Lee Burgess: Welcome to the Bar Exam Toolbox podcast. Today we have two special guests – Zach Lindesmith and Michele Cooley, both from Themis Bar Review – talking about early bar prep. 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 the 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.

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Hi everyone. This is Lee from the Law School Toolbox and the Bar Exam Toolbox. Welcome back! Today we are talking about early bar prep, and we have two special guests. We have Zach Lindesmith, who is the Director of Bar Support for Themis Bar Review and UWorld, and Michele Cooley, who's the Director of Law School Partnerships for Themis as well. So, I'm excited to have you both here because I think this is a really important topic about how we prep for the bar. So, thanks for spending some time with me today.

Michele Cooley: Happy to be here.

Zach Lindesmith: Yep. We're both real excited to be here.

Lee Burgess: To get things kicked off, why don't you just share a little bit more about each of you? So perhaps, Zach, you can go ahead and start, because you're next in my Zoom box. And you can share just a little bit more about how you became a bar support person. What is the career path that leads to this role?

Zach Lindesmith: Yeah, so at Themis, my primary role is I work a lot with our institutional partner schools and the law schools that need academic and curriculum support from Themis. So I build a lot of the programming and figure out the curriculum needs that our schools have. But I also teach a lot of our bar support courses at our partner schools around the country as well. Prior to coming to Themis, I worked as a professor of bar support at the University of Akron. So, very similar to, Lee, your background, I worked as a lawyer at a law firm for a couple of years and found out it really wasn't what I was looking for, before I made the jump going to work with students in teaching. So, I'm very happy working with students and teaching them how to pass the bar exam and finding out the different skills that they need to be successful in law school.

Lee Burgess: Awesome. Well, thanks for joining us. And Michele, we were just discussing, you've been on the podcast before, but in case folks haven't listened to your previous episodes, why don't you share a little bit about yourself?

Michele Cooley: Sure. So, I practiced law for about 13 years – it took me a little bit longer to realize that that was really not the place for me. Went into a law school – so, doing academic and bar support in that law school field, creating that programming, teaching. I did that for a little over six years, and then it was time for a change. And so, I had also worked closely with Themis when I was a professor and they had a spot open. So, I've had a lot of different roles within Themis. Did some work with our course administration, started as a traditional sales director, and now I'm working with this team where we support law schools with their curriculum and their students that are taking the bar, which I really enjoy and I feel like is a good combination of all of my background skills.

Lee Burgess: Awesome. Well, I've got to love a good meandering career path. Well, today we're in the bar prep world, where we are talking about early bar prep. So, this will be released in the spring, and some people who are sitting for the summer bar exam may be thinking, "Hey, should I be doing something at this point in the year?" So, here we are to answer some of those questions. So, Zach, why don't we start with you? Who is a good candidate for early bar prep and why?

Zach Lindesmith: Yeah, I think a lot of the students that I work with that tend to be good candidates for early studying for the bar exam are students that are working full-time either throughout law school, or going to have to be working full-time after law school while they're studying for the bar exam, or are students that have a lot of family responsibilities, whether they're raising families full-time with kids, they're taking care of spouses full-time, or they're taking care of their parents full-time. But I think what's really important if you're studying for the bar exam early, is a student that's a good candidate for an early start is a student that is going to make sure that they have a plan in place while they're studying early for the bar exam.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Michele, do you have anything to add?

