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**CORDEL FAULK:** Hi, I'm Cordel Faulk, Assistant Dean and Chief Admissions Officer at the University of Virginia School of Law. In this episode of "Law Schooled", we talked to Kelly Conlan Barron and Susan Dove, two members of the admissions team. They read our applications and have the power to recommend.

We discuss whether it's better to go straight to law school after undergrad or to work in between and other aspects of getting in.

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I'll let you guys talk about your back story before we ask the core question of the podcast. So Kelly, talk to us about who is Kelly Conlan Barron.

**KELLY CONLAN BARRON:** Well, I went to the University of Michigan for undergrad, decided I wanted to be a poli sci professor. So I wound up going to Columbia to get my PhD. Decided that was absolutely not for me about three months in.

So I left after I got my masters and moved to DC. I definitely did not want to go back to Michigan. I lived in DC for a while and then decided that law school was actually the--

**CORDEL FAULK:** Wait! Importantly, did not live in DC.

**KELLY CONLAN BARRON:** Oh, I lived in Virginia.

**BARRON:**

[LAUGHTER]

**CORDEL FAULK:** That's right! Lived in Virginia, worked in DC.

**KELLY CONLAN BARRON:** I'm sorry. I lived in Northern Virginia. I chose to live--

**BARRON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** That's the smart choice.

**KELLY CONLAN BARRON:** Yeah, it was a smart choice.

**BARRON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** That's the smart choice.

**KELLY CONLAN** I chose to live in Arlington because it was less expensive. And I liked the area better, and I  
**BARRON:** worked in DC. So I lived in the DC area, but not in DC.

**CORDEL FAULK:** But then you had residency at the top ten law school.

**KELLY CONLAN** Yes. And I didn't even know I was going to get residency because I lived there only for like a  
**BARRON:** year and a half when I decided to apply. And lo and behold, when I got the application, I was  
very delighted--

**CORDEL FAULK:** Very good.

**KELLY CONLAN** --that I could apply. So then I went to law school. And after--  
**BARRON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Why? Why did you go to law school?

**KELLY CONLAN** So I went to law school because I was always very interested in things international. And that's  
**BARRON:** what I was going-- I was doing comparative politics as a poli sci student. And I was working at  
a--

**CORDEL FAULK:** Spoke Russian fluently.

**KELLY CONLAN** I spoke Russian. I also spoke French and Spanish.  
**BARRON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** [INAUDIBLE]

**KELLY CONLAN** And I was working at a nonprofit that actually focused on Russia matters as they were coming  
**BARRON:** out of the Soviet Union. We were focusing on the transition, and we were analyzing their  
politics on a regular basis.

And I started looking for another job because I was unhappy with what I had. And all the jobs  
that I wanted actually required a law degree. And so that's when I decided I should probably  
look into it.

And as I looked into it, I realized that was more in line with what I wanted to do. So I started  
looking around at law schools, and decided on UVA for a variety of reasons.

**CORDEL FAULK:** OK, we'll talk about that in second.

**KELLY CONLAN** Yes, we'll talk about that in a minute. But yeah, so that-- After I graduated, I did the big law

**BARRON:** thing for awhile. I did international trade.

**CORDEL FAULK:** I'll talk about-- we can get back to that later.

**KELLY CONLAN** OK.

**BARRON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** So Susan Dove. Who is Susan Dove?

**SUSAN DOVE:** Oh, my goodness.

[LAUGHTER]

I went to Duke University for undergrad, and then focused on--

**CORDEL FAULK:** Oh, come on! You are a Texan.

**SUSAN DOVE:** I am Texan.

**CORDEL FAULK:** And Texans have to claim that.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**SUSAN DOVE:** Yes.

**CORDEL FAULK:** No Texan can't claim that immediately.

**SUSAN DOVE:** That's true. That's true. I am. I am a Texan at heart.

[LAUGHTER]

That is definitely true. I grew up in Texas.

**CORDEL FAULK:** That's right.

**SUSAN DOVE:** And then I went to Duke University and opted to go to law school after that. Because I thought a law degree would give me a lot of versatility in terms of my career choices and what I wanted to do. And if I wanted to change later and pivot to something new, that it would allow that fairly

easily.

