

Alexis Robertso...: Welcome to The Path and the Practice, a podcast dedicated to sharing the professional origin stories of the attorneys at Foley & Larder LLP, a full service law firm with over 1,000 lawyers across the US and abroad. I'm your host, Alexis Robertson, director of diversity and inclusion at Foley. In each episode of this podcast, you'll hear me in conversation with a different Foley attorney. You'll learn about each guest's unique background, path to law school, and path to Foley & Larder.

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 Doug Lightfoot. Doug is currently a summer associate with Foley and Lardner in the firm's Washington, DC office. And yes, you heard that right. He is currently a summer associate, because Doug was kind enough to join me on the show his second week being a summer associate at Foley. Although one of the reasons I wanted him on the show is because Doug was also with the firm last summer, which was his 1L summer.

I had to get Doug on to talk about his experience as a summer associate and how it is and why it is that he's decided to join Foley and Lardner for both summers of his time in law school. But additionally, because this is The Path and the Practice, I, of course, have to get Doug to reflect on his journey to law school and how and why it was that he connected with Foley. That begins with him talking about growing up in Macon, Georgia, him reflecting on his decision to attend Morehouse College, as well as Howard University Law School.

I also use Doug's experiences at Morehouse and Howard to talk a bit about the importance of historically black colleges and universities, or HBCUs as they're often called. Doug reflects a bit on how important it was to him to attend an HBCU for both undergrad and for law school and how it is that they've shaped who he is. But addition to that, Doug discusses the five years that he spent serving for the US Coast Guard between graduating from college and attending law school.

This episode is jam-packed with interesting stories and advice particularly to someone in law school or interested in joining Foley & Larder LLP. And something I will note is that I always encourage listeners to reach out to guests, and this episode is no exception. But please know that because Doug is a summer associate, he's not on Foley's website. So if you want to reach out to Doug, please find him on his LinkedIn page.

And also, if you enjoy hearing about his experience as a summer associate, check out episode 23, which features Nick Benson, who is another summer associate at Foley. With that, I hope you enjoy at my conversation with Doug.

Doug Lightfoot, welcome to The Path and The Practice. A little bit unique because you are currently a summer associate at Foley & Larder LLP, but I'm still

just going to start this how I always start this, which is, can you introduce yourself?

Doug Lightfoot: Yeah, for sure. Like you said, my name's Doug Lightfoot. I'm a 3L at Howard University School of Law. And this summer, I'm working with Foley as a IP summer associate.

Alexis Robertso...: That's really exciting. A couple things, Doug, and I just had some really fun technical issues, so we're happy to be talking to each other at all. But also, you were with Foley last summer, your 1L summer. You're back for your 2L summer. Both summers are affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which I'm sure we'll get to and talk a little bit about. But before we talk about your law school experience, your summer associate experience, let's talk a bit about you and start somewhat at the beginning, which is, where are you from? Where did you grow up?

Doug Lightfoot: Okay, sure. I'm from a very small town in Georgia, Columbus, Georgia. It's West Georgia. So right before you get to Alabama, that's where you find Columbus. I stayed there until I was about six, seven, then we moved to Macon, Georgia.

Alexis Robertso...: And then you grew up in Macon. And what was it like growing up in Macon, Georgia? Give me a snapshot.

Doug Lightfoot: It's a very, very small town. There's not much to do. We really just kind of went to school, came back home. Very close family. Spent a lot of time together honestly.

Alexis Robertso...: And let's say I found you in middle school. What were you into? What were your hobbies? What were your interests?

Doug Lightfoot: Oh man, I was a huge basketball enthusiast. You couldn't tell me I wasn't going into the NBA at that time, all five foot four inches of me. But yeah, that was my big thing, sports, athletics. Always been big into just being active.

Alexis Robertso...: What teams do you root for? You've listened to the show before. You may know, I'm like, go sports. I'm not a major sports enthusiast, but I feel obligated to ask, who are your teams. And then also, what sports did you play?

Doug Lightfoot: As a Down South Georgia boy, I'm everything Georgia, so Atlanta Falcons, Atlanta Hawks, who are in the NBA Playoffs right now doing really well. Just put out the Knicks, so I'm excited about that. And Georgia Bulldogs.