Michele Cooley: I think also students who have received accommodations in law school or just generally need a little more time with studies and material are also good candidates for an early start, or some students who just generally have high test anxiety or nervousness surrounding that. Also, I frequently have talked to students who have graduated from law school and now they're getting married, or their sister is getting married, or their best friend is getting married, and so they've got a big event that is happening during that time that they would be studying full-time. And so sometimes early start can be a good candidate for those types of students as well.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I always think you've got to be honest with yourself, right? And I think that no matter whether you're planning on starting early or if you're planning on doing the typical eight to 10 weeks, I think this springtime moment – let's say four months or so out from the test – is a great moment to be honest and realistic. So, I think sitting down and saying, "What does my life look like? What time am I going to have?" And don't be optimistic. It's really not a time for optimism. I've heard a lot of optimism over the years: "Oh, I'm going to study 35 hours a week while working full-time." I'm like, "I don't think you are, or you're going to be so tired that you have no retention of any information, and therefore your time is completely wasted." I mean, I understand that everyone wants to be optimistic, because these are goals you want to reach. I'm not criticizing anyone for saying, "I can do this", but it is a moment for real realism. If you're studying while you're working and you think you've got 35 hours a week, you need to also make sure you're sleeping. That's not possible for most people. But I think you really do have to sit down and say, "What hours are not only reasonable, but am I going to have the ability to do this cognitive lift?", which is hard work. The bar is hard work. It might not be rocket science, but it is hard work. So, Michele, what do you think about that?

Michele Cooley: Yeah, I agree with that. And I think that studying for the bar is such a different process than preparing for final exams. And so, it is a time for realism, not optimism. As I've said earlier, you have to have a plan.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I'm not that optimistic of a person generally, but it is really not a moment for optimism. I like to be optimistic in certain parts of my life. Zach, what have you seen in the student populations you've been working with?

Zach Lindesmith: That's why I really only like to recommend certain students start early, under certain circumstances. So, whether it's a full-time working student and they are realistic with themselves and set up that realistic expectation of what their priorities are. If you are working full-time and have to take care of your family, that has to be a priority in your life. You can't just not have an income and let your family flounder, so that needs to be a priority. But then one of your other high priorities needs to be studying for this exam, and you need to set a realistic expectation of, "How many hours can I devote for myself that are going to be a realistic, healthy amount of studying that I can retain that information?" And I see that a lot with students, where they just say, "I want to study early to lengthen that runway." But they don't have an actual reason as to why they're doing that. And I think without that plan in place, it's not effective study time. And that's why I think a lot of times when students lengthen that runway without it being purposeful, they're not actually retaining a lot of that information that they're doing. They just say, "I want to start early so that way I don't have to study as much every single day." And they're filling that extra time then with whatever they want to do, and it's not a prioritized time in their schedule. So I think having that prioritized plan in place with your early start is what's going to be really important to make it impactful for you.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. For the students who have family responsibilities or complicated jobs, even pets – whatever it is that is kind of being asked of you outside of work or law school – you can also use this time to really set yourself up too. Maybe you are going to do this early bar prep, but also maybe you need additional support. And how are you going to be able to do that? I'm a big fan of people being very direct with their asks: "I need help with meals." Family and friends are always going to come and be like, "How can I help?" and sometimes they want to bring cookies, which is very sweet. I had a best friend years ago, who would always show up to anything with a chocolate chip cookie. And they were good, don't get me wrong. I love a good chocolate chip cookie. It has to be gluten-free, because we have a gluten-free house, and that's a whole different podcast. But sometimes you're like, "I love the cookies, but what I really need is chicken soup." Or I really need dinner, or I need help doing my laundry, or I need help doing these things. And I do think that's something that is part of this, is as

you're being realistic about your schedule, think about, "Is there anything that I could get my village to step up and help me with, and if so, I'm going to be direct about those asks because it's going to help me be more realistic." This is a hard life skill. I personally did not have this life skill in my mid-twenties when I was sitting for the bar. I learned this life skill from a friend of mine who actually works in hospice and end of life care. And her husband got into an accident; he's fine. But she sends this masterful email because she lives in this space of hard things happening. And she's like, "This is what has happened, and this is how I need support." And she listed five or six things, and then she made suggestions like, "Lee, why don't you coordinate X, Y, Z? And so-and-so, please coordinate dropping off meals for us." And it was this masterful list. And then we all wrote back and we were like, "We got you. We are here for you, we can show up in this way." And I realized what a gift it was to be very direct with your ask when you're going through something hard. And I think that it can be really hard to do that, because you feel like you want to do it all. But this is not the moment to do it all; it's the moment to find a way to manage it all.