**CORDEL FAULK:** So Kelly knew she wanted to be in international law. Did you know what route you wanted to go--

**SUSAN DOVE:** No.

**CORDEL FAULK:** --when you started?

**SUSAN DOVE:** No, I didn't know exactly what route I wanted to take when I started. And as it turned out, when I went through the summer associate program, you went through the rotation and then found your position that way. And that's how I ended up as an antitrust lawyer in DC working with none other than--

**CORDEL FAULK:** That's right.

**SUSAN DOVE:** --Cordel Faulk sitting right next to me.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Indeed.

**SUSAN DOVE:** And we began working together for several years. I was fortunate to have you as a colleague.

**CORDEL FAULK:** I was fortunate. Right.

**SUSAN DOVE:** And then left the law firm lifestyle and made the pivot to admissions when you invited me, which was [INAUDIBLE]

**CORDEL FAULK:** You were lucky. You were very lucky. I remember when I was interviewing for this job, I thought to myself, the first thing I'm going to do is I'm going to see if I can hire Susan Dove and Kelly Conlan.

[LAUGHTER]

And it was a wild dream. Like I was sitting on the couch, and I was like, if I was lucky, I would be able to get Susan and Kelly. And I was like, I'm never going to be able them. And that's exactly what I would do. And it worked out.

[LAUGHTER]

And it absolutely worked out.

**SUSAN DOVE:** I actually remember the phone call. Because you called me, and you said, hey, I have a job for you. OK. And that was it.

[LAUGHTER]

**CORDEL FAULK:** Well, Kelly, talk to us some about-- and this is the core question of this podcast. Why did you choose Virginia Law?

**SUSAN DOVE:** So I chose Virginia Law, I think, for a lot of reasons that people find maybe sort of nontraditional. I came from a nontraditional background. I grew up in a working class neighborhood. And when I was applying to law school, I had no money. Like none, because I was working at a nonprofit.

So primary on my mind was the fact that I was going to have to get a job.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Right.

**SUSAN DOVE:** So I was looking at employment statistics. And I really liked what Virginia had to offer there. The PhD program that I was in was also a very competitive, cutthroat kind of program.

And I was really gun-shy about entering into that sort of environment again, because I knew it just wasn't going to work for me. It's just not the person that I am.

And I had a friend, a roommate actually, from Michigan who was already at UVA. And she said, you really ought to consider giving this place a look because the environment is really different than what you had been in.

So I went down, and I met some people. And I walked around, and I thought it was great. In addition, it turned out I was in state.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Indeed. That's right.

**SUSAN DOVE:** That was very helpful.

**CORDEL FAULK:** That right.

**SUSAN DOVE:** And so that was a large part of it for me.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Very good. Very good. Well, Susan, you went to another law school, but you've chosen to work at UVA. So we're so very thankful that you said yes when you were asked.

Why? Why did you think this would be a good place to work? And why did you feel comfortable moving into admissions at UVA.

Your background-- the reason that we were so interested in having you work for the admissions office is that you had just basically-- just about everyone you worked with was UVA law grad.

So you hadn't gone to the law school, but you had been really immersed in our culture. Because all of us were surrounding you. So why did you feel comfortable moving into this role?

**SUSAN DOVE:** I think in large part, let's face it, you had a big role in that and in influencing my opinion of UVA, and in what I saw around, and the people that I met, both that I worked with and through you.

And I feel like I felt comfortable at UVA mostly because of the culture and because of the belief in the ideal that I think the students and alumni hold, which is that the law really is a noble profession. And it should be approached as such.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Yeah.

**SUSAN DOVE:** And I feel that at UVA you cultivate those kinds of lawyers by the-- not only the caliber of the student that you accept, but also by the compassion that they bring, both for others and for the causes that they wish to champion.

**CORDEL FAULK:** You both are really good at picking that out. You're both very, very, very good at picking that out for us.

**SUSAN DOVE:** Well, I think it's an important thing. I think the law should be viewed as a noble profession. We're one of the only countries in the world that lives by a rule of law.

And it should be protected. And it should be a service profession. And it should be a noble profession. It should not be so adversarial. You shouldn't wake up in the morning as a lawyer and think, who am I going to pounce today?

**CORDEL FAULK:** I know. Right.

**SUSAN DOVE:** That's not the object of the profession.

**CORDEL FAULK:** It's terrible. So this is a profession that is built on relationships. Everything about the law that

happens well it's because it's built on relationships and the relationships that you form as a lawyer.

No lawyer can exist in a silo. It just can't happen. And it's upsetting to me that in law school some people are kind of pitted against one another and then sit down in their profession, and they don't know how to do it well.

