

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 U.S. 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. And of course, you'll learn a bit about their practice. Now, let's get to the episode.

This episode features a conversation with Allison Zweng. I brought Allison on to talk about her experience being a summer associate in Foley's Detroit office. But because this is the path and the practice, I of course first have to get her to talk about her life, and why it does she decided to attend law school, and what it is that led to her working at Foley & Lardner. So our conversation begins with Allison discussing growing up in Rochester Hills, Michigan, reflecting on her decision to attend the University of Michigan for undergrad, and to receive a degree in mechanical engineering and discussing why does she decided to attend the University of Michigan for law school. We then dive into her experience, or should I say experiences at Foley because Allison summered at Foley, not once, not twice, but technically three times. She's been at the firm for the last three summers in a row because Allison first began working at the firm as a summer patent engineer.

So she discusses that and her experience that summer, the following summer, and the one after that. And as she is exploring that and sharing about being a law student, she provides some wonderful advice along the way, including the importance of being authentic to yourself. Also, Allison is a great sport because there's a moment in the podcast where I essentially rant at her about the importance of having a LinkedIn profile, because at the time of recording this, she did not have one. I hope she does by the time that this publishes, but she was a great sport for indulging me in that discussion. But overall, I think you're really going to enjoy my conversation with Allison. Allison, welcome to the podcast. Let's just jump right in and have you introduce yourself.

Allison Zweng: Hi, thank you so much for having me. My name's Allison Zweng. I am going to be a 3L at University of Michigan Law School. And I completed my undergrad degree also at University of Michigan in mechanical engineering. So go blue. I have to put that in there.

Alexis Robertso...: Oh, this is very exciting. You are another brave summer associate, although should I say former summer associate because you just wrapped up your time with Foley this summer, and I'm very, very happy that you agree to be on the show. I think this can be intimidating-

Allison Zweng: Definitely.

Alexis Robertso...: ... for some people, but as we talk, you'll see it's not. And just so all the listeners know, the way this works is like we can see each other, we're in a dedicated podcast recording platform, but it's kind of like a Zoom call that we're recording. Like at the end of the day, that's a lot of what it looks like. So if listeners ever hear me talk about like a facial expression or I'm nodding my head, it's because we can actually see each other, but we don't record the video and share that with the world. But anyway, you are a brave soul. Let's just dive right in. Before we talk about your experience at Foley this summer, it's the path and the practice, we have to talk a little bit about you. So let's start somewhere at the beginning. Where are you from? Where did you grow up?

Allison Zweng: Yeah, so I grew up in Rochester Hills, Michigan, which is in the Metro Detroit area. Yeah, I've been there my whole life.

Alexis Robertso...: Well, I want to hear more about like, if I found you say in middle school, what were you into or how would you characterize yourself as a kid? Like what kind of kid were you?

Allison Zweng: Okay. I feel like I was kind of a tomboy kid at first, but then got more girly as I grew up, but I was super into sports and I was always very competitive. I love swimming. Everyone in the Detroit office knows that pretty much or everyone I work with because I like have a hard time.

Alexis Robertso...: How does that come up?

Allison Zweng: I don't know. I make it come up in every conversation.

Alexis Robertso...: Okay. And given that we are recording this during the Olympics and I think, I don't know if swimming's over not, but this is a time where swimming's on top of mind for a lot of people, how does that come up? Do you just like work it into conversations about swimming?

Allison Zweng: Yeah. Well, in the Olympics, I was cool. I actually swim against a few of the girls that one of them won bronze. Yeah. So I made that come up definitely.

Alexis Robertso...: That's amazing. So I'm assuming that means you kept swimming into high school.

Allison Zweng: Right. Yeah. And then I did high school, and I didn't do college because I wasn't good enough for U of M's team. They're incredibly talented, but yeah, I still love doing it for fun and it's really cool. I've maintained a lot of friends through it, so that's another way it comes up. But yeah, I'm just really passionate about it. Yeah.

Alexis Robertso...: Okay. And I won't spend too long on the Olympics and who you swam against that has since swam in Tokyo, I suppose, but is that sort of on the circuit, like

you're exposed to certain people over the years and then some progress and then some don't? Is that yeah?

Allison Zweng: Yeah, exactly. I think I swim against some of these girls in high school meets and then they just go on to do college, and then they go on to just be really fast. And obviously when I swim against them, I lost.

