

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 1000 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. And of course, you'll learn a bit about their practice. Now, let's get to the episode.

This episode features a conversation with Savannah Levin. Savannah just finished her time with Foley as a summer associate. In fact, I recorded this podcast with her within her last few hours as a summer at the firm. But it was important to me that I got her on to talk about what it was like to be a summer associate at Foley in our LA office.

Because in addition to hearing from senior partners, associates, and council, it's important for us to also share what it's like to be a law student summering at the firm. But because this is The Path & The Practice, I first had to get Savannah to share bit about her life and her path to law school.

So she reflects on her life growing up in Newport Beach, California. She discusses why it was she attended the University of Southern California for undergrad, and her decision to attend the University of California, Irvine School of Law. Additionally, Savannah just has an interesting life. I won't spoil all of it here, but I will share that she was a collegiate athlete and that allowed her to play that sport abroad for a couple of years.

And I'm being intentionally vague so that you can get the story from Savannah herself. But after we talk about all that, she talks about what it was like working as a summer associate in the LA office, what she worked on, how she got her assignments and how she found that experience. Also, if you want to hear from other summer associates at Foley, I'd encourage you to checkout episode 50 with Doug Lightfoot, as well as episode 23 with Nick Benson.

But first, listen to this discussion with Savannah. I think you're really going to enjoy it. Savannah, welcome to the podcast. I say this to every single guest, but I'm very excited to have you in particular, because you are literally in the last few hours of your official time as a summer associate with Foley. So as usual, we're going to jump right in. Can you introduce yourself?

Savannah Levin: Yes. And thank you for having me. My name is Savannah Levin, and I went to undergrad at USC and I'm now a UCI law student and I'll be entering my third year in the Fall.

Alexis Robertso...: And for the next couple of hours, you are a summer associate at Foley & Lardner?

Savannah Levin: Yes. Counting down the time.

Alexis Robertso...: Well, in a way, it's funny, because we have a time difference.

Savannah Levin: True.

Alexis Robertso...: But you're in California, I am in Chicago and for me it's getting close to five o'clock. And partly, when I was scheduling this, I was like, "Oh yeah, I guess she'll have a minute. And they'll come and get her computer." But anyway, I'm going to set the stage a bit before we talk about you, your path and your experience at Foley this summer.

But you are not the first summer associate I've had on the podcast. There have been two others and I will have hopefully shared their information in the intro because I don't have the episode numbers and all that in front of me, but it was important to us to get on a few other summer associates as the firm heads into what I want to call on campus interviews.

But I think now it's more virtual interview season. So not surprisingly, we're going to spend quite a bit of time talking about your experience over the past, I think two or three months or so. But before we do, this is The Path & The Practice, so we have to talk about your path to law school. So let's start somewhat at the beginning. Where are you from? Where did you grow up?

Savannah Levin: I'm from Newport Beach, California. So born and raised in Southern California. My parents moved from South Africa before I was born. So I have a bit of a different growing up culture, I guess you could say.

Alexis Robertso...: Do you realize you're talking to the firm's director of diversity and inclusion?

Savannah Levin: Yes.

Alexis Robertso...: Clearly, we're going to unpack just a little bit of that. If you wouldn't mind sharing, could you speak just a minute about what it was that brought your parents to California from South Africa?

Savannah Levin: Yeah, so my dad was the first to leave and he had gone to England and then to Houston in Texas, and then made his way to California. So I think from a young age he always saw himself leaving. I think he didn't fully see a future for raising kids there and essentially for giving us as many opportunities as he wanted to.

So from a young age he saw himself leaving and then my parents have an interesting background, which they grew up together, went their separate ways.

And then my dad was back in South Africa visiting family and they kind of rekindled so then my mom followed him out here.

Alexis Robertso...: I can't believe I'm going to say these words out loud, but I've heard this term before and it sounds gross to even say, but it's kind of one of those meat-cute dynamics.

Savannah Levin: Definitely.

Alexis Robertso...: I've never had a reason to say that, much less on this show, but that sounds like what it was.

Savannah Levin: There you go.

Alexis Robertso...: So we spoke, I think just last week actually, and you actually told me, and it was before we knew or I knew that I was going to be able to get you on the show, but I think you told me it was interesting growing up in California with parents not from here and that you'd be with friends or they'd come to your house and be a little maybe confused at first about the accents or could you share a bit more about that?

Savannah Levin: Yeah, I think, well, for starters, my parents' house, they have a lot of African, the decor is a little unique. And I think there are certain things around the house, my friends were like, "Whoa, that's different. Different kind of art style." So that, but then also, I mean, I'm very used to their accents, but I think having friends come over and hearing them speak for the first time, they'd try to pretend like they understood exactly what they were saying, but they would just be like, "I couldn't really understand your mom."

Alexis Robertso...: That's so funny. And I imagine at first they're not quite sure, we talked about this too, not quite certain where the accent is from. Because I think with South African accents, often someone will be like, "Are you British? Are you Australian? What is happening here?"

Savannah Levin: Definitely. Sounds like a bit of a mix between the two.

