

Alexis Robertso...: Welcome to The Path & The Practice, a podcast dedicated to sharing the professional origin stories of the attorneys at Foley & Lardner LLP. A full service law firm with over 1,000 lawyers across the US and abroad. I'm your host Alexis Robertson, Director of Diversity and Inclusion at Foley. In each episode of this podcast, you'll hear me in conversation with a different Foley attorney. You'll learn about each guest's unique background, path to law school and path to Foley & Lardner. Essentially, you'll hear the stories you won't find on their professional bios. Of course, you'll learn a bit about their practice. Now let's get to the episode.

Today, I'm speaking with Nick Benson. Nick is a 3L at The University of Iowa College of Law and was a summer associate at Foley this past summer of 2020. As you can probably tell, this is a unique episode of The Path & The Practice and that I am speaking to a law student and not a licensed attorney. But Nick is in his 3L year and promised to our Milwaukee office after he graduates. We wanted to have him on to talk about his experience as a virtual summer associate. Because Foley, like so many other firms is gearing up for an on-campus interview season like none other due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It's been pushed back by a number of months and it's no longer on campus. It's all virtual. In light of this, we want to do an episode of The Path & The Practice to give some of our perspective law students a taste of what it's like to work in a virtual environment. But of course, this is The Path & The Practice, so I first have Nick reflect on his path to law school.

He shares about growing up in Michigan and then moving to Iowa. He expresses immense gratitude for the role his grandparents played in supporting him on his journey. He talks about how it was adjusting to law school. He even mentions the dreaded case of Pierson versus Post. He also talks about writing on to Law Review. Then I have Nick reflect on life as a virtual summer associate. He says that before it started, he was nervous, but that he was pleasantly surprised by the many opportunities he had to do substantive work across a number of practice groups and to really get to know Foley attorneys. I hope that any law students listening to this are heartened to hear Nick's story of what he was able to do and just to hear that, even though we live in these extraordinary times, we are able to make the best out of these virtual environments. To the Foley attorneys, I hope you're excited to hear about the immense talent we have joining our firm in about a year.

Finally, I want to do a shout out to our recruiting department. I say this during the episode, but let me say it again, I watched Foley & Lardner legal recruiting department move heaven and earth to plan what was obviously a phenomenal virtual summer associate experience. I think behalf of myself and on behalf of our summers and the rest of the firm, I just have to say thank you. With that, I hope you enjoy the episode. Nick, welcome to the podcast.

Nick Benson: Thanks for having me on, Alexis.

Alexis Robertso...: All right. This is unique in that you are still a law student, you are a 3L and you're going to tell us more about that. But you just did your summer associate time with Foley. I want you to give me your introduction. Normally, I would say your professional intro, but just give me your general introduction and we'll take it from there.

Nick Benson: Yeah, Alexis. I'm actually a 3L at The University of Iowa College of Law, finishing up my law degree. I went to Iowa for undergrad as well. I'll be heading back to Foley as an associate in their Milwaukee office. I'm excited to get started. I don't have that full biography yet, but I'm excited to add more to it.

Alexis Robertso...: It's funny. I'm sure this will happen more, but we've now recorded maybe 20 or so of these podcasts and you're the first law student I've had on. Everybody's been on so far. I love that we're going to get more of a snapshot of your journey as to where you are now, and then we'll have to have you back on in two or three years to compare, but let's start at the beginning with you. Where are you from and where did you grow up?

Nick Benson: I actually grew up in a town called Belleville, Michigan, actually. My dad was a flight attendant for, if you remember, Northwest Airlines before they merged with Delta. He would fly out of Detroit, and I grew up in Michigan until I was 10 years old. A huge Michigan fan. Grew up with that. I know you went to Michigan for law school as well, Alexis, so we had talked about that. But actually when I was 10 years old though, my mother passed away of brain cancer. We ended up having to move to Cedar Rapids, Iowa. My grandparents took me in very graciously. My dad, he was flying all the time, so he does a lot of international flights now. I grew up with my grandparents until I was 18. I went to a school in Cedar Rapids and then I went off to Iowa for undergrad. I needed to get a little bit away from my grandparents just to get a little distance, but at the same time, just close enough so I could always stop by and check on them.

Alexis Robertso...: Well, and I want to hear a little bit more about Bellevue. Is that what you said?

Nick Benson: Belleville.

Alexis Robertso...: It's Belleville. Sorry. Bellevue, I think that's like a hospital in New York.

Nick Benson: Maybe.

Alexis Robertso...: You grew up in Belleville with is in the Detroit Metropolitan Area?

Nick Benson: Correct?

Alexis Robertso...: In those first 10 years or so. I'm curious of two things. What kind of kid were you? But then also that's really, really hard to go through at 10, but what was that transition like moving from Michigan to Iowa? I mean, I'm assuming it was

really, really difficult, but I don't know if there's anything more to reflect on that part of your journey.

Nick Benson: You're absolutely correct. I mean, it was extremely difficult at first. I mean, when you're at that young of an age, I think that you think your friends and your youngest friends are the ones that you'll have the rest of your life. I felt like I was getting uprooted and that I was losing all my friends. I would never make new friends. I was really worried about that aspect. But my grandpa, I still remember he was sending me newspaper clippings of the high school football team that I'd be going to, the high school I'd be going to. He was trying to get me excited, but my grandpa actually drove us to back to Cedar Rapids. He drove up, we pack up the car. We had this little toy Fox Terri, our black and white dog. He's standing on top of all the boxes in the car and I'm squished into the passenger ...

I was like, "I don't want to do this. I really don't want to go there." But as soon as I got there and I started to realize that I made friends pretty quickly at Cedar Rapids. I mean, Iowa is just one of those communities, especially Cedar Rapids is one of those communities that is very welcoming to people. I think it was one of the best things for me to grow up in Cedar Rapids, Iowa after that, because I quickly got acclimated to the environment and everyone was just very welcoming.