Alexis Robertso...: This is funny though, because the episode I think before yours is going to be, have been another summer associate, Savannah Levin, and she played soccer and actually even played soccer abroad in Sweden before law school. But it's just interesting, I feel like I'm getting all these former athletes on the podcast. Like that's a prerequisite now to be on The Path & The Practice is you have to have at least been like a pretty solid high school athlete. I'm sorry. I laughed because I was not, which I share on the episode with Savannah. All right. So that's interesting. Okay. So swimming was, and sounds like it still is a bit of like a passion. Tell me about you're in high school, you're going to head off to college, what was the thought process? How did that work for you?

Allison Zweng: Yeah. I've always been one of those people, I'm not like, oh, I want to do this, and this is my lifelong dream, and I've always wanted to be an engineer in my case for what I did for undergrad or I've always wanted to be a lawyer. I've kind of just gone... I mean, I've had a little bit of a plan, but I've just kind of gone along with the flow and see how I like things and just yeah, take chances and just see how things go and move along, and figure it out on the way.

Alexis Robertso...: Well, I think that's great because I'm going to pin you down in a second, but I just think this idea that we can just be introspective and know all of the answers for what works best for us. Unfortunately we all tend to think that, but that's not how life is. You actually need to try things to know if you like things. So that makes a ton of sense to me. But I do think for some reason, all of us are like, I should just sit in a room and think deep thoughts, then I'll know what my career should be. And it's like, well or you just go try different subjects and see what you like.

Allison Zweng: I totally agree. And it's interesting because I've been in lectures and engineering where they're like, if you took things apart and then rebuilt them as a kid, definitely you know you want to be here. And I'm sitting there and like, well, I don't really necessarily think that's me, but I'm here. So I hope that's okay.

Alexis Robertso...: Well, it's funny because definitely there's certain personality traits that come through that can really work well with certain jobs. But for a lot of us, if you're not exposed to a subject matter at all, you might not know. But then for you specifically, how did you decide on Michigan? And by the way, anyone who listens to this show probably knows my University of Michigan leanings, which are partially because yes, I too went to the University of Michigan for law school, and also I'm married to a Michigan super fan. So apologies in advance if this is too much Michigan for anybody, but it is what it is. So I kind of want to

say like, well obviously you knew you wanted to go to the University of Michigan. Maybe that's not the case. Maybe there was a more of a decision making that happened behind that.

Allison Zweng: Yeah. I mean, I think I applied to a few schools for undergrad. I kind of decided on engineering right before applications. My dad's an engineer and I really liked physics and I really liked my pre-calc teacher. So my dad's like, "Why don't you try that?" And I was like, "Okay." So I applied. I think I applied to Michigan, Michigan State, and then a smaller school in Wisconsin Marquette. So all Midwest, and I'll talk later more about my choice for law school, but yeah, I really like the Midwest. And Michigan was the best place that I got into for engineering. So I went there and that was it.

Alexis Robertso...: Awesome.

Allison Zweng: Yeah. It wasn't like a super hard thing for me. Like I said, I kind of just went with what happened and made the decision when it came time to do that, and I'm glad I did. I think it was a good decision.

Alexis Robertso...: But what's interesting for you is because for some people, they will go with the flow, like, "Yeah, I just thought I would focus on engineering." And then they're like, "But two years in, I realized I didn't want to be an engineer and I wanted to study Marine Life at the Galapagos." But for you, you stayed with engineering. And we don't have to spend a long time on college, but I'm just curious as to what that transition was like for you, and in particular, what made you want to focus on mechanical engineering, given that there are more than one type of engineering. What was it like going to college? Did you just adapt to that and it was totally fine, or does it take some getting used to, particularly at Michigan, which is so big? And I know a lot of those early classes are really large.

Allison Zweng: Yeah. It was definitely a challenge. It wasn't just like, oh, I got this, like I'm here. It's easy. It was definitely difficult, especially with the big classes, like you said. I definitely went to office hours a lot and talk to my professors one on one, which was super helpful for me and my learning style. And I know that different people learn differently, and I was one of those people that just asking questions and being able to interact with my professors was super helpful. And so it's funny. Later on, as I started making more friends, we always joked, like I met all my friends in office hours.

Alexis Robertso...: It's just funny. That's like a certain type of person. I think it's really positive and a great thing, but you look at each other while you're both waiting for the professor and you're like, maybe we should strike up a conversation.