Alexis Robertso...: Yes. Well, and we're getting into, I will not turn this into a full on lesson on diversity and inclusion and across cultural communications, but one thing I have to say just for everyone, by the way, we all have accents. And the only reason I'm saying we all have accents is because I know I'm talking to a predominantly American audience. But there's a lot of people who it blows their mind that, "No, no, you have an accent, no matter where you are from, you just do. You speak like where you're from."

Savannah Levin: Oh yeah. My cousins who still live over there, they love the American accent and I'm like, "Are you sure?"

Alexis Robertso...: "I don't have an accent, what are you talking about?" Okay. Well, give me another snippet of, because I know we have a lot of interesting things to cover actually before we even get to you attending law school, snippet of life growing up. I find you in middle school, what are you into?

Savannah Levin: Yeah, so soccer was a huge part of my childhood. I'm the youngest of three and we all played. So I think every time I wasn't at school, I was basically at the soccer field, either watching my sister, brother or playing myself. And thankfully, my parents were very involved with that as well. So it was kind of a family thing that we would just be from one field to the next, all kind of supporting each other.

Alexis Robertso...: How old were you when you started playing?

Savannah Levin: I was four years old.

Alexis Robertso...: Wow. So by middle school, you're probably talking travel teams and, yeah.

Savannah Levin: Yeah. So travel teams, and then I played on a club team, which was primarily the main focus. And then there was also the state team and regional team and that type of stuff. So throughout the year, there would be just a lot of different kinds of travel and with different teams as well.

Alexis Robertso...: So another part of this show for people who've listen to more than one episode is you inevitably learn more about me, the host, than you intend to, but I will just share this because I just find it funny when I look back on my life. I was not and still I'm not a very sports-inclined person. I have an avid Pilates career right now, by the way.

Savannah Levin: Oh, I love it.

Alexis Robertso...: But other than that, growing up, I didn't do much. But I did soccer my freshman year of high school, for the first time ever. I knew people did sports and had been doing them for a long time, but that's how separate I was from that life.

Savannah Levin: And how'd you like it?

Alexis Robertso...: So here's the thing, unless you are genetically gifted, which I was not, and I was just not athletic at all, it is very hard to just start playing soccer at 14, because you have Savannah, who's there too, and she's probably not in freshman soccer. She's already up to maybe varsity as a freshman.

But no, truly, I started and I was with people who'd been playing club soccer forever, so I did it for the year. I stuck it out, but it was clear that I had peaked. There would be no more progress for me unless I wanted to play freshman soccer all of high school. So that was it. But I was like, "Oh, people have been playing since they were four or five, six years old."

Savannah Levin: Oh yeah. So the high school I went to, there were actually only 34 kids in my graduating class. It was a very small school. So I did play high school soccer, but I would say 95% of the team was in the same boat that you found yourself in. So it was a completely different experience from playing club soccer.

Alexis Robertso...: That makes me feel better.

Savannah Levin: But it was so fun. It was so fun.

Alexis Robertso...: Had you gone to my high school in the suburbs of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, you would've showed up to the first practice for freshman soccer, and they'd been like, "Oh, she's really good." And then you would've immediately been elevated to varsity.

Savannah Levin: You were too small to even have separate teams.

Alexis Robertso...: Exactly. Okay. Tell me more. Tell me a bit about your experience. It's high school, you're planning to go to college. I know that you're also still playing soccer because your life gets actually very interesting as it relates to soccer, and we will get there. but what was the decision-making process like for you in terms of going to college? Where did you go and why?

Savannah Levin: Yeah, so I went to USC, which is Southern California, not South Carolina, which I learned I had to differentiate.

Alexis Robertso...: In the state of California, not even a question. But my parents actually went to the University of South Carolina.

Savannah Levin: Oh, really?

Alexis Robertso...: Yeah. There you go.

Savannah Levin: Go Gamecocks.

Alexis Robertso...: That's right. You went to USC...

Savannah Levin: Yeah. So from the get go, I wanted to go to a school with a strong soccer program, but also that really valued academics. And so when looking, I was probably a freshman, sophomore when I started seriously looking because they recruit kind of young. So from that age I was pretty sure that I wanted to stay in Southern California but was open.

But essentially after visiting USC, the soccer team was one of the only Pac-12 schools that had won a national championship already. And in terms of the academics, just a great school and the coaching staff also really valued academics, which I think sometimes coaches want you to focus on your sport.

So it can be a tough balance between the two, but they definitely valued that. So it was kind of an easy choice for me.

Alexis Robertso...: Yeah. By the way, you said they start recruiting somewhat early, could you just say a few more words about what that means when you're a sophomore or so in high school? What does that mean?

Savannah Levin: So there's a lot of different NCAA rules and I think they've changed since I went through the process, but until a certain age, the coaches can't contact you, you can only contact them. But there's a lot of different club tournaments or the state regional team tournaments where they'll come watch games, they'll then speak to the coaches or to the team managers and basically say, "Can you please tell number two to contact me?"

