

**EPISODE 100**

[INTRODUCTION]

**[00:00:09] ANNOUNCER:** Welcome to this week's episode of Coffee With a Journalist, brought to you by OnePitch. The guests on our show include some of the most notable journalists on the top US-based publications who covered topics including technology, lifestyle and culture, health, science, consumer products, business news, and beauty and wellness. We discussed their role, the types of stories they cover, what their inbox looks like, and how they connect with sources. Head to [onepitch.co](https://onepitch.co) and look for the video page to learn more about our new video series featuring guests from the show.

Today, we're joined by Alex Levine, a tech reporter for Politico. Alex covers the intersection of technology, government and public policy. And she is the author of Politico's daily newsletter, Morning Tech. When not on the tech beat, Alex can be found doing improv, training for her next marathon and ghostwriting wedding toasts under the pseudonym "The Toastess". During the episode, Alex tells us about the wild array of pitches she receives, a lesson she learned from her professor in journalism school, her side career as a speech writer, and more. Let's hear from Alex now.

[INTERVIEW]

**[00:01:27] BB:** Welcome everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist. I'm Beck Bamberger. I have an agency called BAM that works with all venture-backed technology companies. And I also started OnePitch, which is a platform helping publicists get better pitches to our wonderful journalist friends. And that is the point of this show, to bring on journalists to tell us what they love about pitches or hate about pitches. We'll kind of take everything. Their favorite stories to tell, stories they consume, all this good stuff. We try to have a good time. And with us today is Alex Levine. She's a tech reporter at Politico. I'm excited to have you here, Alex. Hi.

**[00:02:01] AL:** Hi. Thanks for having me, Beck.

**[00:02:03] BB:** Yeah! Are you drinking coffee by chance?

**[00:02:07] AL:** I had my large fill of coffee a little earlier this morning. I'm now on to water.

**[00:02:11] BB:** You're good to go. All right, we're fueled up. I'm drinking coffee here in my lovely glass mug. So half of us have coffee here. This is good. Alex, could you tell us – Actually I've been starting this with a couple people more frequently on this podcast. Just to make sure everyone's on the same page. Tell us about the coverage of Politico. What would you say Politico covers?

**[00:02:35] AL:** Politico's coverage, Politico's bread and butter is really policy and politics. So we differentiate ourselves by really gearing our coverage toward D.C. insiders and people who are interested in going deeper in various policy areas from technology, which is what I cover, to healthcare, to education, to transportation, to agriculture and climate, to energy, to many other issues that are front and center in Congress and in Washington, DC more broadly.

**[00:03:05] BB:** In addition, there's also – So there's a Canadian one, there's Canada, or there's California. So if you want to get further into a certain state, or locale, you can get into there as well, which I always find helpful.

**[00:03:17] AL:** Absolutely. We've got satellite newsrooms in many state capitals, and then also across the Atlantic in Brussels. And I believe we've got some reporters in London as well.

**[00:03:28] BB:** Mm-hmm. Helpful. Alex, as a tech reporter, how was your inbox?

**[00:03:34] AL:** It's such a good question, Beck, because I was just having a conversation with my colleagues recently about how it's become incredibly difficult to actually get stuff in my inbox that is even relevant to my beat. I mean, I want to say I get probably just north of 100 emails a day. And if I take a few days off, or I take a week off for a vacation, I'll come back and it's probably closer to 1000.

But I was just commenting to one of **[inaudible 00:03:59]** the other day about how, for whatever reason, I want to say in the past six months or a year, my inboxes become less and less relevant to me. And the pitches, for whatever reason, have become less and less relevant to

technology more generally. So this morning alone, for example, I got pitches on restaurants, on wildlife policy, on music festivals, on the dangers of gas exposure. Those are just a few.

And so what happens is a combination of either I'm deleting. I find that I'm deleting so many emails before I even open them. Or the pitches that are actually really useful to my beat and to our coverage, I find they're actually just harder to get to and easier to miss because of the deluge of other material that's just not fully relevant.

**[00:04:47] BB:** What then do you do? You mass delete? Your file? What do you do?

**[00:04:51] AL:** So I am definitely somebody who needs to have my inbox clean. And I know others, like with their text messages, they'll have 100 text messages or 1328 unread emails, maybe 14,000. I cannot allow that to happen for my own sanity and organization. And so for me, I typically will mass delete emails just based on subject lines that I see is not relevant. So if I see wildlife policy in the first three words of an email pitch, I delete that. I care greatly about wildlife policy, but it's not relevant to my beat.