Michele Cooley: Yeah. I had a student one time, and she was a non-traditional student and she had this calendar, and it was color-coded and she shared it with her family, and one of the color codes was, "Do not contact me during this time." And that's what worked for her. And so, again, everybody does things a little bit differently, but yes, I think don't be afraid to be direct. Have the ask, have the boundaries.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I love a good shared Google Calendar. It's a masterful thing. Okay, so we've been throwing around this term "early bar prep". So if I'm a law student, let's say I'm in one of these categories that we think there are reasons why I should be studying early. So, one, what does it really mean to study early, and two, aren't I still in law school? When exactly am I supposed to find time to study for the bar while I'm still in school? So, Zach, you want to take this one?

Zach Lindesmith: Yeah. I think early start can kind of mean one of two things. And I think the first one is really important while you're in law school, and that's, we need to remember that a lot of law schools offer for-credit programming for students while they're in law school to start studying for the bar exam. Whether that's with a professor, like Michele or I used to be while we were in law school, working as professors teaching courses. Those are using bar exam materials to get students ready for the bar exam. If you are somebody that is working full-time, take advantage of those materials. Really lean into that to get yourself that head start. I think too often law students think of that as a "course that the school is offering me; this is not my actual bar prep course." And they don't think of that as lengthening their runway, as opposed to looking at that as an opportunity for them to be able to get these materials to start getting their skills

in place and start getting ready during law school at the same time, and getting credit for it, so they can use their law school time to lengthen their runway. The other option is, a lot of bar prep companies will offer early access to their course, and I think that is traditionally what a lot of students think of when it comes to early start. That would be in addition to everything else that's going on in their life. And I think that is the much more difficult one, where you have to have that honest discussion with yourself, as to, "How am I going to fit this into my workload? How am I going to start building those study habits now for myself?" And I think that's really the benefit of that early access – whether you do it six months before the bar exam, an extra month early – where you can start building those study habits, figure out what your schedule is going to look like, so when you get to that traditional 8-week course or that 10-week course, you really have your habits in place and can hit the ground running.

Lee Burgess: And since you both work for a bar review company, does Themis allow people to get access early?

Michele Cooley: We do. We do have early access to our courses, as well as even earlier access to our QBank, which allows for just getting in there doing some more multiple-choice questions. So, we do have that feature.

Lee Burgess: And if somebody is interested in that and they've either already purchased Themis or they are planning on purchasing it, how do they explore that? Do they have to reach out or is there just an option to access early?

Michele Cooley: It's automatic.

Lee Burgess: Oh well, that's easy.

Michele Cooley: Yep. Yeah. So we have our early start, and then our recommended start date. And everyone who purchases a Themis course has that early access. It just really depends on what you need as a student. We have a study planner that allows you to put in your start date. So, if it is April 1 versus May 18, then the schedule will populate for you.

Lee Burgess: Okay, great. And going back to the Google Calendar, back to my lovely shared Google Calendar, hopefully everyone listening to this has some sort of calendaring system that they've used during law school to create these kind of protected blocks of studying – you could call it deep work, you could call it whatever you want. But I think that this is where, again, being realistic with your time and thinking about these blocks can really be helpful. Like you were mentioning, Zach, you need to figure out where you want to invest the time.

And maybe it becomes between now and the end of the semester, Saturday mornings are bar prep mornings and you have a block. Or maybe it's Wednesday afternoon, Saturday morning. I would say you need a few hours to make it worth it. An hour here or there at this point in studying, I don't think you're in it deep enough really to gain too much. What do you think, Zach?