Alexis Robertso...: You played a lot of sports too as a kid? Just give me a sense of like what you were doing. I'm trying to show how normal you are before you decide to go to law school. That's the point of all this.

Doug Lightfoot: I don't know if normal is the right word, but I definitely... I've wrestled for three years in high school. I played basketball. I played baseball, soccer. A little bit of almost everything. The only thing I don't think I've done is swim, because I didn't learn how to swim until I got into high school.

Alexis Robertso...: Now, I'm guessing that middle school version of yourself who thought he was going to be in the NBA, despite height challenges perhaps, he wasn't like, I want to grow up and be an IP lawyer.

Doug Lightfoot: No.

Alexis Robertso...: I'm interested to close that gap, but let's walk a little bit forward. Let's say it's high school. You're considering going to college. What was that process like for you? How did you decide where to go?

Doug Lightfoot: There was a lot of things that went into that decision, and actually where I thought I was going to school was UNC Charlotte at the time for undergrad. However, the Navy reached out to me or the Navy Unit at Morehouse reached out to me and was like, "Hey, we can get you a scholarship." And once they said that, my parents were like, "Yeah, no, we're not spending money for you to go anywhere else." That's how I ended up at Morehouse College.

Alexis Robertso...: And what does that mean? What is the Navy Unit? Tell me more. What did that mean you had enrolled in or signed up for?

Doug Lightfoot: I had signed up to basically join the Navy as an officer immediately after undergrad. They were paying for everything, my room, my board, tuition. I was actually getting a small stipend, so life was pretty good. However, I was getting up at like 5:00 in the morning and doing PT and doing drill and stuff like that. I don't know if that was the best fit for me in undergrad, especially since I was like 17 and still trying to have a social life and everything else.

So ended up getting out of the Navy program, a little bit pushed out of the Navy program, and still was able to finish my degree. That's how I ended up at Morehouse.

Alexis Robertso...: It's a lot to try and decide what you want to do for the rest of your life at 17. This podcast is ultimately... It's for anyone interested in law firms or legal practice or who's a lawyer, but I think it also does exhibit that, that most of us when we were 17, 18 years old did not know what we wanted to do. You've seen it. There's a number of these podcasts where someone's like, "Yep. Thought I was going to do X. Definitely did not do X. Ended up doing this other thing." What did you end up majoring in or focusing on when you were at Morehouse?

Doug Lightfoot: I was really big into technology, so I was like, okay, how can I leverage that into a career? I came to Morehouse. I was like, I'm going to be a computer engineer

originally. That was my goal. That was my plan. Learned that engineering may not be the thing for me, so I actually changed to computer science I think my freshman year. And then I picked up a math minor, so computer science, math minor. I got my BS in those two things.

Alexis Robertso...: Wow! You're like way more sort of hardcore technology STEM sort of stuff. Can I ask you where does that interest come from? Is that something that was a thread when you were younger as something you were interested in, or were you exposed to it through something?

Doug Lightfoot: Yeah, for sure. I think being one of the... Well, I think our generation is the first to really grow up with technology in the household. I think having that computer and being super intrigued by like, "Oh, what does this thing do? What all can I do on it?" And it was really birth at a pretty young age.

Alexis Robertso...: That's really interesting. Keep going. Now what? Actually for you, I can slow down. I'm sorry. I'm used to having sometimes people on the podcast who've been practicing for like 30 years, but we can unpack this a little bit as you have not started your practice. I forget. You graduate for Morehouse. Talk to me about your process of law school, deciding where to go to law school, or even deciding to go to law school, because we didn't even get to that part yet. Perhaps start there.

Doug Lightfoot: Okay. Deciding to go to law school, that really didn't happen until undergrad. My folks are very blue collar workers. Works very, very hard and they've always preached education. My dad always like, "Policy. Policy. Policy. You've got to influence policy on some level." And that kind of, I guess, was him manifesting us going to law school, because my younger brother also just graduated law school from North Carolina Central. That's where the seed was planted, but it didn't really come back to me until undergrad.

I think I was in my either junior or senior year and my brother had had an unfortunate run in with a police officer and it kind of like pushed both of us back down like, okay, this is why we wanted to be lawyers.

Alexis Robertso...: And I have to go back for one second to your dad talking about influencing policy. I'm now imagining you all around the table when you're like, I don't know, 12 and your dad's like, "The key is, you need to do something that influences policy."

