

Speaker 1: Welcome to The Extra Mile Podcast for Bar Exam Takers. There are no traffic jams along The Extra Mile when you're studying your bar exam. Now, your host, Jackson Mumeey, owner of the Celebration Bar Review.

Jackson: Hey, everyone. Welcome to Episode 23 of The Extra Mile Podcast. This is Jackson Mumeey, so glad you're with us today taking time out of your day to just check in, find out what's going in the bar review and bar exam world. Today is one of those special podcast episodes where we get to talk to a former student of mine who's been successful on the bar exam. We're going to be talking with Natalya [Lutsenko 00:00:48] today. Natalya's got a great story. I'm going to let her tell you the story.

The quick summary of it is that she took a bar exam up in Massachusetts and failed coming out of law school. Her self-confidence and just her general ability to feel like she could accomplish anything was really [sha 00:01:08] when she came to me. She decided to take the Florida Bar Exam. She really worked hard and you'll hear some things that she did and some of the advice and techniques that she'll offer to you. She worked really productively and went in and took the Florida Bar and on the first try, she passed. That would be a great story in and of itself.

Then, a couple of years later, she ended up having to take the Texas Bar Exam. She marched up to the plate; sat for a very, very difficult test in Texas, quite different than Florida, and she passed that one as well. Her story of how she did that and the development and change that she went through over a period of a couple of years is really impressive. I think you're going to enjoy listening to the story. You're going to learn a whole lot about some things that really worked well and get some insights from her.

I'm excited to share her story and other stories with you on these podcasts. That's a great way to bring the experience of other people to you. If you'd like more of that, there are a couple of things you can do. One is you can certainly subscribe to our podcast, you can go to iTunes and just look for The Extra Mile Podcast for Bar Exam Takers and subscribe there, or you can go to our website, celebrationbarreview.com and click on the word podcast up at the top and you'll be taken to a page with all of the past episodes along with all the show notes, and you can listen to every episode where we've done some other interviews as well, and you can also subscribe from the show notes and those are all right there. I encourage you to do that.

The other thing you can do that we always want to remind people about is that we have a private Facebook community for bar takers also called The Extra Mile. You'll see the link and the show notes to request an invitation into that community. What makes it special is that it's not just current and perspective bar takers there. It's also my past bar students. People like Natalya who've agreed to come on this site and offer their assistance, and advice, and guidance, and support to people who are currently taking the bar; which I think is just really an awesome thing and I hop on there a couple of times a week as well to answer questions and offer resources.

It's an invitation only, private group. Just send us a request to join and we'll put you into the group, and you'll see all those details and the show notes as well. I also want to remind you that every Thursday, I do a live online training about the bar exam. The title

of that training is How to Make Your Next Bar Exam The Last Bar Exam. Whether you're a first time taker or a repeat bar taker, if you've been struggling with how do I go about this process, what should I be doing, what needs to change, I'm going to provide in an hour of really filled, packed content. A way to help you deal with that, some really effective techniques, and things that we use with our students.

It's completely free. The only requirement is that you reserve a seat. There's a free mind map and workbook that comes with that. You can get your mind map and reserve your seat one of a couple of ways. You can go to our website at celebrationbarreview.com/webinar. That's celebrationbarreview.com/webinar and register for your seat. Or you can just text us at 33444 is the text number, but the text the phrase ' "Next bar exam" to 33444. That phrase again is "Next bar exam." Text that to 33444 and we'll register you for the webinar. It's Thursday at 3:00 pm Eastern, 2:00 pm Central; 1:00 pm Mountain; and 12:00 Pacific; and I still think it's 8:00 at night in the UK; but don't hold me to that.

In any event, really pleased that you're part of today's episode. I think you're going to enjoy what Natalya has to say and really find her story not only inspiring, but insightful. Let's jump into the discussion that we had with a successful bar exam taker, Natalya Levchenko.

Hey, everybody. This is Jackson at Celebration Bar Review and welcome to Episode 12, hanging out with successful bar exam students. We have a successful bar exam taker with us today. She's like a 2-time successful taker. These sessions are really fun for me because I get to go back and revisit some of my favorite students over the past 20 plus years, and Natalya is one of those. She's just got a delightful approach and sense of humor, and she's just a super young lady who first came to me to take the Florida Bar, and then a couple of years later, took the Texas bar and so here, now, she's moving on again. Somehow, amazingly [inaudible 00:06:19] to jurisdiction where she has now to take the bar exam for her third state. I'm really excited to have Natalya Lutsenko here with us today. How are you doing today?

