



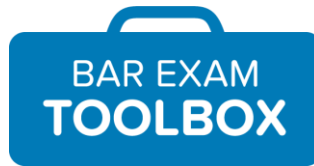
Lee Burgess: Welcome to the Bar Exam Toolbox podcast. Today, we're going to talk about stress. Your Bar Exam Toolbox hosts are Alison Monahan and Lee Burgess, that's me. We're here to demystify the bar exam experience so you can study effectively, stay sane, and hopefully pass and move on with your life. We're the co-creators of [Law School Toolbox](#), the [Bar Exam Toolbox](#), and the career-related website [CareerDicta](#). Alison also runs [The Girl's Guide to Law School](#). If you enjoy the show, please leave a review on your favorite listening app, and check out our sister podcast, the [Law School Toolbox podcast](#). If you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to us. You can reach us via the [contact form](#) on BarExamToolbox.com, and we'd love to hear from you. And with that, let's get started.

Alison Monahan: Welcome back to the Bar Exam Toolbox podcast. Today, we are talking about stress. Well, first off, let's talk a little bit why are bar studiers, do you think particularly prone to experiencing what frankly are pretty excessive levels of stress most of the time?

Lee Burgess: Well, it is just a stressful experience because there's so much riding on this one test. You're trained in law school to have this one final exam, but this is the final exam for your entire law school career. It feels like a very big deal.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. It is definitely a stressful experience. I think that is probably the primary reason people are experiencing stress. Beyond that, I think there are a number of things people do that can also contribute to the excessive level of stress. Things like procrastination, being disorganized, having unrealistic commitments, whether you've overcommitted to work or family or your dog, whatever. I think perfectionism can be a big one. You're like, "I have to get a perfect score on the MBE or I'm not going to be happy." It's like, no one gets a perfect score. So, things like that, I think can cause a lot of stress. This virtual environment and the uncertainty around the pandemic and the bar, I think are definitely causing people stress. Somebody who has external motivation, you're having this thing, "I have to pass the bar, I have to pass the bar, I have to pass the bar" – which may be true, but it's not really that useful in a way. The internal motivation of more, "I'm going to commit to studying these six hours and really being productive" – that's actually something that you can have control over, whereas whether you pass or not is ultimately out of your hands.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that's true. All you can do is serve up your best performance, and then the grades fall where they may. You don't get to pick.



Alison Monahan: You control how you prepare, but you don't control the outcome. So if you're so outcome-focused of, "What's going to happen if I don't pass?" – I don't think that's helpful really for anyone.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think that that's true. You mentioned the virtual environment, pandemic uncertainty – I also think that we're living in a heightened time right now of stress, generally. Everybody is more fatigued, everybody is having information overload, and so I think everybody's level of stress to begin with is already a little heightened. And then if you put the bar on top of that, you're not even starting from, "I'm Zen, and walk outside every day and do meditation." Everybody's already kind of amped up.

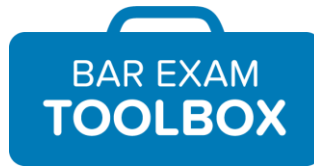
Alison Monahan: Yeah. I would say the ambient stress levels in the world are already very high. I woke up again this morning with an eye twitch. I thought that it went away for a week and I was like, "Oh, okay. I must be doing better." And then I woke up again this morning and I was like, "Uh, why is this coming back?"

Lee Burgess: I know, it's a lot. It's so much. Yeah, it's just so much. Our bodies are already being put through a lot and hits just keep on coming. May we experience less hits in 2021, but I do think that everybody just has to realize that we're coming in already amped. So you really, I think even more than a normal bar exam season, have to be more aware of this, because our tipping point of it really getting to be debilitating or making it difficult to study and perform – it's a shorter distance to travel for most of us.