Doug Lightfoot: And it's funny because it's really how the conversation went. I don't know if it's foreshadowing or if he's a fortune teller, but yeah.

Alexis Robertso...: That's amazing. My children are seven and 10. Occasionally I will tell them, "Oh, you need to eventually start getting a sense of what's out there in the world to decide what you're interested in." But now I'm like, should I be planting more of

these seeds now that'll maybe blossom when they're in college? I am failing at my job right now. I need to tell them to influence policy.

Doug Lightfoot: Not at all. It's crazy what we hold onto and what comes back to us at different points of our lives, for sure. But yeah, he definitely planted that seed for us and it just kind of resonated once we got older.

Alexis Robertso...: You decide. You focused on technology, but I'm guessing is this like your junior, senior year of college that this this seed starts to flourish, to keep the metaphor going, that you start thinking law school is the next step up, or when did that happen for you?

Doug Lightfoot: It was definitely senior year when I was like, okay, I'm not in ROTC program anymore. What do I want the next five years of my life to look like? I graduate. I start working for a consulting firm as like a business analyst, and I was doing a great job. I love the job, but I still had an obligation to the military. I got a bill for like \$60,000 and \$2,000 pass due already. And as a recent college grad, I was like, "I can't do this right now." I decided to put an officer candidate application in for the coast guard.

I was fortunate enough to be picked up. I was able to serve five years, and it was great. I stationed in New Orleans, stationed in DC. It was while I was in the military that law school came back to me. I was like, okay, this is great, but how long am I going to put off this next step that I know is the next step? I talked to my commander at the time and he was like, "Yeah, if that's what you want to do, then I'm going to encourage you to do it." I had a little nest egg saved up, so I thought I was in a good position to make that transition. And so I did.

Alexis Robertso...: Wow! We're going back to the coast guard though. We're going to talk more about law school in a second, but you're not going to tell me that you were in the coast guard for five years. I'm like, okay, let's go..." No. I want to hear about that. You mentioned a number of places that you lived but I've never worked in the coast guard. I don't have anyone close to me who has. For the listeners, but also just for me, Doug, tell me about what was your job? What were you doing during that time period?

Doug Lightfoot: I was a response officer. My job was really a drug interdiction, migrate interdiction, hazardous material response. I went to work when unfortunate situations occurred, but it was a lot of fun. It was very interesting work. I worked with some really, really great, great people, great coasty stuff. It was a great five years.

Alexis Robertso...: Wow! Sorry, I'm going to keep asking you, because I'm realizing how ignorant I am about the coast guard. I think of coast guard as like search and rescue on some sort of boat because happen on the ocean. The words you said can sort of align with that, but not completely. Explain to me even like... This wasn't

supposed to be a pop quiz, but even sort of jurisdictionally. What does the coast guard cover? What do you get called to do the things that you just mentioned?

Doug Lightfoot: What does the coast guard cover? That's a great question. The search and rescue permission is a large mission for the coast guard. It's actually part of the response mission. There was that piece, and it's any coastal waterway. So anything on the Great Lakes to rivers and just any waterway or large body of water within the United States, coast guard operates for sure.

Alexis Robertso...: Well, I'm also just remembering you saying all the sports you did and you're like, not swimming because I didn't learn to swim. Did you have to learn to swim or were you mostly on land?

Doug Lightfoot: That was probably the worst part of officer candidate school for me, because I did learn how to swim in high school. But there's a swim requirement. I had to do I think it's like 18 laps in a certain amount of time. I struggled. I was in like a remedial swim program for the entire time I was in officer candidate school. But I ended up finally I think maybe two, three weeks before graduation passing the swim piece and moving on. But yeah, it was a struggle. It was definitely a struggle.

Alexis Robertso...: Okay, and I'm just belaboring this point. So everybody, I apologize. But the work you did for the coast guard, you were not like jumping out of a helicopter to save somebody who was drowning in the ocean sort of thing. Were you more so on the land, or were you doing water related rescue as well?

Doug Lightfoot: No. I was more so on the land. I wasn't really jumping out of... I would have loved to do that. I've gotten to ride on a couple helicopters, but no, I've never jumped out one. I much prefer to stay inside.