Zach Lindesmith: Yeah. And that's something I've been seeing with a lot of my students recently, especially my part-time students that I've been working with, in particular, a lot of retaker students as well that are on a second try or even a third time for the bar exam – because life does go on after you fail the bar exam, right? – that it seems like they're trying to fit in bar prep where they can, rather than structuring their schedule around their priorities and responsibilities, and they're getting in an hour here, an hour there, rather than saying, "This specific time in my life is exactly where I'm going to study for the bar exam." And I think having that set structure in your life, it almost tricks your brain into saying, "This is the time that I'm learning, and when I'm sitting down for this, it helps me retain that information a lot better." I went to Catholic school when I was younger, and I always had to wear khakis and a polo. And when I went to college, I didn't dress up like that and I really struggled to learn for a while. And so then I started wearing khakis and polos then when I had tests and stuff, and I was much more focused then. And I think it's that same mentality, that if you structure your time and trick yourself being into learning mode, I think you're going to have a much better time learning.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And I hate wasting time personally, because I don't have enough time to do everything that I want to do. And I do think that these deliberate blocks of time, thoughtfully curated for how you learn... I've just recently been doing ADHD research. It's really looking like a lot of people can't work for more than 20 minutes without a mini break to focus and things like that. That doesn't mean that you should do 20 minutes of studying. It means that you should do maybe like a two-hour block of studying broken into 20-minute increments, with breaks in between. But I do think that your phone needs to be off, right? Every time we get interrupted, we lose something like 23 minutes of productivity or something like that. You really need to protect this time, and the busier you are, I think this protection is so much more important. So, turn off the phone. I love the calendar of, "Family, don't contact me, I will not pick up." Whatever you need to do, but I think in this day and age it's very hard to do that. But the ease at wasting time, it's just so easy to do. And then you say, "Oh, I had a two-hour block, but what I was really doing was texting for 20 minutes, and then going to the restroom, and then getting a snack. And then all of a sudden..." Like, how much were you really studying? Maybe it was 30 to 40

minutes. And that's even generous for sometimes what happens in these study sessions. Michele, what do you think?

Michele Cooley: Yeah, I think that if you are doing an early start, you have to be intentional with that time. And if it isn't every day, you still need to be consistent with what you're doing and when you're doing it. And yes, take into consideration, when do you best learn? Does it need to be on a Saturday morning, or are you somebody who gets a second wind in the evening and you can come in and have a couple of days during the week after work or after law school or what have you? But it has to be consistent and it has to be intentional, or else you're not really building up your bank of knowledge.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Alright, let's get a bit more into some of the nitty-gritty about actually doing this work. So, I would say this is a myth, maybe perpetuated by some in the bar prep world, that you should memorize all the material in the last couple of weeks of your bar prep. I don't know if you've ever heard that one. Have you guys heard that one before? Maybe? Okay. Zach, I don't know, I feel like you have something to add to that one.

Zach Lindesmith: I'm a little skeptical about that one. I haven't explicitly heard that, but I can see why students would think it.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, okay. I don't know, I've just heard it some places. And the problem is that if you're front loading your bar prep, or really doing any bar prep whatsoever, I am on the camp that maybe you shouldn't only memorize in the last few weeks of your bar prep. That's really not the best use of time, it will not move things into your long-term memory, you will lose the application parts of the law. There are lots of reasons, in my opinion, why you don't want to do this. Now, I often hear from folks I talk to about studying early, "Why would I start studying this early? There's no way I can learn something and still know it four months later." But I don't always feel that way. So Michele, what do you think? Do you think that's a problem, or have you seen students successfully retain law over long periods of time?

Michele Cooley: Yes, I have seen students successfully retain that information. Yes, we sometimes hear, "Oh, the magic happens in the last two weeks. Everything comes together in the last two weeks." And while that may be true, the reason for that is because you have been building your memorization all along. You are reviewing material, and then you are practicing with multiple-choice questions, with essay questions. Then you're reviewing the material again. So you're working on that forgetting curve, where you have space in between when you're touching that material. So, even if you are extending your study time –

again, if you're being consistent and you're being intentional and you are still following a plan, then you are going to work to move that information into your long-term memory. And even if you have an extra four to six weeks, you'll still be where you need to be on the day of the exam.

Lee Burgess: Zach, anything to add?