Natalya: I'm well. Thank you for asking. How are you?

Jackson: Great, great. We're excited to have you here and with us. A good way to start would be just for you to share with the audience a little bit about your background, and where you went to school, and what led up to you taking the bar the first time.

Natalya: I'm Ukrainian. I grew up in Ukraine. I moved here when I was 13 and I went to high school here. Then I eventually ended up going to Stetson College of Law for my law degree. When I graduated, my at that time fiancé was in the military and we weren't sure where he's going to end up, so I actually took the Massachusetts Bar with a different bar company, and that didn't work out so well.

Jackson: Then you're thinking ok, I'm in Florida, I probably should take the Florida Bar, went to Florida Law school. You planned yourself for that approach and what were you looking for, thinking about at that point in terms of how to study for the bar?

Natalya: I was looking for something different, something where I would have more personal time with anyone who would listen. Someone who would actually read my essays and be able to comment and give different approaches and something more personal where I

can actually talk to somebody and someone who'd be like ok, this one's wrong, how about trying this way; someone who'd be more approachable and who I can ask questions as opposed to just a book, and a guy on the Internet who I don't know I can ask questions really. I'm looking someone more personal.

Jackson: Ok. Hopefully, you found that. Ok, good. It's always those scary moments. We'll edit that later if you said something different. You got ready to take the Florida Bar, and what was the biggest challenge for you going in to sit for that exam, after having taken Massachusetts?

Jackson: Ok, all right, good. I was trying to stall here. All right, what I was asking was what was the biggest challenge for you then having taken Massachusetts and now, having to look at Florida? What did you have to do mentally to change your mindset around that?

Natalya: I think that was actually the most difficult part is I needed to calm down basically. There was so much almost fear going into it is that oh, I already failed one, what am I going to do now, how am I going to do this. The first experience was really not good. I think the biggest thing was the self-confidence. I didn't really have any of that going. After that, it puts a damper on things. You're thinking, oh, I studied for 3 years, why can't I do this? What I realized is that well, they don't really teach you how to pass the bar at law school. They teach you the law which is going to be very helpful later on. A bar exam is such a specific creature, you really need to study for it. Just because you failed a bar, it doesn't mean a bad person or you can't be a lawyer. I think that sucks. That was the difficult part.

Jackson: Yeah, definitely. How did you overcome that? I mean that's a big challenge for people. I mean they start getting themselves into that mindset of I studied 3 years, I've learned all this law, but I'm not breaking through. What did you do specifically?

Natalya: I took a break. Before taking the Florida Bar, I really tried to focus on myself for a little bit. Actually, you helped out a lot with that because when I was looking at different things in how to study for a bar and different programs, I ran across a lot of your YouTube videos in how to oh, with this bar, trying different things, and working on the exercise and things like that, and there are a couple of books that you recommended that I actually bought before meeting you, anything like that. They helped out a lot.

There was one book I can't really remember the name, but it really focused on exercising and eating well and how that influenced everything. I have a psychology background so that really resonated with me and made me really think of going for Celebration Bar with you, the YouTube that I saw, and then I read the books, and it helped me a lot.

Jackson: Who knew? I think these days, we're up to something like 350,000 use of those videos. It's like really? I got to admit, Miley Cyrus gets that much in 15 minutes, but whatever. She's dresses a little more provocatively than I do.

Natalya: Yeah.

Jackson: You take the Florida Bar, and you go in to take the bar, what was the process of actually taking the exam like for you? I mean you're sitting in that big convention hall in Tampa, just you and 3000 of your closest friends, right, do you remember much about it?

Natalya: I actually do with working with you and everything. I just remember you say, "You need to go in and be." I'm not really a strong willed, strong personality. I'm pretty quiet. I'm reserved. What you kept telling me is, "You really need to go in and just be more aggressive and you can do it," and stuff like that. That's how I approached this.