Alexis Robertso...: Okay, and maybe because it's early in the morning, I'm just not the quickest right now. Can you just repeat once again the type of work that you did? You said it initially and I've since asked you a few more questions, but just repeat the type of work that you did do while you were there.

Doug Lightfoot: Oh, sure. When I was working at headquarters here in DC, we were coordinating the drug interdiction, rescue, migrant interdiction, and hazardous material response type stuff. That was the bulk of my mission.

Alexis Robertso...: And then ultimately, a couple of podcasts back, I had Ralph Rodriguez, who's a council in Foley's Miami office, who spent a number of years in law enforcement before he became an attorney, including working for the ATF as an agent, but also being, I think, patrolman for the Miami PD and a detective. I'm like he was in law enforcement. Is coast guard also considered law enforcement as well?

Doug Lightfoot: Yes, very much so. Yes. Absolutely.

Alexis Robertso...: Yeah, that's what I thought. That's incredibly interesting. I feel under prepared because I feel like there's more things I should ask you about what it's like to work in the coast guard. But here's what I will do, and maybe we can connect the sort of work ethic and things you learned during that five year period to that transition to law school, but like you said, you have the support of your senior leaders within the coast guard once you decided to apply to law school.

You do that. What was the process for you? How did you figure out you wanted to go to school?

Doug Lightfoot: Well, going to Morehouse, I had a love and a value or an appreciation for HBCUs or historically black colleges. I thought it was important for me to continue that. I was like, okay, I know that if you go to Howard Law that you have everything available to you. You want big law? You can absolutely do big law. If you're into public interest, there's absolutely public interest work for you there. I wanted to continue that HBCU vein. I wanted to be at an HBCU, but I wanted to be able to do whatever I wanted coming from an HBCU. That's why I chose Howard.

Alexis Robertso...: Yeah, and I was going to say just so we can take a moment to educate listeners who aren't as familiar with historically black colleges and universities, for the historically black colleges and universities that have law schools, I think there are only five or six of them. Howard tends to be the only one that is on the radar of most large organizations, including large law firms. I know that is something that my role at Foley's, director of diversity and inclusion, that I am looking to change.

But just to add I think a little bit of extra context to that decision making process, if you want to go to an HBCU with the law school, and like you said, have that option of going to a large law firm, Howard in many ways is sort of the default decision for many, for factors and reasons that we would love to change one day.

Doug Lightfoot: Yeah, absolutely.

Alexis Robertso...: And also, I don't know if you have any thoughts on this, but we've definitely had Foley attorneys on the show who attended either... Actually you might be the first one at Howard Law now that I think about it. I think we've had some people who went for undergrad and Shana Bell was on the show and she went to FAMU for undergrad. But I think it's nice to just take a moment to talk about the difference in attending an HBCU.

I did not attend a historically black college or university, but I'm someone who predominantly grew up in environments where my educational institutions were all predominantly white. I did think I really, really wanted to go to Spelman. It did not work out that way. I ended up not attending. But from my many friends who did go to HBCUs, I think finding yourself in an environment

where perhaps for the first time in your life you are in the majority can have profound effects on your self-confidence, on your overall education.

I don't know if you have any comments on that, but I did just want to add that context because I think there may be some people who listen who just aren't familiar with an HBCU or why that experience can be so meaningful to a black person.

Doug Lightfoot: Yeah, for sure. I think you're absolutely right. It gives a confidence that I don't know that you would get in other settings, because it creates a safe space. You can be genuinely and authentically you all the time. Say something's going on in the world, be it George Floyd or anything, you can have that space where you can openly talk to your professors. It's a much smaller class size as well. Where other people have a hundred plus in a classroom, we've got 20, 30 people sitting together and having this authentic, genuine conversation.

I don't know. There's just this ability to really open up. Be vulnerable. You take that out into your practice or wherever you're going after. It's super empowering actually. I thank Howard a lot for that.

Alexis Robertso...: Yeah, absolutely. I think I've just gleaned that from the many friends and colleagues I've had who have attended Howard or Morehouse or Spelman or FAMU or Hampton, like any of the many HBCUs. But I think that vulnerability and that feeling like it's okay to be my true authentic self and doing that early in life so that you can take, like you said, that empowerment or frankly just that trust and belief in yourself with you wherever you go, particularly for most black professionals as we go back into majority white environments.