Zach Lindesmith: I think that's absolutely right. I was talking with a couple of students the last couple of days that I've been helping get ready for the bar exam, and I think the most important thing I've been emphasizing to them as we get closer to the bar exam is that as they were trying to memorize the law at the beginning of the course, the real benefit of what they were doing is they were laying a foundation of their understanding of the law that they were building off of as they went through the rest of their studies. And if they don't have that strong foundation at the beginning of their studies that they're building off of with their repetition of their course, the rest of their studies are kind of useless in a sense. And like Michele said, it's that repetition all of that practice that's really getting laid into their long-term memory. And so I think then when you get to those last couple of weeks, where everybody says everything kind of falls into place, it's then when you go back and can review your outlines, or you review the black-letter law, that you really have a strong context of what all of it means. I always like to give my students the example of like, if you read the dictionary, it's really boring and doesn't mean anything. But if you actually understand what all of it means and go back and look up a word in the dictionary that you didn't know what it meant before, you're like, "Oh yeah, that actually means something and I get it now." And that's kind of how I feel about outlining, or looking at outlines. And so, I think you shouldn't necessarily be afraid or trying to memorize something early or studying from the outline early on in the course. So I definitely would not recommend waiting until the end of it. I think you memorize it by practicing throughout the course. And it's learning through that repetition that's really important, based on that strong foundation at the beginning.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And I think that one of the ways that we learn – and science supports this for most people too – is we learn by creating context and meaning, right? So there's always this risk that students focus on this idea, we call it "legal trivia", and it's like, "Oh well, I just want to learn all these facts." And so your whole brain is full of flashcards, but if I ask you to give me an attack plan of how you would approach a homicide question, I get a blank stare. This is what I use on the phone. If anyone calls me to talk to me about bar prep, and talk to me about how it's going, I was like, "Can you list all the hearsay exceptions and all of their elements right here on the phone with me?" And then there's usually a pause.

And not like a positive pause. And then I'm like, "Cool, now you know where the gap is, right?" Because I think so often in prep we miss that. We miss asking ourselves, "Do I know all the hearsay exceptions? Could I list them off?" I mean, we probably are better equipped than some, but we could put together the list, like dying declaration and present sense impression. We could build it, but I want it like "Bam, bam, bam." Give me those hearsay exceptions. And I think that that sometimes gets lost in the shuffle. It's not just about, do you know the elements of a dying declaration? But it's, do you understand how a dying declaration is different than something else, which is different than something else? And what facts cue a dying declaration, versus what facts would cue a present sense impression, versus an excited utterance. And that is context and understanding. I haven't memorized the hearsay exception elements in a long time without notes, but I could pretty much piece it together. And in California we have a slightly different rule, so there's a distinction for the California bar. Sometimes you have to think you're dying. There're all these things. And see, you're laughing at me. I think I'm right though. Right? Okay. And that's out of context, right? I know these laws, I could apply them to fact patterns, and honestly, even without doing much rote memorization, I would probably get the question right, because I understand the law. But that's what we're looking for. And I think it's so easy to lose what we're looking for. It's, do you understand how this law functions? Do you know how it applies to fact patterns? Can you talk about it? Can you laugh about it? Can you create an awkward conversation about hearsay exceptions? Whatever it is, that's what you're going for. And I think this idea of just, "If I just memorize it all at the end and I've got all these legal facts in my head" – that's only going to get you so far.

Zach Lindesmith: Yeah, and that's an exact conversation I've had with a lot of my students. When I was in the bar support space as a professor, a lot of my research really focused on repeat bar takers and how we can get them and their unique struggles to pass the bar exam, which is a whole another podcast and discussion for another day. But I had a student that was in that exact situation, where she would spend so much of her time just writing rule statements down over and over again, trying to memorize them. And I got her to break that by saying, "You need to know the concept behind the law, rather than just the actual statement of the law." And I think so many times students get hung up on that, that if you can explain the concept rather than recite the concept to me, you'll be so much better off.