Alexis Robertso...: Yeah. I'm going to have more questions about Cedar Rapids, but we to pause on your grandparents. Because I know you mentioned that you told them you were going to do this and they're going to have to figure out how to listen to a podcast, but can you tell me a bit about them? Just tell me about your grandparents.

Nick Benson: Yeah, my grandparents are, I get a little emotional even when I talk about them, but they-

Alexis Robertso...: I know what you mean. I'm sorry I'm going right in. We've been talking for four minutes.

Nick Benson: No, you're good. It's just, since I was 10 years old, I always tell people, they came out of retirement to bring me in and it was awesome. I mean, I was just kind of that unruly child in the early years and growing up and they really were good about making sure I had room to grow, but at the same time they disciplined me. But-

Alexis Robertso...: Obviously it's such a tough fear, that since you said they're going to be listening, I was like, "I just have to ask him about his grandparents because it's not that often that we get to just say this really meant a lot to me or these people mean a lot to me." They're going to have a recording of it, so that's even better. But just what did they retire from? I don't know. I'm just curious about a little snippet of their story and then we're going to get back to your story.

Nick Benson: Yeah. No, my grandpa, he sold hair salon supplies for Redken for a very long time. Before that, he was a coach, so he always pushed me in sports all the time. I always tell him that I should have ended up in the professionals, but he didn't coach me well enough. We always go back and forth on that. But then-

Alexis Robertso...: It's [inaudible 00:08:02] fault, that's the running joke, and now I have to be a lawyer. Sorry.

Nick Benson: Yeah. Now you forced me to go into the legal profession. But my grandma was a real estate agent. She actually just went on to a referral basis, but she's been doing it for her entire life almost. She was in retail for a while before that, but once they started stepping off the gas and they brought me in, it was kind of their full-time job raising me since my dad was gone all the time. I mean just the sacrifice they made to give me the opportunities that I've had in life, it's just, I can't thank them enough every day. I'm just happy that I'll have to get them one of these headsets and put it on so they can listen and know that I really do appreciate what they did to help me get through Iowa and put me through law school. I'm glad they get to see everything come to fruition.

Alexis Robertso...: That's fantastic, and we're grateful too, because we're going to benefit from you joining Foley. Also, thank you to Nick's grandparents. We appreciate a lot. All right. Well, picking up where we left up, I would love if you could also just tell me a little bit about Cedar Rapids. You, I know are an avid listener of the podcast. I frequently say just how Midwestern I am having grown up in the Milwaukee area and now I live in Chicago, but we get listeners from all over. I don't know what there is to share about what the ... I don't know if it's the city of Cedar Rapids, the town of Cedar Rapids, but what it's like.

Nick Benson: Yeah. The Cedar Rapids, they call it the City of Five Seasons. I really don't know beyond what they try to call the fifth season, but it's a whole community aspect. The whole thing is, Cedar Rapids, we have about six or seven high schools in the area that encompass ... Cedar Rapids is a little bit bigger city than people expect when they come in. But when I came here, I went to Cedar Rapids Prairie, which is called the College Community because it's connected to Kirkwood. I really was nervous about how I was going to acclimate. But as soon as I came in, I made a lot of friends. Everyone was so welcoming of me, which was just a really nice way to go about it. I think that what makes Cedar Rapids like that is the fact that it's a small town in comparison to even the Milwaukees the Chicagos, but it's the city in Cedar Rapids.

You get a little bit of a cross of both, so you have plenty of things to do in Cedar Rapids, but at the same time you get to enjoy the smaller town community. Everyone kind of bands together, and I think that that was beautiful. I had friends from different high schools around the area, just from playing sports or meeting them through different ways. I think everyone was just really nice people in the community.

Alexis Robertso...: All right, a couple of things. You go from Michigan to Iowa, but you stay a Michigan fan. I wanted to get back to that because there's probably some listeners who really don't like Michigan and they're like, "Good. They skirted right over that. But I just wanted to ask, you maintained your Michigan fan status while in Iowa.

Nick Benson: Yeah. I think it was more so the fact, when people used to tell me all the time how bad Michigan was, it made me more of a Michigan fan. I put on the shield at that point, and so I was like, "You know what, someone's got to defend Michigan's honor, so it's got to be me." I mean, we could make this a whole Michigan podcast of about the football season.

Alexis Robertso...: Which would be really sad though, because I'm not actually a sports person. I joke that I should have a shirt that just says, go sports, because I really am agnostic and I don't care. But I'm married to an avid Michigan fan and he went to Michigan for undergrad, my husband. I did go there for law school. I do own Michigan apparel, but my day is not ruined when Michigan football loses in the way that it is for many other people. It'd be sad. I'd just bring my husband in here if we were going to do that. But it is funny, I do appreciate the rivalry. I also appreciate that they've had a lot of ups and downs over the don't know, decade and a half that I've been paying attention to them.

It is kind of funny to talk about. Although I'll get away from sports because this is polarizing. There's probably some people who now don't want to listen. But let's fast forward to you in say, I don't know, high schoolish. What was Nick like in high school? Was he like, "I'm going to be a lawyer." Or, who were you then?

Nick Benson: I definitely was not thinking about becoming a lawyer. When I was in high school, I was really into sports. I was really into just kind of trying to do as well as I could in high school. I wasn't really sure what I wanted to go. I didn't even know where I wanted to go to school for a while. When I was going through-

Alexis Robertso...: What is it that sports mean? Does that mean you're playing sports, and what sports?

Nick Benson: Yeah, I was playing mostly baseball throughout high school, so I was a really big baseball fan. Just going through that, trying to figure out if I wanted to try to make anything out of that. But throughout the years in high school, I came to a realization that I need to put the sports career on a back burner. Once I decided to go to Iowa, I didn't even think about law school at that moment. I actually was thinking more medicine at that point, thinking about trying to become a doctor. I think it was mainly the fact that I knew I wanted to go onto some kind of postgrad plans. But I quickly realized that medicine was not ... As soon as I opened my chemistry, my biology books, I knew right then that I needed to set that off to the side and think about something else. That doesn't click with me at all.