Alison Monahan: Right. There's less room for error.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: And I think another thing that can cause stress of a really extreme variety that can become very debilitating is when you are sort of disconnected from it. So, it might seem like, "Oh, I'm just powering through and powering through", but when you're totally disconnected from that emotional state or that emotional information that you should be getting from your body, then you start to see these more physical symptoms. And so for me the eye twitch is always a tell. It's like, "Oh, maybe there's something going on here, that eye twitches back." So I think sometimes we think as law students or people studying for the bar, lawyers, we can just power through and ignore whatever we're feeling. But that, trust me from experience, tends to come back to bite you.



Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm. And listening to your body, looking for those tells is so important because I think the earlier you can try and acknowledge it or do some things to maybe reduce your stress are just going to help you overall. So for me one of the things, especially since the pandemic, it's been my shoulders. I can sense the tension starts in my shoulder and crawls down my arm.

Alison Monahan: That sounds lovely.

Lee Burgess: It is lovely. It'll be a few days and I'm like, "Man, my wrists are really tight." And it's like it's happening for the first time. That's so weird. And then I'll do yoga and be like, "Wow, my whole upper body is completely tense", and all of this stuff. And you don't really realize until you take a moment to examine how you're doing and then you're like, "Hmm, what am I not doing to cause this? Is it temporary stress? Is it permanent stress?" But I think we just have to start to learn those tells. I did have an eye twitch for much of law school, so I'm right there with you.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. And I think there are a lot of different ways that people can experience stress. I'll run down a huge long list that I found on the Internet. We assume it's true. Must be, right? Everything on the Internet is totally valid. Seemed good to me. Yeah, so things like a dizziness or just a general feeling of being out of it and it's so hard to focus. Random aches and pains, like you were mentioning in your wrist, grinding teeth or a clenched jaw. I've noticed this one recently – I'll wake up in the middle of the night and my back teeth hurt and I'm like, "Oh, I guess I've been grinding my teeth." Headaches are coming out of nowhere, stomach-related stuff like indigestion, acid reflux. You can have an increase or a loss of appetite. When I get stressed out I just don't eat, so if I'm like, "Oh, I haven't really been hungry for a few days and my eye is twitching. What's going on here?" The things you mentioned like muscle tension in your face, your neck, or your shoulders. I think a lot of people carry stress there. Problems sleeping – that's a huge one. A racing heart, anxious feeling, cold, sweaty palms, feeling just really tired or exhausted, or alternately trembling or shaking. So you can see this can go either way. Weight gain or loss, upset stomach, diarrhea, and even some people have sexual difficulty. So, it can manifest in a lot of different ways. I think being aware of what your personal tells are can be super helpful.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And just being aware sometimes that if a few weird things start happening, you need to take a minute. If you're like, "Well, that's weird, and then that's weird" – something's going on. Too many things happen at once, it's likely that something is going on. And sometimes it really is the simplest



solution, or I guess the simplest explanation, which is, "I'm overly stressed, I'm pushing myself too hard and I need to regroup."

Alison Monahan: I think what we can easily overlook is, a lot of this is actually physical. In a way that's helpful because it means that even if you are feeling a certain amount of stress, you can actually do physical things to break that cycle. So, I think it's useful actually to understand the physical manifestations and what's going on. And these are acute or chronic. And the chronic stress is what causes a lot of longer-term health problems. And you're going into a stressful profession, let's face it. So, I think developing these tools now as you're studying for the bar can only help you in the future. So yeah, let's talk a little bit about the of physical manifestations of stress in the body. One of the biggest ones, which you've already mentioned, is the musculoskeletal system, which is that chronic muscle tension, which can lead to things like tension headaches, migraines for people who are prone to that, back pain, shoulder pain, neck pain, all of these things. I definitely carry stress in my shoulders. I'm like, "Oh, I can't really turn my head. Maybe that's not good." And it starts impacting your posture and the way that you're sitting and the way you're sleeping. For me, if I have a lot of stress, I might not be able to sleep on one side of my body because my shoulder hurts. And then you end up in some weird position, stuff like that. You've got a lot of respiratory stuff. You know probably that feeling of not really breathing deeply or not being able to breathe. And I think that too for people who are prone to anxiety, the breathing is a really big one.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, because breath actually calms your nervous system. So the less breathing we do, we're kind of starving our nervous system of the oxygen it needs to calm the F down.