So that's kind of how it starts. And then you basically just keep calling until they actually answer, because they clearly don't know your phone number. And then it just goes from there. They can invite you to visit the campus. And I did that at a couple of schools. And then as you hit a certain age, they can start contacting you. So that's when it gets a little crazier. And I think that was in my sophomore year.

Alexis Robertso...: Okay. That's interesting. You may know this, but the listeners probably don't, you are not the first collegiate athlete also that I've had on the show. Actually the very first episode of the podcast, episode number one with Von Bryant, who by the way, I will always commend for being brave. Because there was no proof of concept for this show. I was just like, "Hey, I'm launching a podcast."

But he played football and he talked a lot about also the priority of the academics and the sports, and also in particularly his parents very much prioritize that. So if you want to hear another, now Foley lawyer, actually senior counsel in D.C. talk about that. And also our chief legal talent and officer, Jen Patton, she played basketball at Rice University. And there might be a few other people I'm missing, and if so, I'm sorry. But those two stand out. Okay. So USC is the choice, you go to USC, what did you major in and then just tell me a bit about that experience in college?

Savannah Levin: Yeah. So I majored in psychology and then I did a minor in sports media. I loved my time there. I think soccer definitely took up a lot of time and became, we would train in the morning, so I always felt like I had training and then however that went kind of dictated my mood a little bit for the rest of the day. But with soccer, we had just a crazy ride because my first year we came 11th out of 12 in the Pac-12. And then by my senior year we won the national championship. So it was a complete change of experience.

Alexis Robertso...: We didn't cover this when we spoke before. That's awesome. I'm very excited for you now. You're [inaudible 00:14:06]. Okay. So I will keep marching along because there's some other interesting things that happened in your life before

law school and before Foley & Lardner. So you graduate from USC then what happens?

Savannah Levin: So it was towards the end of my Fall semester of my senior year. So we won the national championship and then a lot of my fellow senior classmates, we were all preparing for the draft to play in the NWSL in the States. And then I personally saw myself trying to go overseas rather and play. So it was January, during my senior year, and I was offered to sign a contract to go play in Sweden. So I left early on in the Spring semester of my senior year to go and play in Sweden, where I ended up staying for about two years.

Alexis Robertso...: That is so cool. I'm going to ask you more questions about that. Okay. You said, so National Women's Soccer League, I'm assuming is what the acronym was, but instead you're like, "I want to play abroad." And tell me why, because I know nothing about any of this. What was the appeal? What was that decision making?

Savannah Levin: Yeah, so I actually, my older sister who's five years older, she played professionally as well and for about seven years, so had a little bit of a longer professional career than I did. But the first team she ever played for was in Sweden. And so I had got to visit her once and I just loved the country, the city, she was in. Just, I fell in love with the city.

So I think throughout playing in college, I always had this idea and I also had an inkling that I wanted to go to law school. So I knew playing soccer professionally would be more of a brief thing for me that I always dreamed of doing it and wanted to accomplish that. But I also saw what my next step might be. So I just wanted to make the most of whatever that experience would be. And for me, going overseas, I don't know if it was partially because my parents weren't from the states and I very gratefully was able to travel a little bit growing up, but I wanted that kind of experience.

Alexis Robertso...: You said so much there, I'm afraid I'm going to lose these threads. But you just planted the law school seat and we will come back to it, we have to, that's literally what the show's about. But before we do, I just wanted to make sure I understood. But you actually went to Sweden to play before the official end of college, is that...

Savannah Levin: Yeah. Basically during my time at USC, we would have training in the summer that was optional, basically just fitness. So a lot of running. While doing that, I took summer courses. And so by the time I got to my senior Spring, I only had one class left that I needed to graduate. So that professor was really kind and I had taken her a couple times throughout my undergraduate experience that she knew I played soccer and all of that. So when I told her about the opportunity, she was just like, "Oh, you have to go."

Alexis Robertso...: "Go ahead." Wow.

Savannah Levin: Finished the class. I basically took the exams online and, yeah.

Alexis Robertso...: And that was that. And by the way, does that mean you didn't walk for graduation because you were already off [inaudible 00:17:18]?

Savannah Levin: I did not. So I am very, very excited for a cap and gown next year.

Alexis Robertso...: Actually, you're like, "I haven't done this since high school. This is great." Okay. And I'm sorry if I'm driving the listeners crazy, can you just also say a word about what it was like or what it means to I soccer in Sweden? What is that schedule like? Just a few sentences or more than a few about what life was like? Because you said it was a two-year period.

Savannah Levin: Yeah. It was, so very different than college, of course because you're not balancing that academic portion of it. At the same time, you can only really train so often without getting hurt or overdoing it. So we would have about a day off in the week. And between one and two games usually, yeah, between one and two games per week as well.

And then twice a week would be double days. So we would do a lift in the morning and that day would be kind of a full, you're with the team from the morning till night, probably lifting in the morning and then going for an early lunch together. And then going back to the fields, maybe having some kind of film or scout meeting, some type of meeting. And then our afternoon training, which was actually on the field playing. And then you'd go home.