And either they're not educated in it, and they don't mix well, and they don't turn into the best lawyers that they can, or they have to learn it after law school when they could have learned it in law school.

**SUSAN DOVE:** They could have learned it in law school. They could have made a wonderful network--

**CORDEL FAULK:** Right!

**SUSAN DOVE:** --of support groups that they can turn to for help. Because it's not always the easiest profession, and it's nice to have a peer group that you can have as your support group and friends.

And I think that it's a mistake on behalf of a lot of law schools to breed a competitive culture. I think it's misguided.

**CORDEL FAULK:** I hope those stories are wrong. That's what I tell myself. I'm like, oh, my gosh! Those stories aren't right. Those things aren't true.

I mean, I hear stories of our friends who went to other law schools. And they talk about their relationships with their classmates, and literally they don't make sense to me. It's like I don't know what you're talking about. That world can't exist.

**SUSAN DOVE:** It's like David. He went to another law school.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Your husband, David.

**SUSAN DOVE:** My husband, David.

**CORDEL FAULK:** A fabulous lawyer.

**SUSAN DOVE:** A fabulous lawyer in his own right.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Partner at a wonderful law firm in DC.

**SUSAN DOVE:** He graduated well before I did. I think, five years before I did. He has, I think, maybe one person from law school that he still talks to. And among my best friends and even people that I don't talk to on a regular basis from UVA, I know that if I called them up--

**CORDEL FAULK:** Oh, yeah, absolutely right.

**SUSAN DOVE:** --for anything, they would be more than happy to help me. And it's a different feeling altogether. And he notes this all the time.

**CORDEL FAULK:** We get off our soapbox.

**SUSAN DOVE:** But no, I think it's an important-- I do. I think it's an important point to make that this is not a three-year commitment.

**CORDEL FAULK:** It's not.

**SUSAN DOVE:** It is lifetime commitment.

**CORDEL FAULK:** It's a lifetime commitment. It is a lifetime commitment. So you guys, you deal with a lot of personal statements. And like all of us who work in the admissions office, you've read a lot.

So Susan, when somebody comes to you and they say, what advice do you have for writing a personal statement? What do you tell them?

**SUSAN DOVE:** I want to know what drives them. I want to know what they're passionate about. What is it that they hope to do? Or what is it that has influenced who they are?

I'd like to see people who are capable and committed and compassionate. That's what I'm looking for. And I want to know how you became you.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Kelly, when somebody asks you, should I go to law school? What do you think? What do you tell them?

**KELLY CONLAN BARRON:** I tell them to think hard about it, and that it should never be a knee jerk reaction. And it should never be this sort of I don't know what I'm going to do next, so I'm going to go to law school.

Because it's an expensive endeavor, which I'm sure everyone is aware of at this point. But there's also-- it's a lot of time commitment. You're taking time away from a career that you could be building.



**CORDEL FAULK:** Right.

**KELLY CONLAN** You are taking time away from being with your family. There's a lot of time you have to study.

**BARRON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** And you're entering the career that is consuming.

**KELLY CONLAN** Yes, it is time consuming.

**BARRON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** It takes over your life.

**KELLY CONLAN** So you need to know that going in, and that you should have some sense of what that's going

**BARRON:** to be like. And if you've gotten to the point where you're ready to make that kind of commitment, in terms of finances, in terms of time, in terms of career, then I think that is a good time to choose to go to law school.

But if you're looking at the situation and thinking, you know, I'm not sure. This might be a good idea-- it's time to wait and think it through some more.

**CORDEL FAULK:** How do you guys think somebody should prepare for law school? What can you do to prepare for law school?

**KELLY CONLAN** In all honesty, I'm not sure there's anything you can do to prepare for law school because it's

**BARRON:** sort of a singular experience. It's unique. And I think that-- to my mind, I think the thing to do when you go to law school-- and it's the one thing I did enjoy about being at UVA-- is recognize that this is a chance that you have to learn something that's going to be valuable to you, but it's also going to be very valuable to the people around you.

So take the opportunity to learn. Go in with an open mind. And even if you're confident you know exactly what you want to do, be open to other things and realize that the arc of life is a strange one. And you may wind up at a very different point than where you started or where you planned to be.

And so going in with an open mind and definitely the knowledge that you're going to have to work really hard is probably the key.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Susan, do you have thoughts?