Alexis Robertso...: When it came to going to college, was it like, "Yeah, I want to go to college. I'm applying to college." By then. Actually, what was your thought going into college then? Was it like, "I'm just going to go to college and see what I like or was law school in the back of your head?"

Nick Benson: Exactly. I really just went in open-minded. I think I was technically a pre-med, track open major, because I just didn't even know what I wanted to major in. I took mainly just some of the health science classes that weed you out, which it obviously worked with me in terms of knowing that I didn't want to do that. But I didn't really start thinking how hard about law school until about my sophomore year when I went to my guidance counselor and kind of just told them that I was really struggling with having any kind of purpose in terms of what I wanted to do.

They were like, "Well, you told us you want to go to postgrad. Have you thought about law school?" I had had some experience. I've talked to some lawyers, just even throughout just my grandparents knew or my parents knew. Then I talked to just other people about it and that I knew that were thinking about it. It sounded interesting to me, but I wasn't sure at that point. I was like, "What's the best major to become a law student." They told me to study ethics and public policy. Which if someone asked me what that was, I don't even know if I could tell you. That could tell you ...

Alexis Robertso...: You're like, "I can't define it now. I certainly couldn't then."

Nick Benson: I think that maybe the realization of the fact that my degree was not going to be very employable drove me to the legal field. But on top of that, it was just, once I started ... I worked for a law firm, a small one in Iowa City, and then I also did a little volunteer internship at the Johnson County courthouse. Which is [crosstalk 00:14:39]-

Alexis Robertso...: That was while in college?

Nick Benson: Yeah. That was while I was in college. Those kind of gave me a little of an idea of what the legal practice was like, but I knew that I wanted something bigger, something a little more exciting. Because those were the smaller community practices. But I had done research as well. I kind of scoured some forums and read more about law school and what the legal practice was like. Because I knew how much of a dedication it was once you picked that you wanted to go to law school. It's a big investment. There's a lot that can go wrong if you aren't really committed to it. Yeah.

Alexis Robertso...: But it's really wise that you wanted to do that research. It's funny, as you were talking about your major and whether that could really lead to a job, it takes me back. Listeners know this, part of this podcast is just going to be hearing Alexis reflect on her life. For me, in undergrad, I was a law and society major, whatever that means. I think it's basically poli sci, but it was called law and society. I have

a bachelor's in law and society, just so you know that. Then I also did, I was minoring in philosophy and then I was like, "For three more classes, it's a major." I also, I double majored in philosophy. I remember either somebody while I was in college or after being like, "Yeah, I really hear those philosophy factories aren't hiring the same anymore as they used to."

But I essentially picked majors that were, you have to go to law school. Because what are you going to do with this?

Nick Benson: That's so true.

Alexis Robertso...: But I wasn't smart enough to do the research on what lawyers actually did. I could have told you when I was going to take the LSAT, because I was that person who did know. By the way, when I do these interviews, I often approach it as like, "You were 13. Did you know you were going to be a lawyer?" Most normal people say no, but I was one of those people who would say yes. Then of course I'm not a lawyer anymore. But I didn't do that, let me go get some practical experiece. I think that's so smart. What year in college did you have those internship or those part-time job opportunities?

Nick Benson: Yeah. It's kind of weird because in high school with the college community aspect, we were able to take some community college classes, knock out some gen ed stuff. I was trying to book it through undergrad as quick as possible, and just so I could kind of have a year off before I went off to law school. I volunteered at the Johnson County courthouse my junior year, I want to say-

Alexis Robertso...: Of high school.

Nick Benson: ... as part of my sophomore. Of college, undergrad.

Alexis Robertso...: College. Okay.

Nick Benson: I just had knocked out, which would've technically been my last year of undergrad. Then in my year off heading into law school, I worked for a little law firm in Iowa City. That kind of gave me the public interest side and then the private practice.

Alexis Robertso...: I want to hear more about that because the beauty of me not having to cover the next 30 years of your legal practice, which I do with some of our guests, is that we do have a little bit of time. Also, I think whether it be other law students listening, but I've had people say, "Oh my gosh, my teenage son listens to this." Just a little more detail in terms of when you're volunteering at the courthouse, what are you doing? What was that?

Nick Benson: That was honestly, I was technically a victim witness coordination intern. I was making sure that victims and witnesses for these criminal trials were being well informed about what was going on. They were having some kind of place to

stay, that they were receiving our communications, our emails, our papers. I was working closely in that regard. But the nice thing was the prosecutors around the office. They would talk to me about what they did also because they knew that I wanted to go to law school. I would walk around and actually one of the prosecutors, I saw him, I want to say last year when I was at Big Grove, just a brewery in Iowa City. He was there and I talked to him a little bit and it was cool to just see that connection that still lasted through the years.

I updated him. I think I had accepted at Foley at that point and told him about that, and he was really happy about that. It was cool to see and at least they knew that what I was doing wasn't a good show of what the legal profession truly was or at least they would talk to me in the hallways and kind of-

Alexis Robertso...: Right. They knew you were interested and they told you more, so you got more context. But in general, it's because you got into the environment that you were able to meet some people who could tell you more. Also, I have to just comment on victim witness coordinator is a rough job title. That is a tough ... Just the title itself, you're like, "That sounds like a hard ..."

Nick Benson: It's a tongue twister. I can barely say it

Alexis Robertso...: Hard to say, but also like, yeah, I coordinate victims and witnesses. That does remind me, okay, I lied a little, I did have touch points with legal. I've said this before. I was an investigative intern for The Public Defender Service in D.C. Which in a strange way is not terribly far off from what you were just talking about. That one of our jobs would be going out to meet the complaining witness and taking their statement. Which at the time seemed super normal, but now I'm like, "I was 20." I was going out and finding the person who filed the police report against whomever the lawyer I was working with was representing. Then me and my partner were like, "Hey, can we take your statement?"

Nick Benson: That's intense. That's really intense.