Lee Burgess: And I think this is really going to be a poignant thing as we move into the NextGen. I know we're not here to really talk a ton about the NextGen, but for those who are NextGen curious or they are thinking about maybe taking that test or it's coming down the pipe, it's going to shift a little bit, because we now

have rules that we have to know verbatim, and then we have these concepts that we need to sort of know and understand. And we're still all going to figure out what these nuances are, because nobody's really sat for the test yet, so we'll all learn together. But I do think it's also just interesting, as we move into this new kind of test to realize that we're even going to have categories of knowledge, where students really need to be clear about, what do you have to know? What do I need to be able to ask you about? I'm pretty sure the hearsay exceptions are starred on that content scope list, so same example. There's that, and then there might be other tiny nuances or other rules that you just need to be familiar with. You need to understand the concepts. And so I think if you are studying for the NextGen, if you're doing early bar prep for the NextGen, you do want to make sure that you understand the differences there, because that test is going to be a bit different. I think it's going to really sit in this idea of, what do I need to understand versus what do I need to memorize? Do you guys have any other thoughts about NextGen? I don't want to go on a NextGen long walk, but we can take a hot minute here and talk about it.

Michele Cooley: One of the intentions behind NextGen was really to be able to focus on skills, and so it will be a different type of preparation and those starred versus unstarred topics. But it just goes back to the application and the practice, and being able to understand the concept and explain the concept. And so, if you're a student who doesn't know yet if you're going to be UBE, Legacy UBE, or NextGen UBE, a lot of what we're doing and practicing and thinking about is going to be the same regardless. Can you issue spot? Can you figure out what you need to answer and what facts you need to support that? So, it's definitely going to be an interesting ride for the next couple of years.

Lee Burgess: Zach, anything to add on that? And then I promise I won't make us go down a NextGen rabbit hole.

Zach Lindesmith: No, I agree with Michele. I think that distinctions between the starred and unstarred, it's really going to come down to that understanding of the concepts behind it. Even if you're provided with the law, I think if you don't understand the concept, whether or not you're able to apply it is going to be useless. So I think you still have to be able to study that concept ahead of time. And I think that's a big misconception I've had with a lot of schools that I've been talking with, helping them get ready for the NextGen bar exam and their curriculum, that they haven't really figured out, "Do we need to review this in our curriculum if they're going to be given the materials?" And I think students still need to have an understanding of how that concept works, even if they're provided with it. So that distinction between starred and unstarred topics, I think students still need to review it and understand the concept.

Lee Burgess: So, if you're listening to this and you're like, "Okay, starred and unstarred topics, what on earth are you talking about?", we will link to the NextGen content scope on the NCBE website. And what you will find there is an outline of topics – some of them literally have stars next to them. And that may sound silly and like you're in elementary school, but my friends, they have stars next to them. And if they have a star, you are required to memorize that material and be able to recall it. And if it doesn't have a star, you are required to know less about it. So, are we really doing the bar exam by stars? We are, my friends. That is the direction we are going, but we will go walk this journey together and we will get there. But that is what the starred and unstarred topics are. So really, I will say that things like this content scope and the, I think it's called an examinees' guide – these are important to read if you're thinking of taking the NextGen or you want to learn about it. The NCBE website has a lot of information including sample tests. So, you should go there and learn about it, but those are where the stars are coming from, everyone. Like a chart when you were a kid, like "I did so well on homicide, I'm going to put a star next to it." It's interesting. Anyway, we digress. Alright, let's talk about one of the populations we mentioned earlier, which is those who would get accommodations, especially extended time. So this could be for a variety of things – anything from anxiety, possibly attention issues, maybe dyslexia, any sort of learning difference, all of those things. How can early bar prep really help this category of students and how should they best utilize it? Zach, I'm going to start with you.

Zach Lindesmith: Yeah, I think the big thing is a student that gets accommodations, they explicitly know that they are going to take longer to do their practice questions, or even their practice exams that are built into their course. So, for example, I know with Themis we do a full two-day simulated exam, just like the actual bar exam, but that's going to take a student with accommodations four days instead of two days. Not even counting any of the graded essays that would take 30 minutes, it's going to take them an hour. So, I think a student that knows they are going to have time accommodations on the bar exam in particular, they want to replicate that throughout the course. I think it's really helpful for them to be able to plan for that ahead of time. It's going to take them a lot longer to move through the course. So, if they can plan for that ahead of time and build that in earlier throughout the course to allow them to get through the full course just because it's going to take them longer, I think that's really important for them. But again, they need to be structured with their time and be able to plan for that and get through it, because if they're not structured with their time, they're going to still run out of time and not have the hours in the day to get through all of that material.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Michele, do you have anything to add to that?