Allison Zweng: Yeah. You're just like you're automatically friends because you're spending so much time in the same place doing the same thing. So it worked out.

Alexis Robertso...: Well, you have shared priorities in terms of what you're trying to learn, and then maybe you can compare some notes, particularly if you're in the same classes. And then so it doesn't sound like when you started in college you knew that law school was going to be what happened next. Like where does that come into play? How did you decide law school?

Allison Zweng: Yeah. So it wasn't obvious. So on my swim team, there was a girl and her dad knew or worked with a patent attorney and that's kind of like my first exposure to that. And my dad had always told me, "I think you would have a good temperament to be a lawyer," because I'm pretty like even heel and maybe more introspective, thoughtful. I don't know if those are necessary qualities to be a lawyer, but that's kind of what I'm thinking.

Alexis Robertso...: They are good ones. I don't know if I'd call them that, but they're certainly good ones to have. Absolutely.

Allison Zweng: Yeah. And I don't have any lawyers in my family, so my dad was just kind of offering his perspective as a non-lawyer. So yeah, I talked to this woman and she was telling me about her job and what she does, and I found that interesting. And I did my first year of engineering and I actually worked as a assistant at her firm after my first year of engineering. And it's an intellectual property boutique firm kind of near my house. So I got exposure through that and I still wasn't like, "Oh, this is for sure it." I wanted to explore engineering more, but I always had it in the back of my mind, like, oh, this could be an option.

Alexis Robertso...: Well, and you knew it existed, which by the way, as I've come to a learn for the engineering types and folks who go on to do IP, that's actually the first hurdle because I don't know that a lot of people who focus on like the engineering and biology and some of these other more so STEM fields are actually aware of IP law as a path at all.

Allison Zweng: Yeah. I think that's so true. And I was fortunate enough to have that exposure and that was super helpful because I could always be thinking about it in the back of my mind and just like...

Alexis Robertso...: It's back there. It was in the subconscious. Your subconscious was working out.

Allison Zweng: Right. Right. And you're just like when you're exploring everything, you just want to know all the options. So yeah, after I did engineering, I did two more summer internships, I think, in the engineering field, and then I decided that, you know what, I think that law school thing was a good idea. And I did my applications, I think my senior year of college. And then once I had that done, I found out about Foley & Lardner at the end of my senior year.

Alexis Robertso...: This is where it gets interesting. So you apply to school because your path, it's a little bit different from, I think, the typical law student getting connected with

the law firm and that, like you said, because you've actually been at Foley for multiple summers at this point, which was when Allison and I first spoke, she was explaining to me how this is technically your... This is your third summer?

Allison Zweng: This my third summer. I know.

Alexis Robertso...: Yeah. Like you go way back with Foley & Lardner. So yeah, let's talk about that. What does that mean? You found Foley & Lardner your senior year, what does that mean?

Allison Zweng: Yeah. So it's kind of interesting. I was just doing this lab class, senior year lab class, and my lab partner was telling me about another one of our classmates who's in mechanical engineering and he did this cool thing at a law firm, and he was trying to get my friend to do it, but he wasn't interested in law, but he's like, "Allison, you're interested in law. You should talk to him." And so I talked with him, found out about he was doing the summer patent engineer program over the summer. He did it the previous summer. I think that was the first summer that you guys had that position. And then I was like, "Oh, okay. That's interesting to know." And I kind of just put on my radar. I said that I'll keep it in the back of my mind and maybe apply online or whatever.

And then when I went to Michigan Law's preview weekend, I went to this like, I don't know, lecture, seminar thing. I don't know. It was like, it was one of those things where they bring in a panel of attorneys and they talk to you about what they do. And I saw a guy, he was a lawyer, and I don't want to call him a guy. I saw a lawyer and he was from Detroit at Foley & Lardner. And I was like, oh my gosh, this name's come up for me twice in the past month or so.

Alexis Robertso...: The universe was speaking to you, but go on.

Allison Zweng: Honestly. Honestly. I kind of knew I was interested in staying in Detroit, and this attorney, he practiced in Detroit. So I was like, I have to go talk to him. So I talked to him about his experiences and he gave me his email. And so I started looking into that position more and I emailed him if he knew anything about this position, because I didn't really know much about it either. And he connected me with someone at Foley. And yeah, the rest was history.

Alexis Robertso...: That was that. So then did you start at Foley? Is that the summer after you graduated or was it... Yeah, right? Is that your first summer?