Alison Monahan: Right. We'll talk about some of our favorite techniques later for these physical things you can do to counteract this. It also impacts your cardiovascular system. Most people have heard of the "flight or fight" response, and that's going to be that increase in heart rate via these stress hormones. It's going to increase your blood pressure. That's the acute reaction, is that feeling of like, "The lion's after me, I've got to run, go!" But if that continues indefinitely, you can start to get into some pretty serious problems like hypertension, heart attack, stroke. So, kind of something to deal with.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And I found it interesting. I know you have an Apple Watch too, and I'm usually not a super big data collection person, but I've had this watch for a year or so. And it is fascinating over time if you start to track things like resting heart rate and stuff like that, that you can actually see times of more stress, or times



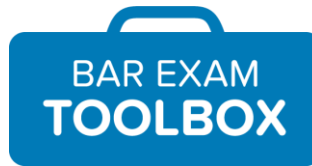
when you're not exercising as regularly. You can look at it. And then there was a month that was, I think, last holiday season, I got a really bad cold or a string of colds and I was sick, and that always pushes your resting heart rate up. And then it was like the month that I moved, which was very stressful in a pandemic like that. And so, it's also just interesting if you do have tracking devices, you can somewhat look for these tells, which is another way to just keep yourself honest.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. I think those can be really good for also resolving some of these stressful things. Like, are you really exercising as much as you think? Are you actually burning calories when you're exercising? Does my walk to the coffee shop really count or not?

Lee Burgess: Right, it's true.

Alison Monahan: It definitely makes you a lot more honest. At least for me, I found having the watch sometimes I'll just decide I'm going to walk that extra block up the hill to get some more steps in. So, it can become a positive feedback instead of a negative feedback loop. Yeah, so more stuff – fun things like gastrointestinal. I think this is fascinating. You've probably read some of this too, about how stress can affect the brain-gut communication and how we talk about that gut feeling, which is actually a literal feeling, as it turns out, in the gut. And then that also, on the plus side, means what you eat can really help you manage your stress. Because if you're feeding your gut bacteria what they want to be eating, they're probably going to be a lot happier, and vice versa. It's actually funny – right before we recorded this, I was like, "Oh God, I've got to go, I've got to jump on this. I don't have time to eat anything real. I'll just have this croissant my friend gave to me yesterday", that had this really sweet filling. It was delicious, and now I feel so queasy. It was like, "Wow! I'm not used to that much sugar, my stomach hurts."

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And anyone who's done any sort of elimination diet... I have done a few. I don't do well with gluten, I don't do really well with dairy. And so, anytime you do some sort of elimination diet, you really learn the gut-emotion connection, and the gut-mental connection, because that gut bacteria, when you take away what it wants, if you're feeling out of balance, it gets very angry and it makes you feel very weird. And so, it's interesting to learn those types of things because yeah, if you feed the sugar monsters, which is what a friend of mine calls them – the sugar monsters react a different way. They love the sugar and they want more, and the sugar causes other problems. It's just really fascinating to experiment with what your body needs, because all of us are different. But



anytime in my household we do any stricter diet regimen or we say, "Oh, we started eating gluten again, we need to cut it out" – my husband and I come together and we say, "I love you, you get a pass for the week." We're just not going to argue about anything because it's not you talking, it's the sugar monsters talking. It's crazy. It's crazy how connected that stuff is.

Alison Monahan: That's funny, because I'm not a person who has... I can eat sugar and not eat it, but when I do eat a lot of it, I'm like, "Oh gosh, that is not for me. I've got to go get some fiber or something soon, because this is just like, ooh!"

