

July Jumpstart, Episode 1 Recap: What Does It Mean to Be a Lawyer?

Welcome to *July Jumpstart*! I'm Alexandra Rogers, Director of Career and Professional Development at Belmont Law—and an alum myself. This podcast series is designed to help you ease into law school with confidence by exploring key themes around your legal career, identity, and growth. In our first episode, we're diving into the heart of the question: *What does it really mean to be a lawyer?*

Law Careers Are Broader Than You Think

Our guests for this episode were two fantastic Belmont Law alumni:

- **Hannah Berny** ('21), a corporate bankruptcy attorney and recent law firm partner
- **Brayden Jackson** ('24), litigation associate at Lewis Thomason

We opened our conversation by breaking down some of the biggest **misconceptions** about being a lawyer. Hannah shared that she assumed all lawyers went to court but soon realized many attorneys, especially in transactional law, never step into a courtroom. Brayden added that he once believed you had to pick litigation or transactional law forever but many attorneys move between areas throughout their careers.

Both emphasized that *no lawyer knows everything*, and the real skill is learning how to find the answer.

Professional Identity & Problem Solving

At its core, being a lawyer is about problem-solving, understanding complex systems of laws and rules, and advising clients thoughtfully. Whether you're in a courtroom or a boardroom, lawyers play a critical role in helping individuals, businesses, and communities navigate challenges.

Hannah spoke about her work in corporate bankruptcy, describing how much of her job is about listening. She explained that even in business law, clients are deeply invested in the outcome. Brayden noted how rewarding it is to apply his specialized training to real-world conflicts, using the tools of the profession to help people.

Law Career Basics: Civil v. Criminal, Litigation v. Transactional

We also took time to break down some career path basics:

- **Litigation** involves lawsuits, court appearances, advocacy, and legal arguments.
- **Transactional law** includes writing contracts, advising on deals, and preventing disputes before they happen.
- **Civil law** covers everything outside of criminal law, including family law, business disputes, housing, and employment.
- **Criminal law** involves prosecution or defense in cases where individuals are accused of breaking the law, and it's mainly litigation-based.

These categories aren't rigid. Many legal careers, like Hannah's work in bankruptcy, blend elements of both litigation and transactional practice.

Your Journey is Unique—And Nonlinear

One important theme from this episode: there is no one “right” path. Hannah and Brayden both emphasized that their law school experiences were filled with exploration. They took internships, clerkships, and opportunities that helped them figure out what they *didn't* want to do, just as much as what they did.

Career Planning Tool: Start Reflecting

Alongside the episode, we introduced the **Legal Career Planning Tool**—a worksheet to help you reflect on your:

- Personal values
- Long-term goals
- Areas of interest

After this episode, take a few minutes to complete the first section. Ask yourself:

- Why law?
- What values matter most to me in a career?
- Where do I hope to be 10 years from now?

We'll revisit this tool throughout the podcast series, and it will be the foundation of our one-on-one meetings in the fall.

Networking as Exploration

We next had a powerful discussion on networking not just as a job-seeking tool, but as a way to explore the profession and build meaningful relationships. Both Hannah and Brayden shared how staying in touch with former mentors and colleagues opened doors they never expected. As Brayden put it, “Be comfortable being uncomfortable. You never know what might come from one conversation.”

Use Section 5 of the **Legal Career Planning Tool** to brainstorm potential networking contacts you hope to seek out.

As you prepare for law school, start building your network now: reach out to lawyers you know, connect with classmates, and don't be afraid to ask questions. People love to share their stories, and you'll learn so much from them.

Professional Wellbeing

We wrapped the episode with a thoughtful conversation on wellbeing strategies both for law school life and your professional career. Both Hannah and Brayden found that keeping space between their schoolwork and home life was a helpful strategy. They both tried to do schoolwork in the law building and not bring it home. Both agreed that starting wellbeing strategies in school makes it easier to carry these strategies forward in their careers.

Next Steps:

- Listen to Episode 1
- Complete Section 1, 2 and 5 of the Legal Career Planning Tool

Stay tuned next week for **Episode 2: Application and Networking Mechanics**, where I'll chat with Molly from our office to break down resumes, cover letters, LinkedIn, and more!

You've got this! We're so glad you're here.