Allison Zweng: Yeah, it was the summer between when I did undergrad and law school because I went straight through it.

Alexis Robertso...: Which is interesting because I have to say, I don't know when I became aware of the summer patent engineer opportunity, and for those who are listening to their IP lawyers, they may know all this. For those who are listening who are not, there's a number of on-ramps to being an IP lawyer. One is you just go to

law school, you have likely that STEM type background, you become an IP lawyer. Another is you may actually become a patent agent or engineer first. You could do that for however many years, and then sometimes people choose to then go to law school. At Foley, in particular, is a program that actually, I think, assists people in doing that exact thing. And then I think this is actually a slightly different on-ramp is working as a patent engineer in summers while you are still in school. And so for you, this is the summer before you started law school, but also while in law school essentially. And let me know if I'm getting that wrong, but I think that's right.

Allison Zweng: So yeah, I did the summer Penn engineer program before I started law school. And then once I was in law school, I just was like a 1L summer associate.

Alexis Robertso...: Yeah, you switched to being a summer associate.

Allison Zweng: Yeah. Yeah.

Alexis Robertso...: Yeah, that's right. And here's the thing, Allison, I told you I was going to raise it on the show and I'm doing it right now. It's harder for me to follow along because you're not on LinkedIn.

Allison Zweng: Oh my God.

Alexis Robertso...: I hope everyone knows before we started. I think it was kindly, I don't think it was a full on rant, but I can rant if you want me to, Allison. It was a kind words to Allison encouraging her to be on LinkedIn, one because it just is easier for me on a podcast, but more importantly, because even as a law student, you are starting to grow that professional network. And it's a great way to plant that seed that allows you to keep track of and connect with people. And Allison, you can tell me your position because I think your position is what actually a lot of people believe when it comes to LinkedIn.

Allison Zweng: Yeah. So this is so funny. Didn't expect to have my non-LinkedIn existence come up today. But yeah, no, I just feel like I've made it this far. I mean, obviously I have a long way to go, but I don't know. I just feel like my more meaningful connections are in-person and yeah, it seems a little bit artificial to me on LinkedIn. And like I said, I haven't needed it thus far. So I'm not convinced yet, you know?

Alexis Robertso...: Yes. Well, that's right, and it is, it is artificial is one thing. But no, the reason I raise it is I just think it's really interesting thing for lawsuits to hear as well as a platform I think, and also social media in general. I think a lot of people are like, oh, it's just not for, but I would encourage everyone including Allison who may or may not embrace LinkedIn, we don't know, to consider setting that up because it's a helpful way for you to start collecting your network, for lack of a better term. It really lets you keep track of and visualize who you know, which might sound like a big deal as a law student, but it's very powerful. You add 5,

10 years to that, it's a big deal, but also you can teach it what you're interested in.

And so once you're a professional, you can follow the pages of company pages, publications. And so for me, this is very different because I don't practice anymore, but obviously I follow a lot of what's going on in the legal industry. And it's rare that someone will send me something I have not already seen because I have curated LinkedIn to essentially bring me that info. So I will end my rant here, but Allison, I appreciate you for allowing me to raise that because I do think it's valuable. And of course what you said is true in person is what really matters. But it's just, I think, one more tool that can really help law students.

But anyway, you were talking about how your first summer was a patent engineer, then you were with us as a 1L summer, and then with us as a 2L summer. So your story and your connection to Foley are a little bit different in that you didn't go through what may be more of the traditional. I went through the on-campus interview process and I bid on 15 firms and I chose Foley, but I would love to get you to reflect a little bit on your summer associate experiences. And the summer associate experience has been unique, but even before that, could you just say a few words about what one does as a summer patent engineer?

Allison Zweng: Yeah, so that was kind of like my first time really working on matters. When I did that other internship really early on an undergrad, I was more of just an assistant, but in the summer patent engineer program, I really got to do hands on stuff and really start learning what patent prosecution was all about. So I think I helped. I definitely was able to get some exposure to working on office action responses, which is like the communication with the United States Patent Trademark Office. When they reject your application, you have to respond. And then I think I got a little bit of exposure drafting. Well, I might have drafted some claims for patent applications. I'm sorry. It's been a few years trying to, but yeah, definitely did substantial work, and I learned a lot. And it was a great starting point to start a career in that field.