And not to get too off on like a life coaching tangent, but I think that that ability and that power to believe in yourself and truly connect with who you really are is a journey that we're all on just in life in general. But to have the seeds of that planted so early is really powerful. And of course, I'd be remiss if I didn't say, there also is just a unique bond amongst Morehouse men in general that we also have to touch on just a little bit.

Doug Lightfoot: There's like a saying that says, you can tell a Morehouse man, but you can't tell him much. I don't know how true it is, but yeah, there's definitely a network there. I've connected with the DC chapter of Morehouse alums and they're great. They're fantastic.

Alexis Robertso...: Absolutely. You started at Howard.

Doug Lightfoot: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alexis Robertso...: You've been out of school for five years, so I imagine there is an adjustment in going back to school and going back to law school. Tell me what that was like for you. What was it like starting in law school?

Doug Lightfoot: Well, one, I actually really love law school. I enjoy it. I think just the way my brain works. It makes sense. I need to understand the why to really do my best work, and that's required a lot in law school. It has been difficult, however, being an older student and trying to maybe connect with your peers and your colleagues. But I think if you put forth that genuine effort and you kind of yourself out there, people are willing to open up and give you the help that you need.

I've got an awesome study group at Howard, got a lot of resources and professors, and they made the transition easier. It's still been difficult to go from working full-time to being a law school student full-time, but it's been awesome. They've been really good to me.

Alexis Robertso...: Maybe we can probe a little bit about that transition, but I love something that you said about the why is so foundational as a law student to what you're learning. It takes me back to when I was in law school, which was some time ago, better part of 15 years ago, but I was notorious for raising my hand and asking the most basic question. The question that maybe certain people wouldn't ask for fear of somebody thinking you weren't the smartest.

But because I was building that why this and why this and then this, I found that I often would just have to double myself, raise my hand, and be like, "Excuse me. Are you saying the sky is blue? I just wanted to make sure it was blue and not overcast, because I'm trying to understand how we got to that stormy day last Tuesday." Right? It just takes me back that I was like, I have to ask this basic question, or else I can't follow you on the why. You're bringing me back.

Doug Lightfoot: I'm sure people make it tired of being my questions, but I can't help it. If I don't understand, I'm not going to do well. I wasn't the greatest student undergrad. I need to really change that narrative now that I'm in law school.

Alexis Robertso...: I'm so with you on that. I think also whether if someone has scholarships or not, money is being spent. This is a significant amount of time and money for me to be in this room right now and for me to read these books and learn. I have to ask the question, and there's plenty of people who might be like, "Oh, I'll just figure it out later."

But I think it's really important to do everything you can to get it as best you can and to take advantage in class and also extra hours with professors for the exact reason you said. Because if I don't get it, I can't do well.

Doug Lightfoot: Yeah, exactly. For sure.

Alexis Robertso...: Tell me just a little bit more about that adjustment. I don't know if it'll be so much related to the transitioning from working full-time, particularly in a law enforcement capacity, to being a student. But also we all know that law school has sort of a different way of teaching, a different way of learning. I don't know

if you had to adjust to that at all, but I'd love if you could share some more about it.

Doug Lightfoot: Yeah. It doesn't bother me so much the teaching style because coming from the military, I'm used to being like, there's a lot of people that are in your face sometimes, so it's okay. But the Socratic method can definitely be intimidating to some, and I can understand why. But end of the day, I recognize we're still people, we're still human, and just trying to seek that human connection. If you need to stay for the office hours or you need to study just a little bit longer, get with your study or whatever.

I can definitely understand why people struggle, but I love law school. I love the Socratic method. Yeah, it's great.

Alexis Robertso...: That's funny. Sorry. You're just going to take me back to my advice to law students and some of the advice that I got. But I remember when I started in law school, I got advice that was like, if you're going to be wrong, be wrong confidently.

Doug Lightfoot: Absolutely. Jump all the way out there.

Alexis Robertso...: Be wrong so the entire world can hear you.

Doug Lightfoot: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Alexis Robertso...: For particularly that first year with the Socratic method and the professor calling on you. It's weird right now. I don't know what the dynamic is like over people who had like Zoom classes the last year. You might have some thoughts on that. But back when we were all in the same room together, you get called on. You may or may not know the answer. And if you do or you don't, just say it loudly so at least we don't have to crane to hear you. Don't make it worse by saying it under your breath.