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Stress can also impact your immune system, so that's not great either. If you're studying for the bar and you're trying to fight off all the germs floating around, having more stress is definitely going to lower your immunity. And one of the things I think is really interesting is this idea of how the nervous system works, where you have the sympathetic and the parasympathetic nervous system. If you've done a yoga class or something, you may have heard them mentioned, "We're going to activate our parasympathetic nervous systems." Or meditation, things like that. But there's this whole system that basically is designed to calm your body down, and a lot of that is physical. So, this parasympathetic nervous system is really the rest and repair. And so, you can get things like Yin Yoga or Reiki or all kinds of different body works. And then what they're really doing is activating that system that'll allow you to repair basically the damage that daily life is doing to you.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Have you done any of the facial massage things?

Alison Monahan: Me personally?

Lee Burgess: Yes, you personally. Not just the rollers, but the... Oh, I have one of the Jade things...

Alison Monahan: Oh no.

Lee Burgess: Anyway, I can't remember how I ended up with one of those, but it was probably me trying to find a way to have less stress. But I think everybody, especially at this time when many people would get massages or go get body work or go to a yoga class in-person – a lot of the things that we would do aren't available. And I was listening to a video, doing little facial massage with my Jade thing. And it was amazing that it really did make you feel better. It releases



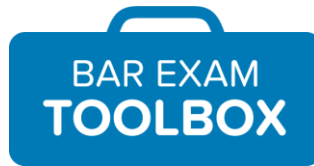
tension, it does. And I'm sure if you took a video of me doing it, it would seem ridiculous, but I think it's all about experimenting with all of these different things...

Alison Monahan: Whatever works.

Lee Burgess: ...to just change your body and how you're feeling. Sometimes even just creating sensations in a different part of your bodies can elicit some calming response. We have a friend who is a yoga teacher and a meditation instructor, who wrote mantras and some meditation exercises for our bar students. And one of the things she said, which I thought was fascinating is that you can pet your own hand and hold your own hand, and that is calming to your own system, because we respond to touch. And so, even just stroking your hand, stroking your arm – that can initiate a calming response. And I just find that stuff fascinating, what we can do to get some sort of support, even when we're staying away from other people.

Alison Monahan: Right. I know sometimes I've been in yoga classes where it was like, "Give yourself a hug." And you're like, "Oh, that is nice. Who knew? I could do that any time of day or night. I'm totally in control of that." And I think, if we want to shift from the depressing stuff about how stress is going to kill all of us to some actual strategies for dealing with this, I think thinking about what you do and don't control in all aspects is really so important. Because the things that are under your control you can do – you can control your reaction, you can control your preparation, you can control what techniques you decide to employ or what strategies you try. And hopefully that gives you a better sense of control. If you know you're walking into a stressful situation, maybe you have your strategy that you prepare. As you mentioned, we have some mantras and things – I think something like that for even before you sit down to study every time: "Okay, what is my study ritual?" How are you going to transition into that mindset of, "Okay, I'm focused, I'm ready to study" in a way that's not stressful? Make it something that's actually pleasant.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. One thing that somebody told me once that I personally find really powerful sometimes is, when you're working towards a goal. And you can't make yourself do something. You can say, "Okay, if the person who's doing the goal" – so the person who's going to sit for the bar – "what would that person tell me right now?" Would that person say to sit my ass down and get my work done? Would that person say, "Don't go out drinking with your friends, because you need to study"? Would that person say, "Don't binge Netflix, because we need to be present"? Trying to associate your choices with a longer term goal, I



think can be an interesting way of also setting expectations for yourself. They don't have to be crazy, but it's like, what do I want to feel in that moment? Do I want to think I did what I could to be here and be present and be prepared, or do I want to think that I self-sabotaged myself and I wasn't able to show up correctly?

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think sometimes I was like, "What would my future self like for me to have done in this scenario? Future me would probably be happy that I sat down and did these two hours of work, because then I will have moved incrementally closer to passing and future self will not have to worry about this topic."

Lee Burgess: Right. So true, yeah.

Alison Monahan: No, I think there's a lot of good brain science about that ability to step outside of yourself and talk to yourself as if you were someone else you care about. Oftentimes people are very mean to themselves in ways they would never, ever be mean to someone that they care about. And so, that type of talk and self-talk can also be something to try to catch up. We have to be gentle, there's no point in if you didn't do those two hours of studying and being like, "You're a terrible person. You're going to fail the bar." Okay, that's not helpful. Reframing it as more like, "Okay, that was not a successful study session. What can I do in the future to help tomorrow be better?"