Alexis Robertso...: At least at the time, and it probably still, The Public Defender Service in D.C. was one of the like preeminent public offender services. But not surprisingly, they did not have a lot of budget to investigate. They did have real staff investigators on, but for some of the more minor stuff, that's where interns came in. Sorry, you're just really jogging my memory here. The other thing you mentioned was that you interned at, did you say it was a small law firm?

Nick Benson: Correct. A small law firm in Iowa City.

Alexis Robertso...: Yeah. When was that?

Nick Benson: That would have been actually just the year off in between undergrad and law school. It would've been 2018, I want to say. I did that for my entire year, just kind of, one, so I could make money and live with some friends and just kind of I

needed to decompress really going through undergrad that quickly. I knew that going straight to law school would've been just a complete mistake unless I 100% knew where I wanted to go. I knew that Iowa was definitely somewhere I wanted to go just because I knew Iowa's reputation in the Midwest. At least that it would've opened the doors I wanted to from the research that I had been doing. Working at that small law firm also opened me up to now private practice, the litigation side mostly. Which is kind of also what law school really just opens you up to.

It was interesting to me and it gave me that aspect, but at the same time, I knew I hadn't hit what I wanted to from when I was reading. I knew there was also some transactional attorneys, mostly they work with wills, trust and all that different kind of stuff, farmers in Iowa typically seek out their assistance. It was cool to see that, but I knew that there was something that I was looking for different. I was just kind of still feeling out. But at least it confirmed-

Alexis Robertso...: What did you do there? Just briefly, what kind of work did you do when you were there?

Nick Benson: Yeah, I was a front desk, but also, I would answer phone calls. Actually, how they did it, they kept all their files in storage. You think of how most law firms do it now, everything's electronic now. But I would go out to the storage facility and there's just these super old dusty files. I would just go through those, find them for them in case an old client came back. I was kind of a Jack of all trades. Whatever they needed me to do that-

Alexis Robertso...: Yeah. You just did what needed to be done.

Nick Benson: ... didn't require a license, I did. That was a great experience because I did a lot of the ... I actually used the Dictaphones, if you had seen that. Where I had to have to put that on a headset and transcribe what they would say. I thought that's what the legal profession was. I thought that's all it was. It was I just would talk into a Dictaphone and just go from there.

Alexis Robertso...: I find that hysterical that you just even said the word Dictaphone, because that is this vestige of, I don't know when a lot of people stopped using them, but generally speaking now there are still and not to stereotype, but some I'd say old school partners who either are using them themselves or may have an assistant that uses them. But generally, we don't use them anymore. To me, it's almost gone the way of shorthand. I don't know if you've heard a shorthand. How a lot of the legal admins they would go to, I don't know, paralegal school or whatever and learn shorthand. Maybe people still do, but that's one of those other things now with computers and word processing, we don't use as much anymore. That's hysterical that in 2018 you were using a Dictaphone for anything.

Nick Benson: It was funny. There would be points where I couldn't understand exactly what had been said, maybe there was some background noise. I'd spend five, 10 minutes just debating, like, "Do I type this word out or do I interrupt the attorney? I don't know what to do." I was just, the whole time, the secretary I worked with, she was amazing, but I would have her listen to it. I'd be like, "What do you think he said?" It was-

Alexis Robertso...: What do you think it says? Well, and it's funny because now I'm afraid that someone's going to listen to this and be like, "Actually, Alexis, 27% of lawyers still actively use Dictaphones."

Nick Benson: Yeah. It might be.

Alexis Robertso...: But I'm like, I don't know. I've been in this industry for the better part of a decade and a half and I have not encountered them, so that's really funny. By the way, if you ever tell that story a few years from now, people will look at you and be like, "Well, you look too young to have even know what a Dictaphone is."

Nick Benson: Yeah. They're going to be like, "Are you actually a lot older than what you are? Because ..."

Alexis Robertso...: Exactly. That's really funny. We are going to move forward to you in law school. But I actually want to take a little side journey because I told you, as we were talking, I pulled up your info that I have about you, because since you were a summer associate, we have a little file about our summers. It looks like we had you write a statement where you kind of say who you are, where you're from. You said the usual, like, I like the Detroit Tigers and my Michigan sports fan. But you mentioned that your mom grew up in Bangkok, Thailand. That just, as I read it, made me think I should ask you a little bit about your parents.

I asked about your grandparents. It says that in Milwaukee, it'd be great if you could find some Thai curry. You didn't get a chance to because we had our first pandemic summer, so we need to find you good Thai restaurant in Milwaukee. But I am just curious about that. This, as you can tell, is me putting on my director of diversity and inclusion hat. I just have to ask you. I don't know. Your mom was from Thailand. Is there anything else to say about her or your dad or you or your culture, anything like that?

Nick Benson: Yeah. She grew up in Bangkok, Thailand until she was 18. She grew up with, I want to say, 11 other siblings and they lived very poor. I mean Bangkok, the city, there's a small elite, but outside of that, it's very tough growing up there. Her and her sisters had known for a while they wanted to get out of that situation. Actually, when they were 18, they were able to immigrate to the United States, and happenchance, they end up in Detroit, Michigan. She moves there. She actually didn't even get to finish high school because they just had to take the opportunity to immigrate when they could. When they were living in Michigan, I

want to make sure I tell the story right, my dad had told me but she was on a jog, I guess. I don't know how this happened, but it-

Alexis Robertso...: Here's the thing, if you say it wrong, he'll fix it for you after he hears this. He'll clarify it for you.

Nick Benson: Exactly. He'll call me and he'll be like, "How did you already forget the story?" But she was jogging and they crossed paths somehow, and my dad just ended up talking to her by chance. They ended up going on a date, and the rest was history from what I understand. It's funny because my mom had to learn English really on the fly when she got to Michigan. I still remember, she would try to teach me Thai all the time and I love spicy food. She'd always cook. She always indoctrinated me to the Thai culture, which I hold dear to my heart. But I couldn't speak Thai if you asked me to right on the podcast.