Doug Lightfoot: Yeah. If you're wrong with confidence, I'm more inclined to believe you.

Alexis Robertso...: Oh, no. That's a good half of being a lawyer. I'm just kidding. But there is like certain just the PR of being a professional. But the other thing is, and you touched on the office hours, my advice to law students, and I did this some in law school, but probably not as much as I should have, really is to take advantage of those office hours. There are a number of professors... It sounds like the dynamic might be different at Howard with the smaller class sizes. But there are a number of professors who, in many ways, they're there to do research and write.

And some of them will treat the teaching part as it's maybe not their favorite. They may give you the impression that they wouldn't be the most welcoming should you show up at office hours. Show up anyway.

Doug Lightfoot: Absolutely.

Alexis Robertso...: Because they just might sort of give you the keys to the kingdom in terms of knowing what to study or the type of tests you're going to have at the end. Once again, you're paying too much money not to just show up anyway.

Doug Lightfoot: Exactly.

Alexis Robertso...: Exactly. But also, what has it been like for you this past... I almost feel like I'm doing this for posterity, getting a law student who just finished the second year of law school during a pandemic. What has that dynamic been like with so many things being remote?

Doug Lightfoot: Now, that has been difficult. I think a lot of law school is a human element. There's not many people that would say law school is fun, but that human element, that's the little bit of fun that you do have. To remove that, especially with older professors who may not be as tech savvy trying to teach over Zoom, it's a lot of just talking at you sometimes. But I think we're all making do the best we can.

I think if you keep that perspective, keep that lens, then it makes it all a lot more reasonable. It's definitely not easy for sure, but it's a pandemic. What can you do?

Alexis Robertso...: The best part is, Doug, I look forward to maybe you'll listen to this podcast in like two or three years. You'll already be like a second or third year associate at Foley. This will take you right back. But talk to me about how did you get... Well, two things. We need to get to the interest and focus on IP, but I also need to get the connection with Foley. Here's a 1L. Tell me how it is that you ended up working with Foley last summer. And of course, what has brought you back this summer?

I hope it's because you liked us, but I still have to ask the question. Tell me about those two things.

Doug Lightfoot: Well, I hope you like my answer. We'll see. But actually 1L year, it was around October, because it was right around my birthday. I started looking around at different firms and thinking about applying because like, okay, I need to make sure I can sustain myself. I got to get a paid internship, got to get a paid summer associate position somewhere. I was doing all this apply. Everything was going okay. I was getting interviews, but I never applied to Foley.

I didn't think about Foley originally, but there was a recruiter at Foley who actually reached out to me on LinkedIn and that kind of went a long way.

Alexis Robertso...: Was it Steve, by the way?

Doug Lightfoot: It was. It was Steve.

Alexis Robertso...: Steve Fundarek is fantastic. Shout out to Steve.

Doug Lightfoot: He's awesome.

Alexis Robertso...: Go on.

Doug Lightfoot: That meant a lot to me. It was like, oh, he actually found me, reached out, and followed up. I took that. I actually applied to Foley. I had my interview, and I got the offer. I was still entertaining like a couple of other offers at the time. But the way my interviews went with Foley, it really turned into a conversation. It was less so about, okay, tell me about this. Explain this grade. Do this. It was more so, okay, what are you interested in? Okay. Tell me what do you think about the firm thus far?

What would you like your practice to look like you think? I think because of those kind conversations, that made my mind that I was going to Foley 1L year. I was like, okay, I don't know what other firms are like, but I don't think this is normal, so I'm going to Foley.

Alexis Robertso...: Yeah, but this place feels good. I don't think I'm going to be wrong on the timeline here, but when all that interview was happening, that is before the world changed.

Doug Lightfoot: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alexis Robertso...: Of course, we all know what happens March 2020, and then there's this thing. Lots of stuff changed in the world, but in large law firms, at least as it relates to recruiting, we were like, oh my gosh, what do we do with our summer associate program? Some firms decided, we're not going to do it. But at Foley, what we did end up doing is scrambling. And my hat also is off to Amy Moynihan, our rector of legal recruiting at Foley. She and her team pulled together a virtual summer program in a very short period of time.

