question.

I think I always admire the attorneys who were just, A, really very good at their craft and, B, be themselves were kind people to the extent possible. So I'm thinking specifically of some people that I worked with who were senior partners and they worked as hard, if not harder, at trial than anyone else, and they would sort of go into a room and they would just go over things and over things and honing their craft and honing the questions they were going to ask on cross examination and things like that. You just see this and then you see how hard they worked and then you see them in court the next day and it all look so effortless.

Jacob: Right.

Alison: And so, I think, you know, it's interesting being able to see behind the scenes and just seeing, like, lawyering is really difficult. Being a lawyer, being a good lawyer is not easy. I think just honing the craft is something I always really appreciated.

Jacob: Excellent. And I think it's a great characteristic to have and that [unclear 00:30:15] help you be a much better attorney.

Alison: Mm-hmm.

Jacob: Now, what about one piece of advice you wish you had during your first few years after law school.

Alison: You know, I think, the thing that I really wished I had sort of either been told or if someone did tell me really take into heart was to listen to my instincts. Because I knew, on some level, like, from the very first day, my very first summer position, that big law was probably not the right path for me. But it was something that I just ignored and took another job and a different job and a different job, you know. I summered three places and then I took a different job when I actually started working. None of them were really the right fit because that wasn't really the right part of the profession probably for me to be in.

So I wish someone had said to me, "You know, maybe you're not the greatest employee. Maybe you're not the greatest employee. Maybe this is not really what you're cut out to do and maybe you should think more creatively." You know because I would tell people at Columbia when they ask what my long-term goals were. I said, "Well, you know, I think I might start my own practice doing

family law” and it was like I’d killed a grandmother. It was just like, “Do what?” Literally people “You can’t do that.” I said “What do you mean I can’t do that? I think it’s possible. I don’t think it’s a bad idea.” But, you know, it was just so far out of the realm of what anyone else was aiming for.

And they [unclear 00:31:38] said to me like, “Hey, that sounds really interesting. Why don’t you read this book about opening a solo practice?” So I kind of wish that I’d been given that advice to sort of trust my instincts more.

Jacob: Right. Exactly. And sometimes we all have different advice we can give people and that’s why I feel that what you just said is really crucial because if people think about it early enough, it really helps you change the way you practice.

Alison: Yeah. What I was talking about wasn’t that crazy, you know. (Laughs) It’s like running your own practice is actually kind of awesome. I know lots of people who do it and I think really on the whole I would say they’re probably happier than most other lawyers I know.

Jacob: Right.

As we come close to the end of our show, I wanted to ask you, how should young lawyers actually approach the practice of law? Just your personal opinion.

Alison: Well, I think, this goes back to really honing your craft. I think you have to be very, very good at what you do and I think you have to care a lot about the work that you’re putting out. I think it’s also really important to think about how you want to interact with people. Whether those are clients or your co-counsel or someone else in your firm, you know.

What do you want your life to look like and work is a huge part of that. You do want to work with people you don’t like. I mean lots of people do it but maybe that’s not the best idea. And really getting clear about why are you doing this? What is it that’s getting you up every morning and making you go and work 10 to 12 hours? Because if you can’t answer that, I’m not sure that you can keep doing it for the long term.

Jacob: Right. And now [unclear 00:33:14] one more thing to this is that just being helpful, the state of mind of being helpful.

Alison: Yup.

Jacob: It’s really going to be a game changer for a lot of these young attorneys because most of attorneys are not helpful.

Alison: Right. Yeah, exactly. I think, you know, who are you serving and what are you doing? And really, ultimately -- and I think this is a huge one for people who are

thinking about advertising [unclear 00:33:34]. Also, it's not about you, it's about what you can do for this other person. No one really cares about you in some level except for can you help them with the problem? I mean that's fundamentally what attorneys should be doing is helping people with their problems.

Jacob: Absolutely. And so, Alison, if our listeners would like to connect with you, why don't you tell us where we can find you in the web and any other social extensions you want to share with us.

Alison: Sure. Thank you.

Well, my main website is the girlsguidetolawschool.com. I'm on Twitter as [girlsguidetols](https://twitter.com/girlsguidetols). I would love to connect with any of you. We've also got the Law School Toolbox and Bar Exam Toolbox sites. The career site, currently is named Trebuchet Legal, although we might be updating that soon.

Jacob: Excellent. And boys are welcomed too, of course, right?

Alison: They're welcome. I frequently get emails saying, "Hey, is it okay that I'm a guy and I'm reading your website? I find it really helpful." So if you can get past the pink, you're welcome to stay.

Jacob: Excellent. Thank you so much, Alison. It was a true pleasure; lots of good tips. I'm very happy that you came on the show today.

This is Jacob Sapochnick in enchantinglawyer.com. If you have any questions, email me jacob@enchantinglawyer.com. You can also leave your questions in the comments. We'll look forward to seeing you at our next episode.

Closing: Thanks for listening. You can find even more resources, including the show notes for this episode, at enchantinglawyer.com. That's www.enchantinglawyer.com.