Unfortunately, once I moved from Michigan, that was kind of the end of my speaking of Thai. But my aunts also lived there and they were great. I mean, her sisters were just two of the nicest people I've ever met. They'll get to hear this too, but I still hold the Thai culture close and dear to of my heart and for my bar exam trip, my girlfriend and I were actually talking about going out to Bangkok, Thailand as well. So just kind of because I want to, that's a part of my life that I need to always hold close to me and never forget that that's part of who I am.

Alexis Robertso...: I appreciate you sharing that because it's tough. I get, I don't know, 40, 45 minutes with someone. I was like, "I want to pack as much of your life as well while talking about law school. Then if you're a practicing attorney, your legal practice." But as I say in the trailer episode, for those who listen to the trailer to this podcast, one of my goals is to show there's no prototypical path to law and there's no prototypical lawyer. Whenever I can fill in tidbits that someone can comfortably share about who they are, I have to. I just have to, because it's a part of you and I just think there's someone else nodding their head being like, "I'm tired of my mom." Or whatever. Thank you so much. We will resume. We will get back on track. All right. You were interning or working for a year for this law firm and then you're like, "All right, I'm ready. I'm going to go to law school." Then what happens?

Nick Benson: Yeah. I head off to University of Iowa. I just actually move across the river. The way that Iowa City is split up, you have the east side, which is the undergrad side and the west side. Anyone that lives on the east side of the river knows it's way too loud, there's too much commotion going on, so I needed to get to a quieter environment. When I got there, I knew the grades I needed to get. I knew what I needed to do to end up in ... I wanted to go into big law. Some sort of bigger firm practice.

Alexis Robertso...: Before we get there, by the way, did you only apply for law school to Iowa? Was that like, "This is where I'm going."

Nick Benson: I applied elsewhere as well, but I knew that if Iowa took me, that's where I was going to go. Just because-

Alexis Robertso...: That's where you're going? Got it. Okay.

Nick Benson: Yeah. I think I'm mamas boy and I need to be close to my grandma and just-

Alexis Robertso...: Close to my family. Yeah.

Nick Benson: ... my grandparents just because I'm the only one that's really close to them now. I like to just kind of check on them and be around them. But once I got accepted to Iowa, I knew that's what I wanted to do. Heading into that, I just kind of laid out some goals. I knew that I needed to approach it differently than undergrad because I feel like a lot of people that are thinking about going to law school are probably in the same boat as me. Where undergrad, you just kind of went through the motions. But law school-

Alexis Robertso...: You're like, "It was fine. I did what I had to do, but I wasn't firing on all cylinders necessarily."

Nick Benson: Exactly. I'll be the first one to admit that I have to work to get where I want to be. I'm not the most naturally intelligent person, but I'm willing to try to do as much research, do as much as I can to prepare myself to put myself in the best situation.

Alexis Robertso...: Yep. Let me clarify this a little bit. It's not about natural intelligence, it's about intelligence that is that kind of intelligence. One of these episodes of the podcast, it was with a partner, who is actually a friend of mine, Larry Perlman, and he's like, "I'm going to say this out loud and people are going to hate it, but I like test taking. I'm just good at it." Some people are naturally good at test taking, but a lot of us we're just intelligent in different ways. Sorry, I had to fix that. I was like, "Clearly you are a very intelligent person." But I hear you when essays and test taking aren't necessarily the easiest thing to do. I hear you when you say that.

Nick Benson: Exactly. When I came into Iowa, I just knew that I needed to come in with very clear set goals, knew what I needed to get grade wise. I think that helped me having a clear vision of what I wanted to do. Because law school, it'll come at you fast, it'll come at you hard. But if you know what you're getting yourself into before you step on to campus day one, I think that you'll be in a lot better mindset and in a lot better place.

Alexis Robertso...: Yep. By the way, and is this advice you had picked up so that when you did start law school, you sort of knew? Because I do think some people start law when they're like, "I'm in law school." But they haven't talked to many lawyers or anyone who has context. They don't necessarily know that, "I really should

buckle down because that first year matters." But it sounds like you came in knowing that.

Nick Benson: Yeah. Through my research on different forums and reading and talking to attorneys and realizing that, I mean, especially your first year grades, I'd heard from everyone how important they were if that's what you want to do, is go into a bigger firm practice. Just from reading enough about that and seeing all the resources online. I mean, honestly there's a lot of great ones like Reddit. If there's law school students that want to go out there, there's Reddit law school. I'm sure there might be some people listening right now that are already on there. But it's-

Alexis Robertso...: Yeah. Well, and you can see me laughing because it makes me feel old. I learned this maybe three months ago that there's Reddit threads about law school. Of course there are, but as you get out of that mindset, you forget the places that law students go to dish whatever the latest law firm gossip is, those places change. Everybody listening, if you haven't been on a Reddit thread about law school, that's where you should go. Go to Reddit.

Nick Benson: It's a beautiful resource. I mean, I'd recommend to anyone you can search through it and it really helps people at least get a clear idea of what's required for any kind of ... I mean, not even for big law, just any kind of job, there's different hiring timelines. There's different ways to go about it. I think there's a thread about everything on there. That really helped me get a clear vision of what I wanted.

Alexis Robertso...: Yeah. You start law school, like you said, you had your vision, you knew you need to buckle down. Spoiler alert, it seems like to me that went reasonably well, maybe pretty well, maybe quite well. But it sounds like you did okay.

Nick Benson: Yeah. I mean, I went through some bumps along the road. There's always going to be some classes that weren't as easy as others. But I think that learning to roll with the punches, I mean a lot of like cliché sayings there, but it's just, it means a lot. I mean, law school's not going to be a straight line. There's going to be classes that you just connect with easier than others. I think that just learning where to put your time on those classes too, I just knew where to dedicate more time and where I thought I could make up more of grades.

Alexis Robertso...: Specifically, how was that first semester for you? [crosstalk 00:32:59]-

Nick Benson: It was a roller coaster. Yeah.

Alexis Robertso...: Yeah. I just want to hear, and I don't need to get in great detail, but just the adjusting because it's different. Everything's different. Just tell me about that.