Alexis Robertso...: That is so interesting. I will move on. I could ask you a lot more questions about it, but I'm not. But also I just think overall, particularly in the US, and you've lived this probably in many more ways than I have, but just the profile of women's soccer in general has grown so much over the past few years.

Savannah Levin: It's awesome to see. I think in Sweden it was great because soccer is one of their national sports. Everyone's an avid soccer fan. But in the States, that wasn't always the case. With baseball and football and just a lot of other sports that I think took precedent. It's really cool to see soccer, in both the men and women's side, but the women are doing very good things.

Alexis Robertso...: Yes. It's awesome. I'm always repeating my lack of general knowledge or interest about sports, but my husband is very into sports. And I mean, he has kept me updated on women's soccer over the years. Which is I think a really big shift, I would say a decade ago, I don't know that that would've... Actually, I know he wasn't updating me on it a decade ago.

Savannah Levin: It's really cool. Because like I said, my sister went over to Sweden as her first team, but she initially was going to play in the states and then the league folded, which kept happening for years here. And I think this is probably the longest stint that the league has stayed around, which is a very good sign.



Alexis Robertso...: That's great. That's amazing. But like I said, you planted this seed earlier. You said, "I wanted to do this because I also knew what I wanted to do next," and you knew law school was that. So yeah, why was that? Where did that interest in law school come from?

Savannah Levin: Yeah. So before my parents immigrated, my mom was an attorney in South Africa and so she never practiced here, but she ended up having a few different careers and she was always attributing her ability to succeed in those, just with getting her law degree and the value behind that.

So I think from a young age, I always saw the value in that degree and what that could do for you, even if you're not in a courtroom or whatever it is, it's just very valuable. So I think I had this idea in my head vaguely that I was interested in it. And as I went through undergrad and tried to envision my future a bit more, I saw it as something that I really wanted to pursue.

Alexis Robertso...: Well, I love that you had the plan, and I don't mean this at all as a negative for other collegiate athletes, but I know that transition can be very difficult for people, particularly if you've played-

Savannah Levin: Definitely.

Alexis Robertso...: Yeah, because to excel I think in any sport, it really is all encompassing and often you have to be very present. So it's just so interesting to me that you were thinking a few years ahead. So is it while you were in Sweden that you start thinking... How does the application process happen? How does all that work for you to actually decide where you're going to go and settle on a law school?

Savannah Levin: Yeah. So I was studying for The LSAT while in Sweden. So during the off time in the days I basically was taking my LSAT prep course. I did an online course. So I was able to do that from there. I got a tutor for that, which helped and that was via Skype.

So I really did all of that from Sweden. But I did fly home to take the actual LSAT. And I was a three-timer, so I took it a couple times, or a few times. And I flew home each time for that. But then I believe it was during my off time over the winter that I actually submitted my applications. And so I was also in the States when I did that part of the process.

Alexis Robertso...: And did you know where in the country you wanted to go? Was the thought to get back to California in general? Or what was your thought process there?

Savannah Levin: Yeah, and I think that was also part of the reason why I wanted abroad, was I saw myself settling down in California and I wanted to be near family. That's important to me. So I was primarily focused on Southern California again, then ultimately chose UCI.

Alexis Robertso...: It's so funny. There's a couple things you've said about having the mom that's a lawyer who never practiced. We talked about this before, me too, and studying for the LSAT while abroad, me too, except I was in Rome and it was-

Savannah Levin: Oh wow.

Alexis Robertso...: ... forever ago. And by the way, obviously our lives are very different, but I'm just like, "Same. Yes. I totally can identify." No, I'm just kidding.

Savannah Levin: Did you take the LSAT in Rome?

Alexis Robertso...: I did not. I did not. I definitely took it in the States. And I was a bit extra with the whole law school process. So this would've been my second semester, junior year. I studied abroad in Rome. I mean, this is ages ago. So Amazon was a thing and I was able to get test prep books sent to Rome, but a lot of other stuff was different. Remember, for me, this is early 2000s. That's how long ago this was.

Savannah Levin: That's not that long ago.

Alexis Robertso...: There you go. But, okay, you settle on a school, you start school, what is that transition like for you? I mean, you haven't been in school for the past couple years. How was that?

Savannah Levin: Yeah, I think the personal transition was tough in a sense. I moved back to the States after being gone for a long time. I actually moved back into my parents house after living alone for a couple years.

Alexis Robertso...: That's a big change.

Savannah Levin: It is a big change. They're great. They're great. But still a big change.

Alexis Robertso...: But all of us, with what's going on with COVID, I think a lot of people, actually, a lot of people in law school have had that experience over the last year and a half as well. But just remembering, this is pre-pandemic. So it is a little bit more of an adjustment to be back in... I mean, it's an adjustment regardless.

Savannah Levin: Right. Yeah. So in that sense it definitely was. And I think a lot of my day was always so active and on my feet. And then you're spending most of your time sitting at a desk. It's very different. But I do think being a student athlete in college helped me tremendously with just trying to balance the time. I think with law school, it's tough, no matter what, because it's just such a large volume of work that you're trying to get done.