**SUSAN DOVE:** I think if you're going into law school and applying and thinking about all those things, know a little bit more about the day to day life of being a lawyer and what kind of lawyer do you really want to be.

**CORDEL FAULK:** It is not like *Law and Order*.

**SUSAN DOVE:** It is not like *Law and Order*.

**CORDEL FAULK:** No.

[LAUGHTER]

**SUSAN DOVE:** It is not like what you see on TV.

**CORDEL FAULK:** No.

**SUSAN DOVE:** Go explore a couple of different ideas. Look at the law firms. Look at the nonprofits. Look at the public interest. See what impassions you, what animates you. Have an idea of that before you jump in.

**KELLY CONLAN** Well, and I would say too, I don't think you really need to know exactly what you want to do or  
**BARRON:** even exactly why you want to be a lawyer. Because that can change dramatically over the course of the three years. But you have to understand that this is something that you're committing to.

So it's not like I'm saying if you don't have a definite plan, don't apply. That's not it at all. But you really have to know what you're getting into.

**SUSAN DOVE:** Right. I think that's important is to know what you are jumping into and what you may do with it. And you don't have to have a definite plan because that might change.

But if you have at least some kind of a macro level idea of what's out there and what it means to be a lawyer and what's involved in the day to day, that's helpful.

**CORDEL FAULK:** So Susan, you and I were K through JD. Kelly, you took some time off and you worked before coming to law school. When the three of us went to law school, Susan and I, we were kind of the model. Most people did what we did and we're K through JD.

And now, after 17 years after we graduated, more folks-- 2/3 of our class are coming with work experience now. Do you guys have thoughts on which one of those is better? If one of them is

better.

Do you think it's better to work before coming to law school? And if it is OK to be K from JD, how do you do that? Why would you do that?

**KELLY CONLAN** Well, I'll speak to the working before first because that's what I did. I found for me approaching school at that point was very different. Because I very much approached it like it was my job. I was 9 to 5.

Well, you know, I still got up in the morning and went to the gym at 6:00 AM. I did my taxes.

**CORDEL FAULK:** You know the one thing we didn't tell them? We were section mates.

**KELLY CONLAN** Oh, yes. We were section mates.

**BARRON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** So at UVA Law, the class is 300. We divided into 10 sections of 30. So our sections are very small. So Kelly and I have known each other literally for 20 years because we met on the first day of law school. Yeah. I'm sorry. [INAUDIBLE]

**KELLY CONLAN** That's OK. So for me, it was really different because it wasn't the way that I had approached grad school or undergrad. But I would go to the gym. I'd go to class.

**BARRON:**

And when class was over, I just assumed that I was still at work. So I'd go to the library, and I'd be there all day until 5 or 6 o'clock. I'd go home and have dinner and maybe finish up a little bit.

But I did not stay up late in law school at all because I was really-- I was used to that schedule, and that's what I stuck to. And I also think that I had a bit more maturity in terms of what was expected of me in the workforce and what having a job was like.

Because when you actually get out in the professional world, it's very different than what you imagined. It's going to be-- it just is no matter what you're doing. So I think that was helpful. And I think I had a little bit more focus on what I wanted to do when I went to law school.

I had, I think, more of a purpose maybe than some of the other students did. That being said, I don't think it's wrong to go K through JD either. I think that some of these students really do know what they want to do, and they can handle it.

I don't know that-- I think they each have the pros and their cons. I don't think one is better than the other. I think it depends on the person.

**CORDEL FAULK:** I'm going to brag about Susan for a little bit. Because I know that she would never, ever, ever say this. Because I've only heard her say it once.

So Susan was the editor-in-chief of her law review when she was in law school. So she was K through JD. The editor-in-chief of the other law review, he worked before coming back to law school, if I remember that correctly. And you two wound up getting married.

Was Stephen the--

**SUSAN DOVE:** He was not.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Oh, I thought he was!

[LAUGHTER]

I thought he was--

I have in my head this love story of the two editors-in-chief of the two law reviews!

**SUSAN DOVE:** No, but he was on-- so, our school had two kind of law reviews.

**CORDEL FAULK:** OK.

**SUSAN DOVE:** There were only two publications, and they were very similar in terms of being able to get on them. And he was an articles editor.