You did still work with Foley last summer as a 1L, but it was our first summer of COVID-19 and a fully virtual summer program. I don't know if you want to reflect on sort of like any concerns you might had time as you're waiting to see what Foley was going to do, but then also what it was like being a virtual summer.

Doug Lightfoot: Well, I was really nervous. It was like, okay, I know some firms are canceling their summer programs. I was like, okay, I really need some type of experience, but I was looking forward to being paid as well. That was definitely a major concern for me. The fact that Foley put together... Not even threw together, really planned and put together a meaningful summer program, that was amazing.

And don't get me wrong, I think meeting people for the first time and having these coffee chats via Zoom or Microsoft Teams, it may not feel very organic, but again, there was genuine effort that went into that. I thought that was great. And then it was still substantive work. There was actual value added last summer. I got to work on some great patent projects and do some like really, really cool things. Though it was virtual and I think it threw everyone for a loop, everyone did as good as could have been done, I think.

Alexis Robertso...: No, I think that's exactly right. If it wouldn't ruin my audio, I would do a slow clip app for Foley's recruiting team, because I think it's really hard to understand the administrative lift that when you have to turn all of your summer program and so many other of our talent facing function is on a dime to be fully virtual. I continually applaud them, because I'm so impressed by what they did. Yeah, we had a chance to connect last summer as well and all the feedback that I got...

And I've actually had one other summer associate on the podcast to talk about that experience, but it was definitely unique, but the firm really did endeavor to get as much substantive experience, while still giving sense for who Foley & Lardner is. Because of course, usually as a summer associate, there's a fair amount of opportunity to sort of like go to lunch, go to events, get to know people in person. We tried really hard to simulate that virtually. We did sort of skip over the connection with IP.

I'm guessing as a part of that... Because Steve is an IP recruiter actually at Foley. I'm assuming when you first reached out, he was like, "Hey, we're focused on IP here. Is this something you'd be interested in?" Is that sort of how that came to be?

Doug Lightfoot: It did. Actually coming into law school, I had an idea that, okay, IP is where I want to be. Since I had a tech background, I wanted to kind of stay in a tech space somewhat. This kind of allowed me to do that. Yeah, Steve reached out to me. He's like, "Hey yeah, you've got the basic qualifications. If you're interested, we'd love for you to interview." That's how I ended up at Foley IP.

Alexis Robertso...: Well, and sorry, I started laughing as you said you meet the basic qualifications. I'm sure you were well beyond and you blew those qualifications. I'm just kidding. I will do just an appreciative mention of Steve Fundarek as well because he's taken on a lot of roles here, but he's a former legal recruiter who also does some dedicated recruiting for IP because of that highly technical background needed. We have a focus on filling that part of the firm as well. We're full service, but we have a very large IP department.

Now we have you back here and I kind of skipped ahead for whatever reason forgetting you were with us last summer, which means when you have the opportunity to go to a firm as a 1L, you have the opportunity to come back as a 2L, and we are so happy that you decided to come back with Foley this summer.

At this point, you're, what, maybe you're two weeks in? Is this your second week?

Doug Lightfoot: Yeah. End of the second week. End of second week.

Alexis Robertso...: End of the second week, which I'm keenly aware of because I always aspire to reach out to all the summer associates and I think I will this summer. But I also know that if I put my head down for too long and blink, the summer will be over.

Doug Lightfoot: Right. It goes by so fast.

Alexis Robertso...: It goes by really fast. And then this summer, of course, we're still navigating this sort of pandemic world, somewhat virtual, but people are able to go into the office sometimes. I think you're likely getting more of an opportunity to meet people in person, but we very much want to respect everybody's concerns or any local ordinances regarding the management of things. But once again, you're still semi-virtual, but not as much this summer.

Doug Lightfoot: Mm-hmm (affirmative). It's still semi virtual, but I do appreciate the hybrid piece. Actually I was able to come in for a lunch with some attorneys two days ago. And actually seeing these people face to face after talking to them for a year now is definitely appreciated. I think the hybrid aspect definitely is making this much more meaningful, at least for me. I just really like interacting with other people and I can't do that as well through a screen.

Alexis Robertso...: Absolutely. You just see me nodding my head so much as you say that. I'm really sympathetic to... I mean, honestly, there are so many things you're sympathetic too, but focusing on the legal world and law students who've been working with firms either. This year or last summer, there's literally law students who physically had not walked into their law firm before starting as full-time associates due to things being so virtual. It's definitely some strange times. We're definitely making the best of it.