And there's only so many hours in a day, and you need to eat and you need to sleep and all of that, and whatever you need to do to stay human. I think having experience beforehand, trying to balance that really helped me. And I just tried to say to myself, when I sit down and I'm at my desk, "Turn everything else off,

get it done." And you get that work done a lot faster than if you're letting yourself get distracted and whatnot.

Alexis Robertso...: Yeah, I've heard something similar to that before, also from people who are collegiate athletes. There is a perspective there. And I'm careful as I say this, not to say that you have to have played sports at the collegiate level to have this level of grit or a perspective.

But I think it'd be remiss to not acknowledge that because there are a ton of demands on people who are able to do both. And I know, I think in particular Von Bryant, episode one, he mentioned it felt like he actually had more time than he was used to having in the academic environment because he didn't have practices and whatnot that he had to be at.

Savannah Levin: Right. You get to give it 100% of your focus. There's really no other distraction.

Alexis Robertso...: No, absolutely. So we make it through, and now we actually are, I think, going to be hitting the pandemic affecting your experience. So you start school, you make it through that adjustment. As we all know, and please stop me if I'm messing up timelines, but the world's definitely changing while you're in law school.

And all of the interview process is actually on a different timeline because of that. So I want to obviously talk about Foley, your summer experience, but people are also going to be listening to this going into interviews depending on the timing.

But so let's talk about the connection with Foley. We'll talk about summer experience. Maybe towards the end we could talk about your thoughts on interviewing any recommendations you have for people. But I'm assuming you connect with Foley through some on campus or virtual interview process, but I could be wrong. Just tell me more about how Foley comes on the radar.

Savannah Levin: Yeah. So I was getting ready for our OCI and whatnot. Foley was actually a resume collect firm for us. And so Foley didn't actually come on campus, but we're collecting resumes from UCI. I ended up getting in contact with someone who used to be a partner actually in the Chicago office, he's no longer with Foley he's in House.

But we were just talking about sports and the current work he's doing. And I saw on his LinkedIn that he used to work at Foley. And so I was like, "Oh, let me ask about that," because just after looking and I've heard other things about Foley, I was he interested. So I figured, let me ask someone who's no longer there who might give a truly brutally honest opinion.

Alexis Robertso...: Yeah. He can be totally candid about it.

Savannah Levin: Exactly. And so he honestly had only good things to say and was so positive about his experience. And I think after speaking to him, I then reached out to someone who was an associate who had graduated from UCI. And so I then spoke to him and very similar things to say about the firm. I think they really were emphasizing the people here. And that's something that was super important to me, trying to find a place where I felt like I could be friends with the people that I was working with.

I know from the team experiences, you spend so much time with people it's just so important that you enjoy that time. And so after that, I was very grateful and lucky that they, I believe, were both willing to kind of pass my a name along. And so I heard from one of the recruiters and then just kind of got the ball rolling from there.

Alexis Robertso...: Take it away into the process. All right. So it's just interesting as I look back, I've said this multiple times, I will say it again, also a great deal of thanks to Foley's recruiting team who as of right now is now recruiting for their second class this year.

Savannah Levin: It's a quick turn around.

Alexis Robertso...: Yeah. So we know that your process, everything was happening in kind of December, January, February of 2020 into 2021, saying these dates in case anyone listens to it in the future, we're now at, literally the last day of July of 2021. All of the various interviewing, a lot of it will start happening next month.

And also for you, it meant there was a little bit shorter of a time between the interview process, getting an offer to come to the firm in the summer and actually starting, because everything happened a bit later. But you started, I think the summer program started around mid-June this year or so.

Savannah Levin: It was, I believe, May 24th.

Alexis Robertso...: Oh my gosh. I'm making up dates. So starts late May, And which Foley office Are you in?

Savannah Levin: I'm in the downtown Los Angeles office.

Alexis Robertso...: Okay. So LA office, you're starting as a summer associate. You don't probably know what to expect. For everybody who is joining us for the summer, you will hear from us definitely before you start on day one. But let's talk about it. Let's talk about how your summer's been. What was that like for you? And maybe we could start off if you had any expectations or concerns. I don't know, but just how did you feel going into the summer?

Savannah Levin: I honestly did not know what to expect, especially given the program was a virtual program, but on an office to office basis, depending on your location.

Some people were able to go in, some weren't. And so I'm really fortunate that I was able to come in and have spent almost every single day in the office. So I didn't know what that would look like.

Alexis Robertso...: Well, and let me pause on that because a couple things that are funny, in talking to the recruiting team, I did hear, the only thing harder than planning a fully virtual program is planning a hybrid one or a combination of both.

Savannah Levin: Oh, I'm sure.

Alexis Robertso...: For listeners who don't know, last year, Summer 2020, Foley did run a summer program. It was condensed because we were all trying to figure out what was going on. This summer, it was the full-time period of a normal program. But due to the various restrictions happening in different cities, they had to treat it and treat a lot of the content or all the content really from the national level, as if it was going to be virtual because you just didn't know.