Lee Burgess: Yep. And I think we talked about some of this in a [podcast episode we did for the Law School Toolbox](#) on the book *Mindsight*, by Dan Siegel, who we have a nerd obsession with some of his work.

Alison Monahan: He's so great.

Lee Burgess: He's super great. And one of the things that he talks about in that book specifically is, he goes through a lot of these things about the power of our self-speak. And then he uses some pretty extreme examples of how folks are dealing with serious considerations, such as OCD, to the point where they won't walk near a pool. There are folks that are really in a debilitating space, through self-speak and mind almost training are able to reframe it. The one I always think about is, I think it was a young woman, who one of the things she was deathly afraid of was water. And she named her "fight or flight" response in her head and basically would talk to it like it was a different person and say, "Thank you for trying to protect me, but I don't need protecting." It was something along those lines, but it was all with kindness. It was like, "I know all you're trying to do is keep me safe, but I don't need to be kept safe." And it really started to



make me think about the way that we do talk to ourselves, which oftentimes, especially for people who can tend to be perfectionists, is pretty terrible.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, you can be very brutal, and it's not helpful. Anyway, I think if you're listening to this and you realize you are someone who really has that very negative self-talk, therapy is probably what you need to sign up for right now. You can do it virtually, but there are lots and lots and lots of techniques that people have spent a lot of time and energy coming up with that really do work. So, you don't have to be in that black hole, spiraling downward. There are people who definitely can help you figure out more functional ways of basically taking care of yourself so that you can function in the world.

Lee Burgess: Yep, it's so true. And I think this is especially important during these COVID times, is keeping some sort of perspective. Becoming a lawyer is a privilege.

Alison Monahan: Right, and a choice.

Lee Burgess: It's a choice.

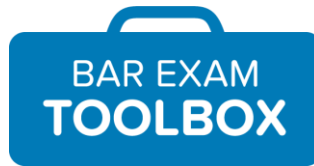
Alison Monahan: You don't actually have to do this, no one's really forcing you to. It might feel that way, but you actually could just decide not to do it.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And so, you do want to try and keep in mind that you're doing this voluntarily and that it's a goal. This isn't cancer; it's a goal and you're just trying to reach this goal. That doesn't mean that it doesn't have a lot of power. And to be honest, I've lived through much harder things than sitting for the bar, in my opinion since then, but I was way too stressed out for the bar for what it was. This more mature Lee would tell younger Lee that maybe she didn't need to be so stressed out about that.

Alison Monahan: Right, "Maybe you could just take a step back and you're probably going to pass."

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that I was doing all of the right things to give myself the best shot at passing. I think I definitely would kind of spiral to the panic. Life teaches you a lot of these lessons as you go through life and end up doing harder and harder things, but it is important to just try and keep as much perspective as you have.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. And I think getting all the boring stuff down that's easy to talk about, hard to do, but that is really definite step one in your stress management plan – things like food, sleep, exercise, probably limiting caffeine. And again, all of



these things get back to the physical underpinnings of stress, but the more that you can manage in a proactive way, getting enough exercise, eating well, probably limiting how much coffee you're drinking, particularly later in the day – these things, although boring, I will have to say do help.

Lee Burgess: I know. It's always unfortunate, isn't it?

Alison Monahan: We don't want them to, but they do.