But I've found as outgoing as a person as I may be, I desperately miss the in person interaction. A colleague of mine from the Chicago office, because we also have not been in, was like, "Oh, maybe we'll be in the office the same days over these coming weeks as the world starts opening back up." And I far too enthusiastically responded to his mention, "We should go to coffee," I was like, "Oh my God, that'd be amazing," because I haven't done stuff like that in well over a year.

We're all sort of adjusting as we step out of our COVID cocoon, which is just really interesting. But anyway, tell me a little bit in the last few minutes that we have together, in these first few weeks at Foley, have you already been able to dive in and get some assignments? What have you been up to the last couple weeks?

Doug Lightfoot: Oh yeah, for sure. The first week is always like a lot of training and orientation, but even still, that very first week I had two, three projects already assigned to me. It's not like overwhelming work or anything like that, but it's actually value adding work. Right now I'm working on a couple patent cases for a couple different partners. But yeah, it's been great. It's not as overwhelming as an actual associate maybe, but I'm still doing some good stuff.

Alexis Robertso...: Cool. And I like the way you said that because I think that's actually the perfect balance is ideally as a summer associate, whether someone is at Foley or another firm, you do get to do some real work that allows you to feel what it feels like to be a new associate. But also even when virtual, some of your time should be dedicated to getting to know people and to getting to know the firm, because that stuff you may not have the time to do once you start.

I say that right now almost as a PSA to the law students listening who will occasionally, and this is not to say you shouldn't take it seriously because you should, but who will almost take the work product so seriously that they cut out the time to do the rest of the social stuff. And I think that's a really big mistake. Those things are planned for a reason. They're so you can get to know the culture of a firm and get to know people.

So that when you come back and you're looking for work, you already have five people you want to call because you know them, because you met them at that thing when you were a summer associate.

Doug Lightfoot: Yeah. I was actually talking to an attorney at Foley recently. A lot of people get caught up in like rankings and everything else. Rankings are great. Rankings are cool. But do you actually like working with the people that you work with? And that's what's most important to me. Definitely take rankings into consideration. But again, that human element matters a lot.

Alexis Robertso...: I like to think, giving myself way too much credit, this podcast at least lets people really tap into the human element of Foley & Lardner. I hope that many more large law firms launch this sort of thing where you can passively learn about the lawyers at their firm. But right now I think we might be it, and we're almost 50 episodes in. You might actually be episode 49 or 50, which is hard to believe. But if you want to know more about Foley, if you've listened this episode with Doug, go back and listen to some of the others.

But in our last few minutes together, Doug, I wanted to get sort of your insights and your advice, particularly for somebody... And I'm not quite sure how you wanted style this. If it's somebody interested in a legal career or perhaps somebody who's taken some time off before going to law school, what's your advice for them? What should they keep in mind, or what could they do just to help make navigating that process a little bit easier?

Doug Lightfoot: I would say that there is no one right way to start your journey. I think however that looks for you, do that. But it's absolutely worthwhile, I think. I've met some amazing people along my path. I've learned some great things along the way. If that's where your heart and your journey aligns you, then absolutely, please pursue that.

Alexis Robertso...: I think that's fantastic advice, and I'm sitting here smiling because I hope that when I am at episode, oh, I don't know, 174, it is bringing you, Doug, back onto the show and then we could say, "You can listen to Doug as a summer associate at episode 50," and reflecting on the practice that you built and your transition to Foley as an associate." Because I can just say, we are so thrilled to have you at the firm. And also, I am so grateful that you were game to jump on this podcast, because I'm like, "Hey, you want to be on the show?" And you said yes.

Doug Lightfoot: I was a little intimidated at first, but yeah, I'm glad I did it.

Alexis Robertso...: And with that, I'll just ask, if people have questions for you... You're a summer associate, so they can exactly look you up on Foley's website, but I'm pretty sure that they can find you on LinkedIn and that there's probably other ways to track you down. But can someone feel okay tracking you down and asking you questions about your experience or your experience at Foley?

Doug Lightfoot: Oh yeah, please do and I'll be upfront and honest completely. Yeah, Please reach out to me.

Alexis Robertso...: Thank you for listening to The Path and 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.

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