But because we have 21 offices across the US, different cities are in a different state of it being okay to open. So like you said, there then had to be that added flexibility of, some of you will be able to go into the office, some of you won't be able to the office. Maybe you want to, but can't due to your own personal circumstances of how you've been navigating the pandemic. But you were someone who was able to spend a lot of time in the actual office. And so how did it work? What did you work on this summer?

Savannah Levin: So I'm in the litigation group and I've got a pretty wide range of experience with a lot of the different attorneys and different kinds of assignments. I did some class action work, just some general business litigation, getting ready for an arbitration. It was a big chunk of my summer, was working on a pro bono case, which was actually a criminal case, which was not something I expected I'd be doing this summer. So some government work. It's really been a broad range of experience.

Alexis Robertso...: Yeah, no kidding. You've said a lot of things. And we can even unpack that a little bit because you mentioned in the litigation group. So at Foley, there's a variety of things going on, I think in terms of the type of work someone does, tell me if I'm wrong, but I would imagine your interests lie in litigation. And I hope that's right.

Savannah Levin: Yeah. I'm actually in IT... No, I'm just kidding.

Alexis Robertso...: She's like, "I've been trying to break into transaction all summer." No, I'm just kidding. Depending on the office, the size of the office and the program, some of our summers may have an experience that's like, "I don't quite know what I'm going to do. I'm taking all kinds of different assignments." But others will be more like, "I know what I want to do, and because that, I know that I'm primarily going to work with this practice group as they also have a need."

And I think that's something for law students to keep in mind, that as the firms, we really do want you to be in a practice group that you most enjoy. But we are also trying to project our hiring needs. So depending on what's going on, some firms might be like, "Yes, we have room for summers and they all need to either go to corporate or to bankruptcy because that's where we have needs." Others might say, "Come join us, see what you like, we will figure it out." But I do think depending on the firm, that landscape can vary. And I think that's just some context that maybe as a law student, people don't always appreciate.

Savannah Levin: Definitely. And I wish I had known more of that when going into OCI, because exactly like you said, there's a lot of firms that are specifically trying to slot for a particular practice group. And if it's not something that you're interested in and you don't know that when you're, let's say, bidding, then you could potentially you be, I hate to use the word wasting, but wasting a bit on somewhere that's not going to be a fit for you.

Alexis Robertso...: You can see me nodding so much. And it goes a number of ways because there are also people out there in the world who are like, "I just want a job somewhere. I think I can thrive as a deal lawyer. I could be a litigator." Now, generally I do think people have preferences. But I think the other thing to keep in mind while interviewing is when firms ask you, "What are your interests?"

If you know that under zero circumstances you could ever do transactional work, then say, "I think I'm most interested in being a litigator." But if you're somebody who doesn't, maybe you have an inkling, but you want to try various things, say that as well. "I think my interests lie in litigation, but honestly, I don't know much about the other areas and would be open to those."

Because depending on what the firm is doing, and just to be super clear, I'm talking about the industry now, not just sharing Foley, but depending on what the firm is doing, if you say, "I only want to do X," they're not necessarily going to come back and be like, "Well, we had room in bankruptcy."

Your name can literally get crossed off a list because you said, "I only want to do some niche kind of [crosstalk 00:34:47] work." So yes, yes, yes, yes. I'm not going to lie, I'm so glad that came up. But also going back to the various assignments you worked on, let me just make this crystal clear, you did real work. You just made things that were real things.

Savannah Levin: And it was great. I mean, I got to help write two motions, one reply, a brief one, opposition paper, but real stuff that's being filed at court. It's stuff that you don't, maybe in a clinic you get a little bit of experience doing that in school, but not much. And if you do in school, it's lucky. You don't find that often.

So it's been great getting that type of exposure and really just working on my writing skills and research. And I think the partners and the associates here in the downtown office, I can tell how much they value giving the feedback,

because I can't think of an assignment I've had where I haven't had a conversation afterwards saying, "You did great on this. You can improve on this. And this is how." And that's been great.

Alexis Robertso...: And honestly that's gold. That's how litigators learn. And while it's really, really important for law firms to have, I think, robust professional development and formal training opportunities, and some of that is also included in Foley's summer program. But somebody taking the time to sit down and really go through something with you. By the way, when you see someone's markup, you'll remember it better. Because there is a part of you that's like, "Oh my God."

Savannah Levin: Absolutely.

Alexis Robertso...: Oh, that is how we learn. So it's music to my ears as you can imagine, particularly given my role in the firm, that you had that experience. And yes, listeners, I suspected she had that experience or else maybe we wouldn't have had her on the show. But still, I hope everybody can tell, we are in general having a lot of parts of this conversation for the first time. I don't know specifically what you are going to say, but I think people do know that law firm attorneys are very busy and it does take time away for an associate or for a partner to sit down with the summer.

That is not something that is billable to a client, but I know for Foley, and I think for many firms, it's really important to us that we take that time with people, just for training purposes, but also it's the right relationship to have. And also you said associates and partners, so it sounds like you did get to work with partners as well this summer.