Alexis Robertso...: Well, and what's funny is, and maybe after your podcast, and I mean this nicest way, I will take a little bit of a break from some of our bad lawyers because I've had a number of Foley IP lawyers on the show, the last few episodes, and part of that was to make up for a lack of them before that. And so I just think for a lot of attorneys who are not patent lawyers, we actually don't necessarily... And I still say we because I'm still licensed, but we don't necessarily have a great idea of what that area of the law is. I think the pinnacle of legal practice frankly is to have a decent of what everybody at your firm does. So I appreciate you sharing that because I think I could be wrong that what you are working on as a patent engineer did lay a foundation for and give you exposure to things that you very much will need to know as a practicing attorney.

And then I know from our earlier discuss that you have that experience at the firm, you then start law school, and we will go back to that by the way. But then when you came back as a 1L summer associate, it's like, you just kept building, and they're kind of like, "Hi, Allison, you're back-

Allison Zweng: Yes.

Alexis Robertso...: ... you can work on this stuff you did before, but now we can also add this other thing to the mix." And so apologies as I sort of weave these things together because I'm very focused on bringing a lot of value to people because I realize we have listeners who are in a variety of places in their career. But before we pick up again, and maybe we'll just jump to the 2L summer, which is the summer you just finished, but could you just say a few words about law school and what it was like starting at the University of Michigan?

Allison Zweng: Yeah. It was definitely an intimidating environment. I think I was super excited. I was ready to work hard and learn, but you're in this elite environment where you feel like everyone is just such like a stellar person and scholar and everyone talks about imposter syndrome, and I definitely had some of that. But I really loved Michigan Law School because the people were so amazing, and I'm sure you experienced that too, but everyone was just so nice and willing to help. And I made some really good friends that I think will be lifelong friends, and also we were able to make through the pandemic as friends when you can meet-

Alexis Robertso...: Oh my goodness.

Allison Zweng: ... and see each other. I mean, that's just a adjustment to-

Alexis Robertso...: The whole pandemic dynamic and I should add that, so as I mentioned, I can see Allison and behind her is a photograph of the Michigan law reading room, which I like to see. So you can just tell how bonded I think Michigan law students are, but I think that's true for most law students and their law school. But no, that's right, you did have the whole added dynamic of the pandemic. Did that hit basically your second semester of your-

Allison Zweng: Correct.

Alexis Robertso...: first year?

Allison Zweng: Yeah. So I was fortunate enough to have had a little bit of a regular experience and then form those connections, which is super critical for me because like I told you, I really like to ask questions to learn. And I was able to use my friends as people to ask questions to and talk about things and discuss in addition to my professors in office hours.

Alexis Robertso...: Yeah, absolutely.

Allison Zweng: And just like emotional support too, you know?

Alexis Robertso...: Oh, without a doubt. And a question that I either ask with IP lawyers or it comes up, in terms of that adjustment to the style of learning, the style of taking tests, my understanding is that is different from the way you probably were learning or being tested when you were focusing on mechanical engineering. Did you find that you had to change your study habits or kind of get up to speed in that way?

Allison Zweng: Yeah, I think it was like a different way of studying. I joined a study group with my friends, and we were able to talk things out and just review every week, and that was super helpful, but I don't know if that was super different than what I was doing before, because I was going to office hours and collaborating with people.

Alexis Robertso...: Yes.

Allison Zweng: So I think that's just how I like to work, but I just shifted it.

Alexis Robertso...: So I had a few episodes back, Steve Millendorf, who is a cybersecurity and privacy senior council in Foley's San Diego office. And he was an engineer for two decades before law school. So obviously very different life, but he talked about when he adjusted to law school that something that was hard for him was he was used to sort of getting... And tell me if I'm wrong with this, Allison, because it's probably not that dissimilar, but you would essentially with engineering get like the formula or whatever it is you were supposed to apply and then you get to practice at a whole bunch. And so he actually had somebody sort of pull him aside after he had some major challenges for a semester and was like, as an engineer, you may need to study a little bit differently because you're used to kind of getting the formula, practicing it, and applying it. And you can kind of have that same format with this, but that's otherwise not how it's going to be presented to you. I thought that was super interesting.

Allison Zweng: Definitely. Definitely. And I would add on to that, like there's not necessarily one right answer. And that was another thing that was super challenging to kind of wrap my head around, is that okay? Like when I get to the end of this problem or prompt or whatever it is, there's you don't just circle your number and that's it. It's like you have to write words and they can be different and they can all be right, and that's weird.