I remember a funny moment where I was sitting outside and when everybody was about to go in, and I just held a moment of clarity and peace beforehand. Remembering those words and I was sitting on a concrete block, but there was a palm tree right above me. I was looking at the palm tree and I was like I'm just in my happy place. I'm in my zone place that you talked about in all those videos where you just tune everything out. I was there for just a moment and it just helped me cruise through everything pretty easily.

Jackson: Good. Yeah, that's a nice feeling isn't it when you just know that you've got it and you don't have to worry about all the craziness going on around you. You take the Florida Bar and we get 6 weeks or so later, and it's results day, what's that like?

Natalya: It was mortifying.

Jackson: Yeah.

Natalya: It was really scary, but it was ok at the same time because you already think, "I've already won. I've lived through my worst professional nightmare or however you want to call it up to that point obviously. What else? What's the worst thing can happen? You already been through there, so it sucks, but it was an "oh god" as you thought it was going to be. If I don't do this one, I'll just try again. It's not going to be that big a deal. It was still frightening, but in the back of my mind, it's ok, whatever happens, it's going to be ok.

Jackson: Then you go online and you see that you've passed, yeah. What's that feel like?

Natalya: It was amazing. It did really just come back a day and ok, so you can do this. No one's telling me that you can't anymore. You can do this. You can practice law and you can excel at it and you'll be fine.

Jackson: I remember from looking at your materials, you were practicing and preparing saying you're going to pass.

Natalya: Yes.

Jackson: Yeah. That's always amazing. That's always, those moments look like yeah, I knew she could. I mean absolutely. That was a pretty exciting moment for me as a teacher as well. Let's fast forward a couple of years. I get a phone call. I think it was a phone call.

Natalya: Yeah.

Jackson: There's this voice on the line going, "I can't believe that I'm calling you again." What happened? Now, what happened? You remember the Florida Bar, now, what?

Natalya: I do. I remember the Florida Bar and my still that time fiancé, we didn't want to get married until he came back from deployment said, "Ok, I'm going to be in this place for a

couple of years," so we thought right. Why don't you think about taking the Texas Bar and I'm ok, why not, yeah. At that point, it was no, it's just another year I thought.

Jackson: Yeah, right. Yeah, Texas, right, go ahead.

Natalya: That's a whole new beast.

Jackson: You got to take the Texas Bar because of the boy.

Natalya: Yeah.

Jackson: Yeah, it's always the boy. Yeah, I know. My daughter had to take the California Bar because of the boy. Yeah, I get it.

There you are faced with climbing the mountain again. This time in Texas. That's an unusual combination of Florida and then Texas. Maybe you could share with the people that are watching today, what's the difference between those 2 exams? What stood out in your mind?

Natalya: Texas is 3 days.

Jackson: Yeah.

Natalya: It has a lot of different laws that I didn't learn in Florida law school like the oil laws and all of that stuff. It was a brand new beast to me. I found taking Texas was more pleasant than taking Florida because I liked the law better. I knew that ok, I can pass them both, that's fine; but the actual laws, they just seemed perhaps more interesting to me. It felt easier this time around.

Jackson: How long did you spend studying for the Texas Bar Exam?

Natalya: Not that long. I think I was on the short program.

Jackson: It was less than 3 months wasn't it?

Natalya: Yeah, I think it was .

Jackson: Where you in Texas when you were studying or when you're still in Florida?

Natalya: I was still in Florida.

Jackson: How did you set up your study structure, your day? What did a study day look like for you?

Natalya: By this time, I was a pro.

Jackson: Yeah, you were.

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Natalya: It was better because I didn't have a job at that time so I didn't have to worry about anything like that. I just focused on my mental, physical being and the take just focusing on studying. I would get up. I would exercise and then I'll do something more interesting

to me for an hour. I was watching TV, or reading a book, or cooking. I enjoy cooking. Then I would go back and study for a couple of hours, then I would redo it again. Then before going to bed, I would try to do some yoga to unwind and relax. Then just try to go over again next day.

Jackson: One of the things that struck me when I talked to you as you were studying for Texas was how calm you were all the way through the process. I mean you didn't have those moments of great anxiety, big highs, big lows. You seemed very calm. Were you aware of that as you were going through?