**CORDEL FAULK:** No, we're talking about you. You were the editor-in-chief.

**SUSAN DOVE:** I was the editor-in-chief.

**CORDEL FAULK:** So K through JD worked out for you.

[LAUGHTER]

**SUSAN DOVE:** K through worked out fine. I think that it is about the experiences that you can have and, like Kelly said, the passion that you bring. And that's your back story. That's your life history. And that comes in many forms.

And I don't think that there's a one-size-fits-all in terms of getting there. I just think that if you can go out and have experiences so that you don't idealize what you think the law is going to be is the most important thing you can do for yourself.

So you go in with realistic of an understanding of what it's going to take when you get out and kind of an idea of the passion that brought you there. So I think you can get that in a number of ways.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Perfect. Well, let's talk about what everybody wants to know. When all applications come to the law school, you are two of the people who they go to first. Before we see them, you see them, and then you filter them to us.

So would you talk to us about how you approach an application when it comes, and how you read it and how you think about it? And I'll point out-- so one thing that it's important for folks to know is when we look at applications, I think all of us who review applications, we attack them in a different manner. And that's OK.

**SUSAN DOVE:** Right.

**CORDEL FAULK:** And it's OK. I think that probably would surprise people because they think there's just one robotic way that every law school goes through them and that's not even the case within a law school. Who wants to start?

**KELLY CONLAN** OK, I'll go. So I actually start with the transcript and the letters of recommendation first, mostly  
**BARRON:** because I want to see what other people are saying about this person.

And then when I get to the application, I do read every single word. I've had a number of people ask me, do you really care about my activities and interests?

**CORDEL FAULK:** Yes.

**KELLY CONLAN** And the answer is absolutely I do. And sometimes it's the most fascinating part of the  
**BARRON:** application. It tells me a lot about the person. And then I do the personal statement last because I kind of get a sense of who they are a little bit from everything that the letters are saying, from the activities and interests. Got to look at the resume.

And then the personal statement, to me, is their opportunity to tell me what I haven't seen yet. What is it about them that they personally want me to know that I can't figure out from their

resume, from the activities and interests, from the letters of recommendation, all those things?

And the funny thing is I tell people all the time, that letter-- the personal statement, for me, a lot of times it's make or break. Because I could be looking at someone's application and think I'm definitely on the know here. Like this is not something that I'm thrilled with.

But then I get to the personal statement, and I'm like, and I was clearly wrong. And I've had it go the other way too where I thought things were great, and then all of a sudden the personal statement just didn't do it for me.

So it's really-- I think the way I approach it is I'm really looking in the personal statement for somebody to tell me something about themselves that I didn't know before-- and like Susan-- to sort of explain to me how they think, why they're doing this.

They don't have to have a specific purpose, but I need to know do you really understand why law school might be the right path for you to take. Do you understand what you're getting into, that sort of thing?

But more importantly, how do you think? And are you someone who I think is going to be happy at UVA? Because that's the other part of it too. I think that not every school is right for every person. And we've got a pretty good sense of who is going to like UVA, and who's not. And so, that's the other factor that weighs in there too.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Susan?

**SUSAN DOVE:** That's interesting. Because I approached it a little bit differently. I start with the application. And I go through and I read the activities and interests. And I look at the resume and see what people have done to kind of get a sense.

And then I read the personal statement because I want to do that first just to get a sense of who they are. And I want to understand-- and I get a lot of information, both about the quality of the writing that they offer and the type of person that they are.

And like I said, I look for are they going to bring a sense of compassion? Are they going to look at this as a noble profession? Is that the kind of person that they are really?

And then I'll move on to any supplemental statements. And then after that, I will go to the transcript and to the letters of recommendation and see if those support everything that I've

heard before. Or if there are any deviations in there that raise questions or concerns for me and make a decision after that.

**KELLY CONLAN** The really interesting thing to me about this is I've tried doing it that way, and it just doesn't  
**BARRON:** work for me.

[LAUGHTER]

**CORDEL FAULK:** So I think that's funny. I go activities and interests first. Then I go resume, then I go personal statement. And then I do letters of recommendation to transcript.

And I've tried to do it the other way, and it doesn't work. It feels uncomfortable. Like I don't feel like I'm getting a sense of somebody. I have to go in that order for it to make sense in my head.

So yeah, we all read them very differently. We all read them very differently.

What's your favorite mistake? Wait. First let's--

**KELLY CONLAN** Oh, I was going to say clarify.

**BARRON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Well, that's in several ways, but what's the favorite mistake that you see over and over and over again in certain applications.