Nick Benson: The adjustment was very, very difficult because day one, I mean, they started us and we were in property. I still remember to this day I got called on the very

first day and I was like, "This is for real." It was Pierson versus Post. I remember the fox case. For those that are in law school know that case dear.

Alexis Robertso...: Even I remember that case. This is straight out of a movie. It's your first day. If I was making a movie and it was set in law school, I would have the person get called on their first in property, and the case is Pierson versus Post. Because that's the first ever property case apparently that freaks law students out.

Nick Benson: I still remember too, when he called me, I was like, "I don't know. It's a Fox. How is this anything about property right now?" I was just having a panic attack, but it went fine. Once I took a deep breath, the professor, he was just trying to get the best out of us too. Our property professor was fantastic at Iowa and he really just kind of worked us through. Then once I got through that first cold call, I think everything else, all the stress just kind of dissipated from my body and I realized that I can do this. The hardest part of law school is-

Alexis Robertso...: If you just-

Nick Benson: ... the anxiety I feel like, of just being called on and-

Alexis Robertso...: You just got it over with. It's funny though. I think something I learned in law school, and maybe this is already my personality maybe, is if you're going to be wrong, be wrong confidently. Be wrong so the whole class can hear that you're wrong. When they ask you the question, instead of muttering because you're not sure, be like, "No, the sky is purple and here's why I think so." Say it loudly and proudly. The professor will tell you you're wrong, but, Hey, at least no one had to strain to hear you say it.

Nick Benson: I couldn't even tell you if I did it correctly or not, but I just remember everyone's patting me on the back and like, "You did amazing." I was like, "Thank you." I think everyone else is just relieved that they didn't get called on. I told them that it's not as bad as you think, and I mean, no matter what, I know every single person coming in will always be nervous about it. But I think the more people here hopefully they'll realize that you just got to do it. Once you'd realize that it's just you and the professor and everyone else is also worried, it goes a lot smoother than you expect.

Alexis Robertso...: Oh my gosh. Okay. I want to be mindful of our time. We still have some time and there's some couple things I want to hit. We have to talk about OCI and we have to talk about you being the first ever probably virtual summer associate class in large law firms. But before that, I know you're on Law Review. Tell me about that. When did you apply? What was that process like?

Nick Benson: Yeah. I started applying for Law Review ... Actually Iowa is a write on process, so it's actually completely anonymous grading. Heading in, you get done with your last final actually of 1L and you're leaving and they have packets out on the tables and you just grab a packet. The last thing you want to think about is doing

a journal write on where you have to write a 10 page comment that they call in, and then you blue book a ton of stuff. Which for people that don't know about the blue book, it's just the way that you do legal citations in law school. I left and through my research, I had realized that Law Review and just journal in general was a very strong plus factor if you were thinking about going into big law or private practice. I knew that I wanted to get on Law Review. That was my goal. That's what I wanted the most. I was working for a law firm in Des Moines, and I actually remember, I'd work for the law firm in Des Moines during the day.

Then once it was over, we were allowed to stay in the office upstairs and I would just work. I would just work on that write on from 5:00 until whatever and just try to get it done. That was a lot of work, but once I got it with submitted and accepted to be on Law Review, I was fortunate enough to be selected. I knew it helped me immensely in terms of, one, with OCI and, two, with just learning how to write and read effectively. Which I think that people don't realize how hard it is to read something like different legal writing and scour through that stuff. It was student writer process. We just mostly blue booked and like went through like footnotes. Then once I chose to be on board. I kind of got convinced by the editor in chief of the last Law Review, if he listens to this. This is Matt Scott that made me come on. He really pushed me for it, and I'm glad he did because it's helped me even see now the publication side.

Which you don't see as a student writer. I mean, this is how professors really get their academic work out, is they send it to law journals. It means a lot to them, and so it's cool to see and see how professors ... They're very appreciative. I get to work with a lot of professors and they tell me all the time that they're so thankful for the work that we do. It's a really great thing to hear from professors. It just makes things a little bit easier.

Alexis Robertso...: Well, it's funny. Sorry, you said a lot of great things about Law Review, the experience and what it means to professors. I'm still stuck on the write on after you finished your first set of exams. Which I do have some vague recollection of that also being the timing at Michigan. But it does make me think of, if you just run a marathon and then instead of being like, "No, you can run another marathon now." You're like, "Really?"

Nick Benson: I just couldn't believe it too because when I opened up the packet, I was like, "It can't be that much work. I'll get into it." Then I opened it and I was like, "No, this is a decent amount of work."

Alexis Robertso...: Oh my God, this is a lot of work. Let's talk about OCI and Foley. This is where I hope nobody gets upset with us because we might sound like we're going into straight Foley propaganda mode, and maybe we will. I don't know. But you do OCI. I assume you meet with a lot of law firms. You settle on Foley & Lardner. I would love to hear why Foley, and then we're going to jump to your summer associate experience

Nick Benson: When I was going through the OCI process it's actually funny, all the doors are different in Iowa. They'll have little signs on them that say, knock when your time is there. All my doors are like that. Foley's was knocked two minutes before your time was there. I like to prepare before the interview, so I was going through it and I walk up to the door and I was like, "Oh no, I already messed up my interview. It says two minutes before I'm at the time of the door." I knock on the door. I came in and I think that really helped me just realized too, I came in with no preconceived notions. Just kind of just wanting to tell them who I am and really no nervousness. I think that's when I speak up my best and do my best. It went really smoothly. I met with Carmen Decot in the Milwaukee office and Alex Lodge in the Madison office. The interview was just a really smooth interaction and they really wanted to find out who I was as a person.

Then when I interacted with them in terms of asking them questions, they really just were responsive to everything I had to say. That was a great experience. Then when I came from my callback interview, that's when I got completely sold on Foley. I come back from my callback interview and I actually had a couple changes to my schedule that day. I was doing a little quick research, and I still remember Brian House was one of the partners I met with that day and he's an Ohio state fan. We got into it a little about Michigan, but he also is a big Thai cuisine aficionado as well. He was from the D.C. Office for a while and he told me that D.C. has far and away better Thai. But he's like, "I can show you some ..."