Natalya: Yeah, I think I was. At that point, we were in a position where I didn't have to pass the bar right away so there wasn't that pressure. I knew that that's something I wanted to do because eventually, that's where we actually want to live, and Texas has a lot of reciprocity with a lot of states. I knew that's something I wanted to do, but I wasn't forced to it because I needed to get a job, because I needed to do this, this, and this. It was a good investment of time and money in the long run, but I didn't have to do it right then. With having all the tools and exercising, it felt a lot smoother this time around.

Jackson: I remember, correct me if I'm wrong, but I'm remembering that you're then fiancé was deployed. Was it during this time you were studying?

Natalya: Yes and that's why that I wasn't pressured to go back to Texas right away because he was deployed and then being almost 10 months.

Jackson: Didn't you guys go and take a vacation right before deployment?

Natalya: Yeah, we did.

Jackson: What I remember about that was that you were I don't know if concerned is the right word, but you asked me, "How's that going to affect my studying?" My recollection is that I felt like you have been working so steadily and so smoothly through that process that you probably worked and had any problem and you could take the time off. Tell me a little bit about your thought process about that, going to take the time off before the exam to spend time with him.

Natalya: It seemed very counterproductive. Obviously, I wanted to spend time with him specially knowing that he's going to be in Afghanistan for such an extended time. On the other hand, I wanted to pass the bar and not having to take it again so it was 2 forces fighting each other being like you need to pass. I really don't want to do this again, but on the other hand, you need to take time and enjoy your life and do what you need to do. At the end of the day, that's what calmed me down and being like you're doing this so you can have a good life later on, but you still need to enjoy your life now because with him being deployed, there is always possibility that you may not get that so you need to take your time.

Jackson: You didn't bring or borrowed your books with you when he went to see you?

Natalya: No, I did not.

Jackson: Ok. I want to make that point because it comes up a lot, not necessarily deployment; but people take vacations that are like I'm going to go study while I'm on vacation. You didn't do that, right? You went and actually spent the time with him and were really all there in that moment with him. I remember you being very intentional about that. That you were just not going to try and do both things at once. Is that right?

Natalya: Yes, because I really wanted to enjoy the time and not have to worry because I knew if the opportunity of a book was there, I was going to study. I was going to read that extra question or right that essay. I just didn't want to even have the temptation. I wanted to be in the moment and experience everything to the fullest. Then I'll just deal with the bar and study a little more when I get back.

Jackson: Yeah, absolutely. You came back and got into that last phase of your study, and then went in and took the exam. It's obviously a different kind of exam in Texas. The essays are different there, the 30-minute essays on a wider range of subjects as you said and there's the performance test. What did you think about the Texas essays compared to the Florida essays? Did you see a difference beyond just the subjects?

Natalya: Yes, I did. I actually found them to be a little more straightforward. I found that the Texas Bar didn't try to hide the ball of being like oh, we're going to try to think this way and then the question is something totally different. It was logical. Everything seemed pretty easy. They wanted to work with you so you could get the question. I found it easier for me.

Jackson: What about the performance test, did you like that part of the exam? That was something you hadn't seen in Florida.

Natalya: It was different. I'm not sure so I'll go about it. It was just so different than anything I've experienced before so it made total sense especially now that I am practicing.

Jackson: Keep going. You were talking about the performance test.

Natalya: As I was saying, the performance test, it actually relates to everything I do now as practicing. Looking back, I think it was actually one of the most enjoyable parts because it was so relatable. It is what we do on a daily basis. That was such a big part. I think that it was a good gauge for how we practice and it was a good experience to have and to learn how to do.

Jackson: Obviously, your confidence had to be higher going into that exam than before, right? It was like I can know how to do this.

Natalya: Best.

Jackson: Yeah, absolutely. What advice would you have for somebody who is about to as we're recording today, we're turning the corner and just trying to think about the February 2016 exams, so a little ways out still, but people started to study? Do you have any advice for somebody who's just starting that process, things that they should be thinking about or are focused on right now?

Natalya: Yeah, I think the biggest advice I would give is don't forget to focus on yourself. I know that for such a long time, all we really want to focus is the exam, how we need to pass it, and this is not going to be the end of the world if we don't and all this kind of stuff. We really need to think about whatever happens on the exam, it's not going to change the person that you are, it's not going to change the knowledge you have already, it's not going to take anything away from you.