**KELLY CONLAN** So favorite mistake as in one that I'm going to kind of laugh at and overlook? Or a mistake that

**BARRON:** I'm going to be like, that was a mistake.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Both.

**KELLY CONLAN** OK. So I think the one mistake that I probably tend to overlook more than other people is like if

**BARRON:** they accidentally slip in the wrong name of the school or something, I know that it's not the best but--

[LAUGHTER]

**CORDEL FAULK:** Right.

**KELLY CONLAN** Sometimes it happens. And it depends on the quality of the rest of the application. You know I

**BARRON:** mean? Like if somebody just had a bad day, it's fine.

If it's consistent, then probably not. Like you can kind of tell.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Right.

**KELLY CONLAN** So that one-- I think the one that really gets me the most though that I can't overlook is the  
**BARRON:** one where it's very obvious the only reason they're going to law school is because they don't know what to do next.

And it's surprising how apparent that is in even the best prepared an application. Like you could just tell that this is basically plan B because you're not sure what you should do for plan A. And that is a huge mistake.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Right. I know what Susan hates. Susan hates grammatical errors.

[LAUGHTER]

She hates them! She hates them! She hates them! But I'll let you speak for yourself. That's my guess.

**SUSAN DOVE:** What makes you say that?

[LAUGHTER]

**KELLY CONLAN** We hear that a lot. Actually, I do have one [INAUDIBLE]

**BARRON:**

**SUSAN DOVE:** I do dislike grammatical errors.

[LAUGHTER]

Because I can tolerate one or two typographical mistakes here and there.

**KELLY CONLAN** Right.

**BARRON:**

**SUSAN DOVE:** I understand that those happen, but otherwise it shows a lack of care and preparation.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Which is bad for a lawyer. Which is very, very bad for a lawyer.

**SUSAN DOVE:** Which is bad for a lawyer. Yes. So I have a-- what is it-- a little level of tolerance for it, but it's not incredibly high.



**CORDEL FAULK:** No.

[LAUGHTER]

**SUSAN DOVE:** I think that's fair.

**CORDEL FAULK:** No, it's absolutely fair. It's absolutely fair. But I always know if I'm looking at an application, and if I happen to see one before you guys do and I see a typo, and I know it's going to you, I'm like, I feel bad for [INAUDIBLE]

[LAUGHTER]

**SUSAN DOVE:** Yes, yes. That is. I don't like it. I think that, at this point, you're going to write a lot. The legal profession--

**CORDEL FAULK:** Right, that's what lawyers do.

**SUSAN DOVE:** --is a lot of writing, and so it's got to be a skill that you're ready for. Because once you get to law school, learning how to write with proper grammar is going to be a problem for you, I think.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Yeah, I think.

**SUSAN DOVE:** Especially this school, a top [INAUDIBLE]

**CORDEL FAULK:** So we can teach somebody-- like it is our job as a law school to teach somebody how to write like a lawyer.

**SUSAN DOVE:** Right.

**CORDEL FAULK:** We are very good at that. The assumption is made that you know how to do like the basic grammar.

[LAUGHTER]

**SUSAN DOVE:** Right, yes.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Like we're not teaching you grammar. We're teaching you how to write like a lawyer. So it is very important that you are coming with the basic set of skills so that we can do the part of teaching you how to write like a lawyer. Because we're not going to teach you how to write.

**SUSAN DOVE:** Right.

**CORDEL FAULK:** That's not our job.

**SUSAN DOVE:** Right, that's part of when I look at them when I said I want to-- for a capable student.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Correct.

**SUSAN DOVE:** I need to see sort of the baseline there, and above and beyond is even better. So I love it when I have really fluid statements that just evoke a lot of-- it doesn't have to evoke a lot of emotion, but it makes me understand you more.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Right. But I did force an answer from you.

**SUSAN DOVE:** Yes, but it was an answer.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Did you have another answer?

**SUSAN DOVE:** No, I think that that is a true answer on my part. That I do-- it is a pet peeve to see that. But I do have-- I do let some things slide. Typographical or a couple here and there.