Michele Cooley: Not really anything else specific. I just think it is important to still follow whatever your plan is, following the schedule that your bar review vendor provides, because again, going back to the whole memorization and practice and application – if it's taking you longer, you still want to move through the material in the same way, so that you have that repetition and you have that time in between the topics. So yeah, just still being intentional and having that plan and giving yourself that extra time.

Lee Burgess: I just always have to make this pitch, because if you are going to file for accommodations and you have not done so, please pause this podcast and go do that paperwork today. That is incredibly important. Students wait till the deadline and then you have no opportunity for appeal. It is very serious. Also, you will not know until the last minute whether or not you have those accommodations, and then you cannot do the thoughtful practice that we're talking about, which is simulating an exam with extended time. I don't want you to do a simulated exam with extended time if I'm not sure you will get extended time. And depending on your jurisdiction, I have seen students get rejected for accommodations and I've been very surprised. So, you cannot assume that just because you got these accommodations in law school that you'll automatically get them for the bar. So, pause the podcast, file for accommodations, and then come back for the last couple of points. There's my pitch for today. Okay, now this is something that students often talk to me about when they're worried about long-term bar prep, which is, "I'm going to burn out. I just can't do it for so long." So Zach, what do you say to students who are worried about burnout?

Zach Lindesmith: I always like to tell my students that this whole bar prep process is just for a temporal period of time, and that you just went through law school for three or four years, depending on if you were full or part-time. So, six months is generally the longest I would recommend anybody study for the bar exam, unless you're an international LLM student, which is a different ball game, but you can do anything for a limited amount of time – for three months, for six months. You can do this if you are structured with your time. Don't waste all of that money that you just went through law school for. You might get burnout, you're going to get tired, but keep doing it. I promise you that you will have time to rest after you take the bar exam. And keep your eye on the prize and it will all be worth it. There're little things along the way that you can do. We talked about taking little breaks every 20 minutes or every two hours. Set little learning checks for yourself along the way, set goals. That was something I did when I studied for the bar exam that was really helpful for me. Or I had little things throughout my week that I always looked forward to, like I watched some stupid

reality TV show like every Wednesday night. Little things along the way that you can look forward to help, in my opinion, keep you from burning out, because you're not so consumed in the every minutia of every little thing that you're doing. I always tell my students that it's easy to want to go on vacation, it's easy to want to take breaks and do this and that, but if you keep focused on what you're trying to do and accomplish your goal, I think that drive and motivation should be enough to keep you from burning out. My joke that I always tell my students is that my family wanted to do a big trip to Europe when I graduated law school, and I told them, "No, let's wait. I'm going to study for the bar exam first, and then after I pass the bar exam, we'll do it." So I made them wait then until after I found out if I passed the bar exam. And I passed the bar exam in November of 2019. So, for those of you who are thinking back, then the whole world shut down, so I still have not gone on my bar exam trip. But that's what you have to keep focused on. You can do anything if you stay focused for that amount of time.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I would also add to that, that if you have a six-month window and you do have important things that are coming up – now maybe not a long-term trip to Europe, you should probably save that – but if you know your best friend's getting married, or there are certain life things that may come up, good or maybe even not so good – with longer prep time, you can thoughtfully plan around them. You can still go to the wedding. Six months of bar prep does not mean you can't go to the wedding. It means that you're going to need to plan to go to the wedding and you're going to need to move things around. But I do think that burnout often comes with students who just say, "I've got to abandon my whole entire life for six months", which is, one, not practical because life does continue to happen, and it gives this test way too much power. If you basically say that studying for this test means you abandon all of the important stuff going on in your life for a very long period of time, that doesn't help your mental state and that perspective to kind of hunker down. So it's like that balance, right? It's like you need to hunker down and say you can do anything for six months, and life is still happening while the test preparation is happening, and you can plan around it thoughtfully. If you're diligent with your work, going to the wedding is not going to mean that you're not going to pass the exam. So you can go to the wedding, you just have to plan for it. Michele, what do you think?