Savannah Levin: Yeah. And they were just as communicative in terms of giving feedback as the associates. Definitely.

Alexis Robertso...: Yeah. So in terms of assignments, I think I know that answer, but I will still ask, how was it that you ended up getting assignments? Did you get to choose some or did they kind of come up organically? How did that work for you?

Savannah Levin: Yeah, it was a mix. So I think at the beginning of the summer, I was more so pulling from the assignment pool, which we have an assignment pool where attorneys can place their assignments and we get to choose, "Oh, this looks interesting to us. I'm going to take this on."

So at the beginning of the summer, it was more of that. But I think as it went on and I developed relationships with different attorneys, they would kind of come to me with either a followup or maybe an assignment that's related the same matter, but not the same kind of assignment at all. And I think that's how my summer progressed. It became a little bit more of just through emails and whatnot.

Alexis Robertso...: It becomes a bit more organic. And it's interesting, another way in which I applaud our recruiting department is, and I want law students to realize this, we actually have to get our lawyers to put assignments in a system. And I think most firms are like this, at least who run larger programs. Attorneys are busy, so often before the summers come, it's just emails and phone calls. Please put things in. We know you have work for them to do. Please put that in.

But I do think you're right, inevitably once you're ramped up and know the ins and outs of something and they've gotten something for you, it's like, "Oh, Savannah, one more thing. Would you mind also doing some research on X, Y, Z?" And I'm sitting here and I'm trying to think of what else, but I think that's a big one that law students want to know is what kind of work did you do? How did you get the work?

And then I think the other thing to keep in mind and I'd love to see if you have some commentary on this, is being a summer associate, we want you to get a sense of what it would be like to be an associate at the firm. But it's not supposed to be an exact simulation and that it's also important for you to have time to get to know people at the firm.

And that happens through, when you were saying aspects of this were virtual, I think a lot of the summer of associate programming were different programs that you were watching virtually. And a lot of that is learning about Foley or hearing about other aspects of the firm. And then also there is that going out to lunch, going out to coffee, or should I say, where permitted via local government and CDC guidelines or whatever, to really get to know people. So your summer wasn't just 100% client work.

Savannah Levin: No, I can say I could count on one hand the number of days I had lunch alone. And so the office isn't entirely full. Of course, people are still working from home and whatnot, but I think that goes to show how many people really took the time. The attorneys can't build that time with us.

So they really made the effort to come in and to spend that time with us. And I think all of us summers, there's five of us in this office, and most of us were coming in pretty regularly. And so we got to do quite a bit of lunches, even just coffee. We did bowling night, we've had some happy hours, a good mix of stuff where we've been able to just get together and chat.

Alexis Robertso...: When you said I rarely had lunch alone, I kind of wanted to clap. I was like, "That is a successful summer." Well, and also I hate to say it, but just in this environment with so many of us navigating the pandemic, we of course have summers who were virtual for probably 99% of experience. And their summer was very different, but that was in light of just what we had to navigate given what's going on in the world.



But even those individuals, I know still spent a lot of time, and a lot of it unfortunately is on the phone or via virtual meetings, getting to know people. And I just can't stress that enough. So as law students going into interviews, who next summer will be summer associates somewhere, please understand, you are also supposed to get to know your firm as a summer.

It's not that you won't be able to do that at all as a first year associate, but the dynamics are different at that time, the billable clock, wherever you are, if you're at Foley or any other firm, it's starting to run, but also building those relationships as a summer can help you when you come in as a first year, because you're not going to get to necessarily work with everybody who's in litigation in the LA office.

But perhaps you got to meet most of those people through the lunches, through activities. So when you come back, they remember you, you remember them, perhaps they said something about a really interesting area of litigation they work in that prompts you to reach out. I can't possibly go through all the combinations and ways that it's helpful just to meet the people.

But I've run in to law students or summer associates who thought it was all about the work. And don't get me wrong, do good work, it's important. But where I was like, "Don't do it to the detriment of you missing things that have been planned for you as a summer associate." We do that for a reason. So I'm just beating a dead horse here, but I just have to make that clear.

Savannah Levin: Yeah, no, it's been a huge part of the summer program as well, is making time for that type of interaction. And I think at least the summers in this office have done that.

Alexis Robertso...: All right. I want to segue, as we come to a close, a little bit to ask your advice to law students, a couple of things, and I'm going to bounce around a bit. You said something earlier, so yeah, Foley has a number of schools that it does on campus interviews or virtual interviews, a number of schools where we collect resumes. But I loved what you said about reaching out to people who knew this firm. Do you have advice about that? About learning about firms? What law students should do and why you did what you did?

Savannah Levin: Yeah. So I think sending emails to people at firms, this is what I did, I tried to go through people's bios and find something that connected to myself, whether it was that they had some time at USC or UCI or spoke a language, anything.

Alexis Robertso...: Played soccer, anything.