**KELLY CONLAN** Yeah, here and there.

**BARRON:**

**SUSAN DOVE:** It's totally fine. Everybody makes that-- that happens.

**KELLY CONLAN** Consistent pattern though and--

**BARRON:**

**SUSAN DOVE:** Yes.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Not bad. It's just not a good idea if you--

**KELLY CONLAN** Yeah, like I said, I can understand how something happens once, maybe twice. But if it's

**BARRON:** consistent, no.

**SUSAN DOVE:** Right.

**KELLY CONLAN** The one that really kills me though-- now that I think about it-- that really kills me.

**BARRON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** What's that?

**KELLY CONLAN** When you get to the activities and interests section and it says see resume.

**BARRON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** No!

**KELLY CONLAN** I asked you to answer that!

**BARRON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** We asked you a specific question! Right. We've asked you a specific question, and if you put see resume there, you have not read the question.

And again, that is terrible for a lawyer to not have read in detail what the question is asking. That is malpractice. That is malpractice.

**KELLY CONLAN** And I will tell you that after the first year of doing this, if I got to the resume and there were

**BARRON:** activities and interests on there that they did not list in there-- I did not go the extra step of pointing it out because you didn't answer the question, so I'm just going to pretend it's not there.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Right.

**KELLY CONLAN** And that's what I do.

**BARRON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** What's your favorite big mistake that you've seen in an application? We've been going for five years now. What's your favorite one mistake that you've seen-- the one that was like, oh, my gosh. I can't believe I'm looking at this.

This question is always hard for me. It's hard for me.

**KELLY CONLAN** This is a hard one too because, on the one hand, I don't want to feel completely cold-hearted

**BARRON:** about it.

[LAUGHTER]

I think the one that really get me--

**CORDEL FAULK:** We're admissions officers. A lot of people think we are--

[LAUGHTER]

**KELLY CONLAN** Oddly enough, I've had this one happen more times than I can count really. Is that when the  
**BARRON:** personal statement is devoted to this sort of I got my heart broken, and now I'm going to law school.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Oh, yeah. I remember that. We've seen a couple of those, and that was really weird.

**KELLY CONLAN** It is really weird. And so, it will be literally a few paragraphs about how the person got their  
**BARRON:** heart broken--

**CORDEL FAULK:** That was a non sequitur. Right.

[LAUGHTER]

**KELLY CONLAN** --and they've decided they're going to law school as a result. And this is how they're going to  
**BARRON:** get over it. And I just--

**CORDEL FAULK:** No. No.

**KELLY CONLAN** It's shocking to me that somebody would put that in an application, but it has happened.  
**BARRON:**

**SUSAN DOVE:** I would say that the thing that is a big mistake that I see that's my favorite-- or wouldn't be my favorite big mistake, I guess. But it is--

**CORDEL FAULK:** Most entertaining?

[LAUGHTER]

**SUSAN DOVE:** It's not even-- it's something that's somewhat ubiquitous, and that is that there are these students who apparently want to come to UVA and offer three statements to say why.

And instead of inserting a supplemental statement to detail what it is that makes you attracted to this school-- this school is a unique place to be. You are lucky to get here. And you should explain why it would matter to you to come.

So I think to have one or two sentences stuck in the PS-- in the personal statement-- that describes that is a big mistake.

**KELLY CONLAN** Well, sometimes I feel like too when they do that, I know that you're doing this for every place

**BARRON:** that you have applied to because you think this is what I want to see. I want you to tell me--

**CORDEL FAULK:** Guys, we've been doing this for a long time.

[LAUGHTER]

You're not slipping anything by us. You do this once a year. We read thousands of these in a year.

[LAUGHTER]

You're not slipping anything by. Like, I'm going to get them on this one.

**KELLY CONLAN** No.

**BARRON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** No, we've seen it.

**KELLY CONLAN** We know it's a placeholder mention.

**BARRON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** Exactly. We've seen it.

**KELLY CONLAN** And to be honest, I just prefer they leave it out. Because a lot of times too, it doesn't even flow

**BARRON:** with the rest of the personal statement. It's just kind of thrown in there at the end. And yeah, that one drives me a little crazy.

**CORDEL FAULK:** If you want to tell us why you want to be at Virginia, tell us why you want to be at Virginia. Write something about it. Don't put a couple of sentences in because you're, in essence, not telling us why you want to be at Virginia.

**KELLY CONLAN** Right. And there are plenty of reasons you should want to be at Virginia.

**BARRON:**

[LAUGHTER]

**CORDEL FAULK:** We think so. We think so. We think so. So what is the number one reason that you two think you're glad you went to law school? Why are you glad you went to law school?