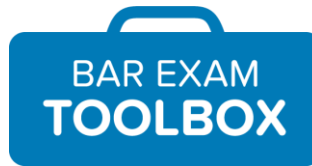
Lee Burgess: We don't want them to. And social support is important, which can be a trickier to get during these COVID times. But if you want people to help you reach your goals, it is really good to be honest about what you need. So, if you have friends and family who love to buy you sugary treats as treats to reward you for good behavior, but that's not good for you right now – you can say, "I really appreciate you wanting to bring over cupcakes every couple of days, but that's not going to help me get to my goal. But instead, you could bring over frozen dinner. Cook in bulk for me so I have extra meals." I think being able to be very specific about what sort of support you need is very helpful.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, because people do want to help, but sometimes they don't know what to do. So, if you can give them specific offers: "Oh, it'd be really amazing if you could maybe take my dog on a walk once a week because I don't have time for this", or whatever it is. People may be willing to pay for house cleaning or something that you just feel like you can't deal with, because if we're thinking about really strategies for this exam period, I think one of the things you want to try to do is delegate anything you can that causes stress. And so, if there are people in your life you can delegate those things to, fantastic. Let them help by doing something useful.

Lee Burgess: So true, because people do like to help, but if you don't tell them how to help, they might come up with their own ideas and it may not be that helpful.

Alison Monahan: Right. And then you're managing their inability to help, and then that's not helping anyone. But overall, I think when you're thinking about preparing for the bar, I really encourage people to include stress management as part of that bar prep plan. And it is equally important as doing practice questions, because if you are in a state where you can't focus and you can't think and you can't function, you cannot study and you cannot take this test.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that's so true. So I mentioned another support system of being important, which is therapy. And I think that especially if you don't have folks in your life to



help you with some of that accountability and you struggle with accountability, having a therapist is great, because one of the things that they also can do is look for those patterns and they can say things like, "You mentioned that this was an important goal, and it doesn't sound like you're taking the steps to reach that goal."

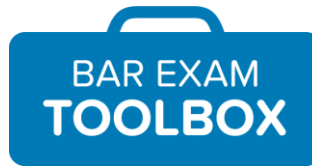
Alison Monahan: Like, "What do you think that's about?"

Lee Burgess: It's possible that I've maybe at some point in my life gotten that feedback. I don't know. Totally hypothetically speaking. But I do think that that external observer or who can say, "Oh, that's interesting because last year you said that XYZ, and now you're saying something totally different." I do think that having that professional observer of your life can really help change patterns. So, if you're open to it, your school has options that may still be available to you during bar prep. Or now especially there are lots of different virtual therapy options out there. It is a good time to get the support that you need.

Alison Monahan: Right. I think you do have to be careful when you think of social support about only talking to other people who are taking the bar, because that can be helpful, just to have someone to commiserate with, but I think you really have to draw some firm boundaries around how much of other people's stress you're going to be taking on if you start only focusing on the people who are taking the bar.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm, yeah. I think that's true. In fact, I remember both in law school and studying for the bar, one of my best friends was not in law school, and I would get together with her and be like, "Don't let me talk about school. Talk to me about anything else. Your job, whatever."

Alison Monahan: Yeah, which I think everyone needs, because otherwise it's just like, "Well, what have you been doing today? What did you study? What did you focus on", blah, blah, blah. "Did you do this or did you do that?" And then you're in this comparison cycle and it's just... This is definitely a time to stay in your lane, focus on yourself, focus on what you need to get done, being very deliberate. I keep saying "focus", but really focus is one of the key things here, and I think trying to avoid multitasking and focusing on what it is you need to be doing throughout the day to study. And that also includes lots of time off to refresh. So, if you're studying really strongly, you can't do that for 12 or 14 hours a day; your brain just doesn't work. So, you've got to schedule in that time off. And hopefully that time off is when you're disconnected from the Internet, maybe you're doing something more physical, maybe outdoors, to really try to refresh your brain so when you come back and study again, you'll actually be focused.