Alexis Robertso...: I love that you said that. That is like a big law school secret that I think everybody has to eventually come to terms with. But if you are somebody who's more like the answer is 12 because the answer is 12, right? And you take that to, oh, I don't know your first year tots class. And like you said, you're usually given some essay prompt and usually what they wanted towards. And by the way, I have to qualify everything because I don't want someone to fail a tots

exam because... But usually what they want is this, like, it could be this, it could be that, it might be this, she could argue this, or maybe she'll answer that. And if you're just like, it's an intentional tort because of acts done, often that's a great way to get a C on a law school.

Allison Zweng: Yes, they want to be like sometimes consider different things and then say, "Oh, which ones? Probably the most likely because of X, Y, Z." And I'm like, "Wait, I thought there was only one option." That's right.

Alexis Robertso...: You were making me laugh because we did go to Michigan. We both went to the same school and I know Professor Sherman Clark is still teaching at Michigan. I don't know if you had him, but I literally just saw him on Michigan's Instagram.

Allison Zweng: Oh, yeah. [crosstalk 00:29:03].

Alexis Robertso...: So I know he's still teaching. There you go. And I remember for his class, just thinking like the best answer for him was always the like more layers of it could be this, it could be this, it could be this. You could add in like, and I don't know, maybe aliens would come down and then you would have to argue that was an assumption of risk because the baseball stadium should have known that aliens were coming. But that's how out there it could feel at times. So I do appreciate you sharing that because as we get law students listening and even people contemplating law school, that is some really valuable advice. But yeah, also the experience in the pandemic, and I apologize because I'm kind of riffing on all of this, but I just think acknowledging how hard that has been for everyone and to be a virtual law student for what's effectively going to be potentially half of your law school experience is something that a lot of people are going through.

And this is one of those words, like mark my words, but in 10 years from now, you may be giving it to law students and they'll be asking how it was for you. And you'll be like, "Well, what you need to know is I was affected by the 2019 pandemic." And so that's something you're going to be saying for... This is like a formative thing, yes, in your experience. Okay. So let's talk about this summer. I'll stop annoying people by talking about everything else. But 2L summer, and yeah, you were with Foley at 1L which means you also experienced the virtual summer programs. You can also feel free to say words about that, but how was this summer for you? What kind of things did you work on? What was life like in the Detroit Office?

Allison Zweng: Yeah, the summer was really awesome actually. I, first of all, loved the other two summer associates that were in the Detroit office with me. We got along super well, which is great because we're all experiencing a similar situation and it's nice to just have people to talk to. And I think that this summer, I really grew in my skills and in my experiences. Even though it was virtual, it was funny because as I was getting ready to go back to Foley this summer, and it was

virtual and I was like, honestly, I'm more used to virtual at this point than going in-person.

Alexis Robertso...: That's true, because last summer was virtual for you too.

Allison Zweng: Yeah. And then school, and I'm like, I don't even remember what human interaction is like.

Alexis Robertso...: You fully adapted. You fully adapted.

Allison Zweng: Yeah. But we were able to actually do quite a bit of stuff in-person as the situation in Michigan got better, which was awesome because it's just so nice to see people and meet new people in person and make those connections. So we were able to do a lot of fun activities, and just being in the office, it was really great. But yeah, I think this summer, I was able to branch out in some of the work that I was doing and the people I was working for, and I just really feel like I grew as a future patent attorney.

Alexis Robertso...: Now, and some of the nuts and bolts questions, I'm trying to hit at least, I don't know, one, maybe two of the questions that students like to ask on campus interviewing. And I know for you it's a little bit different because you had had two summers with Foley prior to this summer, but in terms of your assignments, because you know, one big question about summer is always like, how do assignments work? How do I get what I'm working on? So how did that dynamic work for you?

Allison Zweng: Yeah, for me personally, I got a lot of my assignments just through the attorneys that work in the Detroit office. So we have a partner in the electro mechanical technologies practice group and he funneled a lot of work to me. Another associate works in electronics and gave me a bunch of work. We have another associate in chem bio who gave me some projects. And then I was able to work with a senior council in the DC office who I got work from through my bosses in Detroit. They're like, "Oh, reach out to this person, see if they need help with stuff." So I didn't personally use the work allocation system that we have, but I know that the other summer associates did. So I think it might just depend on what practice group you're in, what office you're in.