**SUSAN DOVE:** I think law school did for me a little bit of what I expected in the sense that it gave me the

versatility to pivot. It gave me a way to think about things in a different--

I like the Socratic style of law school and the type of thinking that you get out of it. And I think that having the ability to have worked in a law firm environment, having the ability to work in the admissions environment, having-- just to be able to pivot to different careers somewhat fluidly, I think, is a nice aspect of a law degree. So I think that was achievable.

**KELLY CONLAN** I think for me it changed the way that I think just dramatically. And I've told people that after  
**BARRON:** law school, I was never able to read the newspaper the same way again.

**CORDEL FAULK:** I'm not able to walk to the grocery store the same. I look at things, and I'm like, why did they do that? Oh, my gosh. That's terrible. They're not protecting their mark.

**KELLY CONLAN** Exactly.

**BARRON:**

**CORDEL FAULK:** I mean, you can't do anything-- I don't drive to work in the same way that I did before.

**KELLY CONLAN** Well, I will say I have two daughters, and they will both tell you that they wish I hadn't gone to  
**BARRON:** law school because I'm an excellent interrogator.

[LAUGHTER]

**SUSAN DOVE:** Yes.

**KELLY CONLAN** So there's that. But I think too that-- it did. It changed the way that I think. And I think it also  
**BARRON:** gave me a versatility. And it gave me just a different way to look at things generally. And that's been very useful. And that is applicable to just about everything that I do.

**CORDEL FAULK:** You both have two daughters, who both have two lawyers for parents. So if your daughters come to you and they say, mom, I think I'm going to go to law school, what are you going to say in response to that?

[LAUGHTER]

**KELLY CONLAN** Well, for kid number one, I'd be like, you really need to rethink that because I don't think  
**BARRON:** personality-wise this is right for you. Kid number two, I could totally see it. And I think I would give her the same advice I would give everybody else, which is take some time and really think that through.

Go work in a law firm for a while. Figure out if this is something that you can really do. Because it's not easy. And no matter how you do it, no matter where you do it, it's not easy.

And it is taxing. It can be grueling. It can be very rewarding too. So there is definitely an upside. But you have to know that it's what you want to do. And so, if she would just one day out of the blue said, that's what I want to do, I'd be like no, you need to think about that.

**CORDEL FAULK:** Susan. Mom, I want to go to law school. How do you respond?

**SUSAN DOVE:** I think in a similar fashion that I would want her to investigate the different types of venues for practicing law. So does she want to be in the law firm setting? Does she want to be in a government setting and what that entails?

Does she want to be in the academy? Does she want-- does she aim to be on the bench? My younger one, I could definitely see on the bench. But I just-- I think that it's--

**CORDEL FAULK:** She's going to listen to this one day.

[LAUGHTER]

**SUSAN DOVE:** I hope. But my greatest advice would be you need to explore the different venues for your practice. Because a lot of people-- and I think to some-- myself included, went in with the idea that there were only two real tracks, which was either you did public interest, which was just it's government. It was very narrowly defined. Or you did private practice, which was also narrowly defined in terms of the law firm track.

And I think there are many ways that you can practice law and many venues in which you can do it. And I think exploring kind of the panoply of options you have is important to know if, hey, do these speak to me? Is this really the path to getting to where I want to go?

**CORDEL FAULK:** So a lot of people who will be applying to UVA law and to many law schools will be listening to this podcast. What is one piece of advice you want them to walk away from this podcast with? If there's one takeaway that they're going to have, what do you want them to walk away from this podcast with?

**KELLY CONLAN** For me, it would be make sure you know why you want to do this. It doesn't mean you need to  
**BARRON:** know exactly where you're going. But if you're going to apply-- if you're going to put the application in, then take the time and tell me who you are.

And that is my greatest piece of advice. And I think it would apply to any law school. Just tell me actually who you are and think about that before you write the personal statement.

**CORDEL FAULK:** OK.

**SUSAN DOVE:** I think that's very true. I think you need to show me what drives you. Show me why this is the path for you. Like Kelly said, you don't have to know exactly what you're going to do.

But why does it matter to you to be in this profession? Why does it matter to you to be a lawyer at all?

**CORDEL FAULK:** That's great. That's great. And I think we'll leave it there. Susan Dove, Kelly Conlan Barron, thank you for joining us here in Charlottesville today.

And everyone, thank you for listening to the podcast. We'll be back next week.

[MUSIC PLAYING]