Alexis Robertso...: Than Milwaukee?

Nick Benson: Yeah. He's like, "I can show you some of the good Thai spots in Milwaukee." We really had a great interaction there, and just everyone in general was so welcoming of me. Even though I didn't feel like ... Because Iowa law school, it's still a great law school, but I didn't feel like they cared about what law school you went from, what you did before, Foley. They just wanted to know who you were as a person, and what-

Alexis Robertso...: Good people.

Nick Benson: Yeah. They just wanted to see if you were a good fit for the law firm. Which, I mean, the fit was perfect for me just because everyone was just ... It was just, I have nothing but good things to say about Foley. You said it might sound like propaganda, but I mean I'm there, so it worked. I mean, I'm a part of Foley now and I'm very happy about it. I just couldn't have been happier.

Alexis Robertso...: Absolutely. Well, and it's interesting because something that I've found, now I've been working at Foley in my role for closing in on a year. As many know, I summered at Foley a very long time ago. But I do find compared to many of the other firms of our size, we may not be as well known. We do have, last I checked, it's over 1,000 lawyers in the US and 21 offices. If you kind of look the other firms of that size, they may have a little bit more name recognition for

whatever reason. Or people sometimes think we're only regional. I'm always interested when I talk to law students about their impressions of the firm or how they heard about the firm. Partly though when you're a law student, you don't know the names of any law firms.

I remember being like, "I don't know. They all sound like fraternity and sorority names that I've never heard of before." But I do really appreciate you reflecting on your experience getting to know us. By the way, was your callback, the only time you've gotten to go to the Milwaukee office because of the pandemic?

Nick Benson: That is true actually. I remember flying in. Because I was still finishing up my summer job, I went from Des Moines to Minneapolis and I had such a quick connection. I remember sprinting through the airport and just trying to catch my flight. I made it thankfully and then I got to Milwaukee and I fell in love with the city right there too. I had had previous exposure, but I didn't know that Foley was the US Bank building. I remember walking down to Lake Michigan and just seeing how the office overlooks the water, and i-

Alexis Robertso...: It's a beautiful view and probably one of the tallest buildings in Milwaukee. Then I'm a little partial to Milwaukee. I grew up there. But I do think, like you said, people may have certain thoughts about what Milwaukee is like. Then when you visit, you're like, "Oh no, this is pretty metropolitan and this view is beautiful." But this is a good segue. Normally, you would visit the office for the callback and then you would start in that office as a summer associate. But instead, we have a global pandemic and we, at least on the law firm admin side, the world scrambled to put together the first virtual summer associate class. Let me set this up even more.

I want to be dramatic about it just because I can. Which is Nick, as far as I know, this may be the first podcast, maybe the only podcast to have a summer associate on who was a virtual summer during the coronavirus pandemic. People listening, prove me wrong, prove me wrong. Send me others. But I'd love for you to share. What was that like? You're excited. You're going to be a summer associate, but the experience is so different. We send you a laptop, and then what happens?

Nick Benson: Explain it with one word, I was nervous. Just in terms of I'm very extroverted. I like to meet people. I want to walk into offices and do all that, so I was nervous about being able to meet people in that way and just have the face to face interaction. I just remember day one too, when we log on to do orientation and we haven't put in our pictures yet, but we're all into the first orientation day, and I was just like, "I wish I could just be meeting these people in person and getting the interaction." But after day one, I think that there was two ways we could have gone about it. We could have just said, "Whatever. We're virtual. We'll do our own work, do our own thing." But our summer class especially, I'm sure it was like this across other offices too, but in Milwaukee especially, we really banded together.

We made a group chat. We all made a concerted effort to get to know each other. I think that the pandemic made us band together even stronger. I absolutely loved my class. We all got along on so well, and that made the experience even 10 times better. But once I got to go through the virtual experience, I had attorneys reaching out to me. Every time I would reach out to an attorney to talk, I would get an instant response. No one turned me down. It was just a great opportunity for ... I think it was even easier for me to meet with people because I mean, the Milwaukee's office is huge. I would've to go floor to floor to floor, but I was able to just Skype call, Microsoft Teams all the time and-

Alexis Robertso...: Get to know people.

Nick Benson: ... I got exposure to all the different practice groups. The way that Foley structured the virtual program, I think worked extremely well because we were able to pull work from all different industries and practice groups. But at the same time we got to do team meetings all the time. I think they set the schedule super well for us to be able to figure out what we wanted to do. I mean, obviously since I'm going back, it worked for me extremely well, but I really enjoyed the virtual life. Because I was just nervous in general because I know there were summer programs that had been canceled or cut completely. The fact that we were still able to have a substantive experience was just so meaningful to me and I just was very thankful about being able to-

Alexis Robertso...: Well, it's such a strange time. My hope of course is for our next summer class that they're in person. Fingers crossed that it's safe to do that. But there's a chance we might have to do it again, although I hope not. I am curious, in terms of substantive stuff, what kind of stuff did you get to work on as a virtual summer associate?

Nick Benson: My first project, I still remember it was in the GEDI group with John Turlais in the Milwaukee-

Alexis Robertso...: Do you know what Jedi stands for?

Nick Benson: Government Enforcement Defense Investigation. Because I had to ask because I was like, "This isn't actually related to Star Wars at all?"

Alexis Robertso...: Before they say that, for those outside of Foley who listen, they'll be like ... They do have one of the cooler sounding acronyms within law firms I would say. But anyway, go on. You do a GEDI project.