Alexis Robertso...: Yeah. And I think that's right, because for you also you know a lot of the people already. I think we were joking before that they're like, "Allison's back."

Allison Zweng: Honestly. They're like, "Wait don't you already work here?"

Alexis Robertso...: So I'm not at all surprised that was your experience. But for those coming in for the first time ever as they're 2L summer, the firm does have essentially a database of a summer assignments for each office, and I think a lot of summers will use that to get their work. But what can happen is you'll then develop relationships with people and you did that first assignment, and now they know

you're kind of caught up on whatever they're working on, then they'll ask you if you want to do something else. So yeah. So I think you can expect a mix of that. And I'm also curious, how did feedback work for you? Do you feel like people would kind of sit down with you and let you know their thoughts or feedback on assignments that you've done for them?

Allison Zweng: Definitely. Definitely. And that's huge. That's a huge part of the learning process, especially for me, as I've said multiple times already, like I like asking questions and that's how I learn. So having access to people to ask questions or just see their feedback is really helpful to me to grow and learn. And I definitely sat down with multiple people to discuss my assignments that I did, and I tried to implement those changes to my future assignments, which I think when someone tells you something, they don't want to keep telling you the same thing. So I think that's something that I tried to do. I think everyone was super willing to, they're just like, "Let me know if you have questions, I can discuss these with you." Obviously attorneys are busy, especially fully attorneys, they have a lot of important stuff going on, but they still made time for feedback, which I think was really important for my learning.

Alexis Robertso...: It is. It's critical. And I love, though, that you're someone who your theme is, I like to ask questions, but also what that means is I like getting feedback, right? Because if you're willing to go to professor's office hours and say, what's going on here, that means you're willing and open to them saying maybe correcting you. And that's literally the whole point. But that is a skill that will serve you very well as a lawyer. And so for listeners, feedback is the holy grail of attorney development. And if you can get people to sit down with you and tell you what you can improve, it's way faster that way than you having to do it trial and error for what without... Someone's comment could actually launch you three years ahead in that particular skillset of something that you otherwise might have just done maybe not wrong, but let's call it not optimally without that feedback.

And I just also think for attorneys, or actually I should say for law students, as they're assessing law firms, a huge question is the feedback culture. That is more important than a lot of the other things people ask about. It's will people tell me how I can get better? Because that that's the same as saying, are they going to help me develop as a lawyer? And then as you were talking, something I wanted to mention also for people who are listening to your episode and you're the first summer associate they've heard from, and they'd like to hear from others is also episode 23 of the podcast is Nick Benson, who was at Foley last summer, summer of 2020. And then episode 50... Oh, I think it's 53 or 50. Yeah, episode 50 is Doug Lightfoot, who's another summer associate this summer out of the DC office, also IP.

And then just as I mentioned earlier, a couple episodes before you is Savannah Levin, who is litigation out of LA. So just trying to mix all that in because I think if someone is interested in knowing what it's like to be a summer at Foley, if you listen to all those episodes, you'll see that the experience varies, but there are

some uniform principles there. The other thing, Allison, that I was the for you is it's really interesting because you've seen Foley operating in multiple modes. Like you had a summer with the firm as an engineer. Well, before anyone knew there'd be a pandemic, you did the six-week program when we were all just really trying to figure it out. And then this longer program that was still virtual in many ways with the world's had opened up a little bit more. So it's funny that you've seen the firm in all these different modes.

Allison Zweng: Yeah. Who would've thought being able to do that in three years?

Alexis Robertso...: Well, and I just think it's so funny that when you come back as an attorney, they'll be like, "Haven't you been an attorney for a while?"

Allison Zweng: I know. It's honestly funny. I'm like, every time, it's like I come back, I'm like, "I'm back." And people would just say, "Don't you work here already?"

Alexis Robertso...: Yes. You just won't be leaving when you return, which is very exciting. Well, and the other thing which I... Sorry, this is going to be kind of funny to raise, but I'm going to raise it anyway. So Allison, as I was looking back at my notes for our earlier conversation, because yes, I reached out to literally every summer associate this summer, I wrote down IP, I wrote down Michigan, I wrote down Detroit, and I wrote down reality TV.

Allison Zweng: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Alexis Robertso...: And so I would love if you would just talk about... Because I think you shared with me earlier how you did find someone in the Detroit office who shared your passions for certain TV shows. And I don't know, share that too, because I want people to like, we're also people while we're doing these like complicated patent prosecution things.