Michele Cooley: I agree with that. And I had almost the exact same notes written down as Zach as far as, it's temporary, remind yourself of the end goal. But I think burnout is possible for any bar studier, and so I think it's also important to give yourself those little rewards. Maybe it's, like you said, watching a TV show, or maybe it's walking to get ice cream or something like that, but have something to look

forward to at least once a week. And then give yourself like, "What am I going to do when all of this is over?" And it doesn't have to be expensive, it doesn't have to be a trip to Europe. It could just be like, "I'm going to have a whole weekend of nothing", of binging an entire series, or staying in my pajamas or what have you. Just give yourself something else to look forward to. That can help, I think, motivate somebody and keep boosting them along throughout this process.

Lee Burgess: Alright. I want us to finish up as we run out of time with this idea of motivation. So, something that I often talk to students about doing when they're feeling a bit lost, is to write themselves a letter at the beginning of a journey like this and say, "Why am I doing this? Why is this my goal? And what are the promises that I'm going to make to myself?" And then your future self can always reference back that clearheaded intention, because sometimes when we're in the muck, we aren't as clearheaded as we were at the beginning of a journey. So that's one of the things I often share with students. Do either of you have any tips for kind of making sure that you can sustain that motivation over this long period of time?

Michele Cooley: So, when I was teaching an early bar prep class, we would start with, "Why are you here? Why did you come to law school? What are your goals after this process is over? What are some hurdles you might experience? How are you going to get over those hurdles?" So I think going back to the whole start of this process and being intentional – what are some of those things that you might encounter and how can you plan and prepare for those? And then yes, just referencing back like, "Why am I here? What am I doing this for?" And nobody can take that away from you. So just keeping that close to your heart as you're struggling or as you're tired or as you're frustrated by the hearsay exceptions. Just keep referencing back to that and keeping that, "What does tomorrow look like?" Like, once all of this is over with, what does the rest of my life look like, and how is it going to be improved, having made it through this test?

Lee Burgess: I love that. Zach, anything to add?

Zach Lindesmith: Yeah. Mine's a little bit more specific on the day-to-day motivation on something that I always work with my students that helped me, is that at the end of every day, I would always do a learning check of like, "I started this day, I got through all of this prep. What did I do today that I didn't know yesterday?" If I had to boil it down to one or two things that I learned today. Today I got better at knowing one of the hearsay exceptions. Or today I wrote an essay and now I know this exception on secured transactions. What is one or two things that I did today to move the ball forward to help me pass the bar exam? And I think that always, in my opinion and some of my students', it keeps it reframed to

keep you from falling in that despair and that vortex of getting lost in everything. And I think it keeps you focused on moving forward and staying motivated that, "Yes, I am learning. Yes, I am getting better, I am going in the right direction." And I think that helps a lot with that internal motivation and the external motivation of why you're doing it. But also like, "I'm not failing at this. I am learning and moving forward."

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I love that. Like journaling, basically. Journaling with a purpose. I love it, yeah. These simple things that we can incorporate, I think can be so powerful. Well, I want to thank you both for your time today. I think there were a lot of great nuggets in here. I think it's pretty clear that if you are interested in doing early bar prep, you can reach out to your bar prep provider, especially if it's Themis, because they will give you early access so you can get started. You should be talking to your law schools and milking them for all the resources they can give you, because you paid a ton of money to be there. And make sure you're taking those bar classes, and just keep your eye on the ball. This is just a period of time and in the end it is just a test. It is a test with very high stakes, but it is just a test. So I appreciate your time, both of your times today. Thank you so much for being here.

Michele Cooley: Thanks for having us.

Zach Lindesmith: Yeah, great. Glad to be here.

Lee Burgess: As a reminder, we have a special promotion for our listeners with Themis Bar Review. Save $700 on any July 2026 Themis Bar Review course, using the code BAREXAMTB700 at checkout. That's B-A-R-E-X-A-M-T-B-700, now valid through April 3rd, 2026. Don't miss out on this opportunity, start your bar prep journey with Themis today.

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