- Lee Burgess: Yeah. It's making the most of the time that you have. Hours clocked studying does have diminishing returns at a certain point.
- Alison Monahan: Oh, for sure.
- Lee Burgess: Just because you have logged a certain number of hours, it does not mean that you will pass. Trust us, we have talked to tons and tons of people who have studied very hard for this test and not passed.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. So I think focusing on not over studying, but really making sure you're doing active learning and that you're committed to an approach. So I think in the beginning you can say, "Okay, I'm going to try a few different things and see what works." But if keep changing your approach throughout the study period, that is going to cause a lot of stress.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. I also think that it's something to keep in mind about where you study.
- Alison Monahan: Oh, for sure.
- Lee Burgess: Maybe where in COVID times is more limited, because you may not have as many options. But wherever you decide to do it, you want to make sure that it has the ability to be quiet, it's inviting, you're going to want to tidy it up regularly. I'm looking at my desk right now, which is a total, total mess.
- Alison Monahan: I know. I have a whole pile of stuff and it's really actually stressing me out.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, it's not calming. I've got three water glasses, and a kombucha thing, and all this recording equipment, and packages. I don't know why I have packages stacked in here. This isn't the room where I take packages, but they're living here. So, keeping your area clean and tidy just helps with, I think, mental load. And that can be part of your daily routine. At night when you make your plan for the next day, you tidy things up so when you sit down, it doesn't look like, "Oh, welcome back to the chaos."
- Alison Monahan: Right. And I think this is particularly important if you don't have a designated study space in your house. I think you don't want to leave all this stuff on your kitchen table every single night. It's more like, put that away in a corner, don't think about it for the rest of the night. And then in the morning as part of your study ritual, you go out and you get your stuff and you put it out the way it's supposed to be. You want this to reflect order, not chaos.



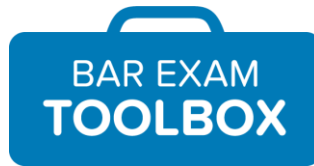
Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm. Yeah, exactly. And then as you get closer to the exam and you're starting to think about test day and your prep as we get closer, you do want to think about your mantras, things that you're telling yourself, how you're going to visualize success, if you're going to use affirmations to boost your confidence. What are you going to do to help with your mindset? Athletes have been doing this stuff forever. It's not just for athletes, but there are things that you can definitely do to create focus and make sure that you are in a positive mindset going into both study and eventually the exam.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Even something as simple as instead of thinking about, "What if I don't pass? What if I fail?", think about yourself opening that email from the bar and saying your name is on the pass list. That's going to help you actually be more positive about this experience. If you have failed the bar, that is upsetting and I think you need to allow yourself time to feel upset about it. But try not to ruminate about it because that's really when you create this whole storyline about what it means, and on and on, when really you can reframe this as a disappointing step, but on the road to success. And you can try to sort of depersonalize it. So it's, "This exam did not go as well as I'd hoped, but these are the things I'm going to do to move forward." But I do think you've got to feel upset about it. We sometimes give people a certain amount of time to feel upset, like a few days or the weekend, and we're like, "Alright, you can wallow, you can cry, you can do whatever you want for the next three days, but after that, you've got to start moving forward."

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And coming back from a failure is its own mental challenge. So you've got to work on it; you can't just let it lay there.

Alison Monahan: No, because it will definitely sabotage you. I sometimes encourage people to do things that sound kind of woo-woo, like a ritual, go to the ocean and throw the old bar exam in the water and watch it go away. But these things are actually really effective.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. There's a reason why people have been doing rituals forever. And I've actually found that just looking at COVID life, I've really missed rituals, especially when it comes to hard things. I think so often we do gather together. I've had a few friends experience incredible losses, and the idea that we can't come together to create comfort is really challenging. And I think even when you're dealing with something like frustration around a failure or a loss, oftentimes you would go maybe travel to be with family, be with the people who are the most grounding for you. You may not have those resources or it might not be safe to call on those resources. So, these other types of rituals may become more



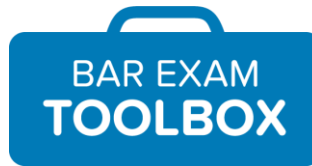
important. One of the things that is popular here in the Bay Area is, there are a number of labyrinth walks around the Bay Area. And I know a number of people who use that as a meditative exercise. They do that, they contemplate on a journey that they're taking. We actually did it when we were pregnant. I did it with my midwife and a few other pregnant women to walk the labyrinth and think about the labyrinth symbolizing labor and having the baby. But I know other people who have used labyrinths for illnesses and any challenge that has maybe a nonlinear path. And so, it is just really interesting to think about how those rituals that maybe are safe can support us when we can't call on the things that we usually call on.