It may be uncomfortable to tell people, "Oh, I didn't pass." However, it's not going to change anything so what you really need to focus on is going through this experience with as much happiness as you possibly can, whatever makes you happy.

For me, it really was the exercise, the taking time for myself. I'd go and get my hair done and get lean and exercise. I would do things that really made me happy in order to perform better on the test.

Jackson: Cool. That's a great piece of advice. I think too many times, bar takers really get themselves wrapped around the emotional axle and then, it's like what are we going to do. They get themselves so tight that it's really hard to be successful on the exam.

Jackson: No worries. As people are gearing up, it's obviously a moment of some stress. For some of the people who are taking the exam, like you, Natalya, they had an experience that wasn't so positive; but then, they're trying to mentally turn that corner. You said that you thought it was really helpful to have a course where you got personal attention. Can you tell me a little bit more about what that meant to you and in practical terms?

Natalya: It was really nice just to sit down. I think for us, we had a conversation about every week or so. It was just really nice to be able to talk to somebody who's like "It's ok, I understand what you're going through. It's going to be fine in the first bases." Then when I got more comfortable with everything and it was really nice to be like ok, this sentence, how about we put it here and this is what you're missing and this is what would work better here. It was just nice to have someone actually read all of my material and then be able to go through everything together almost pretty much line by line in the beginning because I needed it. It was a good experience in that I could ask questions, "Oh, ok, what doesn't work here? How can I make this better for myself?"

Jackson: That worked better for you than just saying here's a grade or whatever, some arbitrary assessment. Ok. Cool. Now, you told me before we went on live that now, you are married, let's see the ring. Come on, put the ring out. Let's see it. Yeah, nice, nice. Ok. The boy came through and he got back from Afghanistan, right?

Natalya: Yes.

Jackson: That's great. Thank you both for your service. He's now being stationed in where?

Natalya: Oklahoma.

Jackson: Oklahoma, where the wind comes rushing down the plain or something like that, ok. It's close to Texas and it has reciprocity, right?

Natalya: Yes. I don't have to take another bar at least for now. I'm very happy about that.

Jackson: I can't believe it. I was so hoping another chance, but no. On to Oklahoma and maybe back to Texas at some point I hope.

Natalya: Yes. When we went to Houston, Texas, we really enjoyed ourselves when we were down there. That's one of the reasons why I wasn't so against taking the Texas Bar because I think it really suits our lifestyle.

Jackson: It's great to just reconnect and see you, and talk with you, and to hear that things are going so well. I remain very, very proud of you in what you accomplished. I think that emotionally, to come from not having a success and then stealing yourself and putting yourself together and going, you just killed it in Florida. Then to come back a couple of years later and to do it all over again in Texas and knowing that you weren't like, "Oh boy, yippee, I get to do Texas again." Ok, but to get those two under your belt, that really makes you a super success story. I know a lot of people are going to enjoy hearing about what you've done and to wish you well. Any other thoughts you want to just leave with people as they're getting ready to get going here?

Natalya: Yeah, just don't let this define you. This is a part of your life, yes, but it's not the only part. Your mother, or daughter, or son, your father; there are other things that make you, you. Whatever happens, don't let it define you. This is just one part. You can do it and you're going to move on and going to be ok.

Jackson: That's awesome. Thanks, Natalya. I appreciate it. It's great to see you and great to have time with you. We hope that those of you watching today got as much out of this as we enjoyed being able to do it. Our thanks to Natalya Levchenko for joining us today. If you want to know more about her journey and the journey of other people, we invite you to join us in our private Facebook group called The Extra Mile for Bar Exam Takers and to visit us on our website at celebrationbarreview.com. This is Jackson. I'm going to sign off and thanks again. We'll see you on our next episode.

That wraps up today's episode. Thanks so much for listening. If you'd like to be part of our Extra Mile for Bar Exam Taker's private Facebook group, just check the show notes, you'll find a link in which you can request an invitation, and we'll see you along The Extra Mile.

Speaker 1: Thanks for listening to The Extra Mile Podcast for Bar Exam Takers at www.celebrationbarreview.com.