Nick Benson: I didn't even know that was a practice group at Foley, to tell you the truth. When I got into it, it was so interesting because I worked with the anti-bribery, anti-corruption act and just kind of made sure I made a little checklist and just went through that. It was really interesting to get exposure to that. John was awesome about telling me more about the group. But like you said, it's very, very intense, very interesting, but I think it was a little even too cool for me is

what I would tell people. But I really enjoyed it though. It was a great exposure to something that I didn't even know existed at Foley. I did that. Then my associate mentor, actually, Nick Kitzman at the Milwaukee office, he was a real estate attorney and him and I had a lot of interaction through that. All of a sudden, I just told him that I was interested in doing transactional work. I was interested in the real estate group. He really facilitated my ability to get more and more work from the real estate group.

I think that people who are listening to this, Foley does an amazing job about, if you reach out to them and tell them if you have an interest, they will make sure that you get work in that area. I didn't think I got to meet all the people that really meant. Larry Bonney was awesome. We got to do a lot of work together and they really do a good job. Especially their group is smaller, so they kind of recruited a little bit more, I felt like. In terms of they wanted to make sure that whoever they had fit with the group well. I did a lot of substantive work in the TPG and real estate group because that's what I came down to, is-

Alexis Robertso...: Yep. TPG is Tap ... No, Transactional-

Nick Benson: Practice Group.

Alexis Robertso...: ... Practice Group. Yeah. Sorry. I just paused. I literally just had every acronym at every firm I've ever worked for pop into my head and I was like-

Nick Benson: You're good.

Alexis Robertso...: ... "What is it at Foley?" Thank you.

Nick Benson: When I came in, I actually thought I wanted to do M&A, mergers and acquisitions. I was really interested in that because I had taken a class, but I had realized that when I came in, I wanted to do it for the glut and the glamor. I wanted to do it to be in The Wall Street Journal or just work with those kind of companies. But I quickly realized that a fulfilling career is working with the people that you really, really with and-

Alexis Robertso...: And where your interests lie. The intersection of those two things, if you can get that, that's perfect.

Nick Benson: Yeah. That's why I really, I kind of sat down and thought about it and that's why I ended up putting real estate group as my number one. Just because it that's where I felt like my connection feel like the greatest and my interests feel like the greatest just because there's a lot of intersection in the work. But at the same time, I really connected with that group extremely well. I think that just the substantive work all helped me get to that point, but I'd taken work in TPG, Transactional Practice Group, real estate, GEDI, litigation, antitrust was a subset of that. I got plenty of-

Alexis Robertso...: That is a good sampling. Especially considering because of the pandemic and having to figure all this out, it was a shortened summer. I think instead of the normal eight or 10 week program, it was six weeks. You really did pack a lot into that six weeks to get a taste for so many different practice areas within the firm. Then also, as we are up, a couple things, I have to give a shout out to our recruiting department who planned something that had never been done before. We have a lot of really dedicated, hard working people who work in that department at Foley. Then a special shout out to Amy Moynihan who's our director of recruiting and who'd actually joined Foley during the pandemic. It was like, "Hey, Amy, thanks for joining Foley. Can you go ahead and plan a virtual summer program? We've never done it before, but you'll be fine. It's fine. It's in eight weeks."

Or whatever it was. It sounds like you felt well supported. I know they planned a ton of interesting little activities and get to know you so that you all felt connected to the firm. I hope those were well received too.

Nick Benson: They were. They were. We did trivia. I remember Windy City Trivia Night, which is a riot. Our Milwaukee office loved it. The group was amazing that put it on. Then we also did ... I remember we were supposed to go to Chicago if we were in person and have a firm wide recruiting event, but they did that via-

Alexis Robertso...: Normally we would in normal times.

Nick Benson: Yeah. We ended up doing that virtual as well. But I got to meet people from other offices around the country. I thought, I mean, Milwaukee office was extremely welcoming. But then that just opened my eyes up to ... I met an associate over at the LA office. I met summers from Detroit office and just different offices, Madison. It was the same all over. It really shows that even though that, I mean all over the country Foley is, but at the same time, they're all looking for the same kind of culture and people that fit well together.

Alexis Robertso...: Yeah. That's fantastic. Thank you so much for sharing that. We will wrap. I could talk to you for a really long time, but let's finish the podcast like I finish all these podcasts. Your reflections or advice to somebody who either thinks they want to go to law school or maybe to law students who are gearing up for OCI. I don't know if you have any sort of final thoughts for them.

Nick Benson: My advice is just to do your research, really prepare as well as you possibly can for law school OCI, any of that, and just lay out some goals. I think that for me, the vision really helped me the most was knowing what I exactly wanted. Even if you don't know exactly what you want, just being able to lay out some kind of goals to go after just helps a ton. Just treat law school like a 9:00 to 5:00. I know that's been emphasized throughout this podcast, but treating law school like a 9:00 to 5:00, minimizing your distractions. For me, it's my cell phone. I need to put that down and put it on mute or something. I throw it in my backpack actually.

I also can't study at home, which probably doesn't make the study at home environment that great, but I've learned to acclimate. I would study at our law school carols and just kind of find ways to minimize your distractions and treat law school like a 9:00 to 5:00 because it truly is a job. I think that helped me just do as well as I possibly could. A mixture of those two. I think everyone will be fine coming in law school.

Alexis Robertso...: Well, thank you so much for that, Nick. Normally at the end of these, I would say, "You can find this person on our website." You can't find Nick on our website yet, but you will eventually. But for now, what I will say is, Nick is on LinkedIn. If he said something that interests you, find him there, shoot him a message. But otherwise, Nick, thank you so much for being on the podcast and best of luck finishing your last year of law school.

Nick Benson: It's an absolute honor, Alexis. Thank you so much for having me on.

Alexis Robertso...: Thank you for listening to The Path & The Practice. I hope you enjoyed the conversation, and join us again next time. If you did enjoy it, please share it, subscribe and leave us a review as your feedback on the podcast is important to us. Also, please note that this podcast may be considered attorney advertising and is made available by Foley & Lardner LLP for informational purposes only. This podcast does not create an attorney client relationship. Any opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of Foley & Lardner LLP, its partners or its clients. Additionally, this podcast is not meant to convey the firm's legal position on behalf of any client nor is it intended to convey specific legal advice.