Savannah Levin: Yeah. Could be anything. But that you could connect to. And I basically sent emails. I wrote a little bit about myself in the email and then said, "I would love to set up a time to chat. If you have any time, I would really appreciate it." And I think for me, that was the best way to get to know both the firm and for myself,

whether or not it was a place that I wanted to bid on or whether I wanted to really pursue going after.

And I think it's also, once people can kind of get a sense of who you are before the actual OCI process begins, people will see your name or maybe even give your name to the recruiter if the conversation goes well. And so I think that's something I highly recommend. At UCI, they call them informational calls and interviews. So doing those, I think that was a big reason why I had success in my process.

Alexis Robertso...:

And I think that's time well spent. And I realize for a number of people listening to this, that's going to be advice that's a little bit too late, because they've already done their bid process or they're maybe already in interviews. But that advice I think can apply other times in life. And actually I was just doing a recruiting panel where someone asked, "What if we're in the midst of interviews, should we still be doing those sorts of things?"

I will say, it can get a little bit interesting if you're already in process. Because you don't want to make it seem like you're trying to skirt around things. But that being said, reaching out to people who you're connected to, or you have a commonality with, to say, "I have a callback interview with X firm. Could you tell me more about them? Your experience there?" That is different, but of course always use your judgment.

So I do just want to give that caveat, knowing the timing of when this podcast is going out. But I think a lot of that also applies when people listen to this later, perhaps they're looking for [inaudible 00:44:56] opportunities or anything else. And then also, of course I have to ask, final thoughts, advice, whatever it may be.

And this is not your final takeaway, by the way, I just want to be clear. But about the summer program, I don't know if you have general advice about going into the summer program or just observations yet to share, but I want to leave an opportunity for that.

Savannah Levin:

I think just ask questions and ask a lot of them because my biggest bit of nerves coming in was, I don't know specifically what I want to practice within litigation. I don't have all of the experience that would make me substantively this massive contributor to... I'm still learning.

And so I think showing people that you're curious and that you care, I think for me, that was a huge part of how I was able to build relationships here and contribute, was just getting into the nitty-gritty of cases and trying to really understand and what's going on and how I could contribute in whatever way I could.

Alexis Robertso...: That is huge. And by the way, maybe I should have made that the final question because that was fantastic.

Savannah Levin: It can be.

Alexis Robertso...: I don't know, we're going to keep going for just another minute or two. But that's fantastic advice. And I think as you just said, it can be a bit daunting. You go from law school, suddenly you're in this tall building with an office and you can wonder, "Do they want to hear from me? Is it okay for me to ask?"

And by the way, these feelings are the same feelings you have when you start as a first year associate. So, yes, ask the question. That is wonderful, wonderful advice. The other thing I just wanted to say as we do wind down is, it's a big process that everyone's going through, whether or not you're interviewing through on campus, virtual interviews, the [inaudible 00:46:37] process.

But I think in general, that human connection, I just have to stress it, and you already did, and I'll just stress it one more time. Learn the basics. So law students, learn the basics from the websites and from the rankings. But if you have the bandwidth to reach out to people, obviously with Foley, we are very different right now because there's 54 episodes of lawyers you can listen to.

The episode before this one or a couple before this one is going to be about all things recruiting. A lot of that's at Foley. So you're getting a real way to get an insight scoop at this firm, particularly if you're listening to this. But I just can't stress enough to do the human thing. And so I love that you did that. I did not prompt you. I didn't say, "Say this during the podcast."

Savannah Levin: I got a script.

Alexis Robertso...: Exactly. And if you did, well done. But overall I can't thank you enough for sharing your experience at the firm. And I do want to give you one more opportunity to just leave me advice to anybody who's contemplating law school, or I don't know if there's anything else you would like to add before we leave, but I want to give you that opportunity as well.

Savannah Levin: More in terms of just again, the OCI process, I think being yourself and just trying your absolute best to, don't try to pretend your interests are something that they're not or anything like that. Because at the end of the day, your resume and your transcripts and all of that, that will speak for itself.

And I think through the interview process, at least from my experience, a lot of firms are trying to find someone that personality-wise is going to be a fit with the firm. They can already see you're capable of getting good scores and doing that kind of work. But in terms of spending time with people and getting to see who has the same type of goals and personalities, I think that's huge.

Alexis Robertso...: That is wonderful advice. I love that you said that also. That's making my diversity director's heart smile. Because I actually think this whole podcast proves what you said. We are looking for people. We can read your accomplishments from your resume, we really want to know who you are and for entry-level hiring or summer associate hiring, that is the interview process.

So try to be, as you said, your authentic self. But with that Savannah, I'll just thank you so much for taking the time within your last few hours of officially being a summer associate at Foley, to be on this show. And for listeners, if you have questions for Savannah, she will not be on Foley's website, because she's not yet an associate here, but she will be. You can find her on LinkedIn. And it's okay if people reach out to you over LinkedIn?

Savannah Levin: Yeah, of course.

Alexis Robertso...: All right. Thank you so much, Savannah.

Savannah Levin: Thank you.

Alexis Robertso...: Thank you for listening to The Past & 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, because your feedback on the podcast is important to us.

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