Alison Monahan: I think that's a really great point. And before we wrap up, we do just want to give you a few ideas to explore. I think the labyrinth is a great one. I think walking meditations are great, guided meditations can be really fantastic, mantras that we mentioned earlier. I think any type of yoga, whether it's active or Yin, restorative, whatever you need in that moment. There's a reason these things have lasted for as long as they have. And your favorite, the box breathing, which we're not going to go into detail because we've talked about a lot before. But they teach snipers this, so look it up – box breathing – in, hold, out, hold. Sounds very simple, but really, really effective. And just a technique you can call on at any moment.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And I think one of the things I just want everybody to understand is, even if you've been humbled by this experience, I do believe you are stronger than you give yourself credit for oftentimes. I'm totally a crazy Peloton biking nut person during the pandemic, but I will say that they've got some quotes that really stick with you. And one of them, I was doing this one ride where the woman said, "You have already survived 100% of your hardest days. Why would you not survive the next ones?" And I was totally like, "Oh, that's a really nice framing of that idea."

Alison Monahan: That's a good point.

Lee Burgess: I was like, "That's a very thoughtful point." Not that it's super novel, but that's why... I don't know, reading things or having these mantras or these things that you can hold on to, it's like you have already lived through some really hard things. This is just another hard thing that you have to conquer and it's going to be okay. You're going to be okay. And so, I think just anything that you can do. It doesn't have to be becoming a Peloton nut, but anything that you can do to anchor yourself can be really helpful.



Alison Monahan: Yeah, I agree. I think different things work for different people and some of the stuff we've talked about you might think like, "Whatever." For me, rolling Jade around my face, I'm like, "Hmm, I'd have to consider that one." But if Lee tells me that it worked for her, maybe I'll go get into it. Who knows?

Lee Burgess: I'll send you the video, you can choose for yourself.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, definitely, I'm kind of curious now. But I might look at this and be like, "You've got to be kidding me. This was super kooky." But that's okay, that just means it's not for me.

Lee Burgess: That's right, yeah.

Alison Monahan: I'll go to my restorative yoga class and my Reiki and be happy.

Lee Burgess: Right. And here's a window into what our Slack conversations are going to look like after this podcast recording.

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

Lee Burgess: I want to take a second to remind you to check out our [blog](#) at BarExamToolbox.com, which is full of helpful tips to help you prepare and stay sane as you study for the bar exam. You can also find information on our website about our courses, tools, and one-on-one tutoring programs to support you as you study for the UBE or California bar exam. If you enjoyed this episode of the Bar Exam Toolbox podcast, please take a second to leave a review and rating on your favorite listening app. We'd really appreciate it. And be sure to subscribe so you don't miss anything. If you're still in law school, you might also like to check out our popular [Law School Toolbox podcast](#) as well. If you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to reach out to myself or Alison at lee@barexamtoolbox.com or alison@barexamtoolbox.com. Or you can always contact us via the website [contact form](#) at BarExamToolbox.com. Thanks for listening, and we'll talk soon!

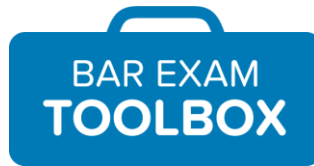
RESOURCES:

[Brainy Bar Bank – UBE \(MEE + MPT\)](#)

[Brainy Bar Bank – California Bar Exam](#)

[Bar Exam Self-Study Program](#)

[Podcast Episode 13: Handling Bar Exam Stress \(w/Megan Canty\)](#)



[Podcast Episode 57: Using Mindfulness Techniques in Your Bar Exam Preparation](#)

[Law School Toolbox Podcast Episode 202: Book Club – Mindsight: The New Science of Personal Transformation](#)

[Train Like an Athlete for the Bar Exam](#)

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