Allison Zweng: Yes. So people who know me know I love reality TV. Guilty pleasure, but yeah, one of the other summer associates, she also loves Real Housewives. So that's one of the things I super... I think Real Housewives in New York city got me through the pandemic.

Alexis Robertso...: Wow. That's a testament. That's a public service they were doing.

Allison Zweng: Public service. And my roommate can also tell you that it got me through the pandemic. And then one of the assistants in the IP group, she loves everything bachelor, Bachelor Nation, all that good stuff. So we've definitely bonded over that, and it's just so fun. It's fun to talk about other things besides work. And like you said, people are real people here. We'll be talking about bachelor and we'll get made fun of by another attorney, and it's just fun.

Alexis Robertso...: Well, it's so much fun. And you can imagine for me as the firm's diversity director, I think that's so great because what Foley wants and what I know I

want is for people to feel like they can be their authentic self. And I know that that word is used so much that it may be devoid of meaning, but I know it's important to us to know that Allison is an avid fan of swimming, both probably watching it and doing it, as well as The Real Housewives of New York. Like, those are things that we actually want people to bring some of that to work. Do your work too, but I also think it balances what can be some really hard demanding, very cerebral practices that people have. We have to bring in the fun stuff too.

Allison Zweng: Yeah. And you have to be fun. And like you said, it's nice to know when to talk to people about things other than the work, because the work is always there, and it's fun and it's good to learn, but yeah, it's a nice break sometimes just to be able to have a real conversation with others.

Alexis Robertso...: Absolutely. All right. So here's the thing, I'm undoubtedly forgetting to ask you like six or seven questions that I should. So apologies. But I do encourage people to reach out to you, although I have to figure out how, Allison, because you're not on LinkedIn and that's where I prefer them to.

Allison Zweng: You may see I'll make a LinkedIn after this. You might have convinced me.

Alexis Robertso...: Okay. You should just for that purpose. But as we are winding down, do you have any just overall advice? And you can style this to whatever audience you want. But whether it be somebody contemplating law school or contemplating an IP path, do you have any just general recommendations for them?

Allison Zweng: Yeah. I think that what I would say is be true to yourself because I think we know ourselves better than others do. So yeah. One thing, and an example of this is you go to a big law school and everybody's like, "Oh, I'm going to go to New York or LA or DC, these Chicago big markets." And it's easy to get wrapped up in that or feel like, oh, I have to do this because this is the way everyone else is doing it. And I was like, "Oh, maybe I'm not doing it right. Maybe I should be doing what all these other people are doing." Because that's a huge thing that University of Michigan also markets is like, oh, you can come here and you can go anywhere. But I thought it over with myself, I reflected, and talked with my mom and dad, and I was like, "You know what, I really love being in Michigan. This is where I like to be, and this is where the people I'm closest with are." And I decided you know what, being in Michigan is the best thing for me.

So that was a huge realization to have, and it made me just enjoy all my experiences at the Detroit office in Foley so much more because I was just confident in what I wanted to do and who I wanted to be, and maybe not second guess or think I should be doing other things. So yeah, I guess I would just say, be true to yourself and don't let others make you question what you know is good for yourself.

Alexis Robertso...: I think those are such wise words, and it's so hard but it's so good to hear that. And I think also gather tidbits of information, but put them through your lens,

like you said, then take it and reflect on yourself as to what works best for you. But with that, Allison, I will just say, thank you so much for being on the show. I'm going to keep my fingers crossed that you do make that LinkedIn profile, even if only for the purpose of people who listen to this podcast having a way to contact you, because I don't necessarily want to give out your UMich email to the world right now. But it sounds to me like if she sets that up, she'd be happy to have you reach out to her as listeners.

Allison Zweng: I was going to say, yeah, I will be happy to answer any questions or just chat. I'd love to talk to anyone who spent the time listening to this podcast that I've been on. So yeah.

Alexis Robertso...: Perfect.

Allison Zweng: And you'll be my first link. I think that's what they call it.

Alexis Robertso...: It's connection.

Allison Zweng: Connection? I don't even know the lingo, but you're my first connection.

Alexis Robertso...: Okay, we will make this happen. Thank you so much for being on the show, Allison.

Allison Zweng: Thank you so much for having me. This was awesome.

Alexis Robertso...: Thank you for listening to The Path & The Practice. I hope you enjoyed the conversation and join us again next time. And 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.