And so I find that mass deleting is one thing. And then sometimes what I'll do is, when I actually do find the pitch that is more relevant to my beat, even if it's not something I'm covering immediately, if it's something more generally that's in my space, I will log the contact info or log sort of the theme of the pitch into an Excel sheet. It's not external. It's just like the little thing that I use to keep track of my own stuff. I'll jot it down. And I think a lot of times I'll return to that later.

**[00:06:03] BB:** Now, wait a second, you have like an Excel sheet, Microsoft Excel sheet? Like not even at Google Sheet? Like one on your desktop.

**[00:06:11] AL:** Yeah.

**[00:06:12] BB:** Oh my gosh! I've never heard this before.

**[00:06:16] AL:** I keep an Excel sheet. It's pretty embarrassing, actually. It's really low-tech. It's got a lot of colored headers. And the way that I think of it is sort of when you've got a really messy bedroom where your stuff is all over the floor, because it's all over the floor, you know

exactly where everything is. And only you can know how to find everything. That's sort of the look of the Excel sheet that I've got going. So I have tabs for com people and PR people. Then I have another tab for experts on a given subject or people that might be particularly helpful for a specific story. Many of these people are sources that I've built up over the years. But many of these people are also just contacts that I've never actually spoken to, but that I think would be potentially great people to speak to for a future story.

And so especially when I'm in a breaking news situation where I need to have somebody on-hand quickly to weigh in on something, I find that – Of course, going back what I've spoken to before, it's extremely helpful. But if it happens to be on a topic that I have not covered in-depth so much, then having these names on-hand can be really valuable.

**[00:07:22] BB:** I love this Excel sheet. This is some novel and old school. But hey, it's working for you. Usually I've heard more people do kind of, okay, they had filings. Some people, some people I should say, have attempted to do coding and filing. And then others have just used a very basic, "Well, I just search my inbox." Forget the filing, forget the organization. It's just a landline of just all my sources in there somewhere that I just search for. And I'm like, "Well, efficient." I do that too.

**[00:07:53] AL:** I find that I really am a creature of habit. And I like to joke that as a tech reporter, as far as tech reporters go, I'm probably one of the more low-tech tech reporters as far as the way that I stay organized. I love writing things down on paper. I love using – And I love using my Excel sheet, which is just extremely analog. And there's no there's nothing hype about it whatsoever. There's no code. There're no formulas. There's no equal signs and asterisks and stuff like you got on other Excel models. It's very, very 101. But it really helps me stay on top of things.

**[00:08:26] BB:** Oh, okay. Okay. So within that Excel sheet, let's just play this out, when have you used it to execute a story? Just to give people an idea.

**[00:08:37] AL:** I've used it to execute a story when I'm looking for a very specific source to speak to. So one of the issues that I cover a lot, for example, is facial recognition technology. I was pursuing a scoop late last week that I really was intent on pushing out before the weekend

hit on facial recognition. And when you hit – I've always been told this about reaching out to either editors to pitch editors. I've also been told us about reaching out to sources to comment on a story. And I feel that it's probably like a helpful thing as well from the PR side of things.

One of my professors in journalism school once told me never reach out to anybody before noon on a Monday and afternoon on a Friday. And I think that in the 24-hour news cycle, you have to assume that many people are certainly going to be responding to emails before noon on a Monday or afternoon on a Friday. But I think to maximize responsiveness, it really is a good rule of thumb that I've tried to stick to

Last Friday, though, I was pursuing a story. And I knew that getting anybody to comment on something late on a Friday afternoon, when it was already dark outside on the East Coast, was not going to be easy. And so I sort of went through my Excel sheet and I looked for all of the people who I either have spoken to on facial recognition or people who I've been meeting to reach out to on facial recognition. And I really pinged a good at least half dozen people.

**[00:09:59] BB:** Okay. What was the response?

**[00:10:01] AL:** I got what I needed. I should say, I don't think that that's the best strategy always. Like I don't believe in mass emailing people just to get a soundbite. I really don't believe in that. But I think that because of the timing of it and because it was time sensitive, and it was a scoop, and I wanted to make sure that it got out sooner than later, my best bet was to just really try like half a dozen people at the same time.

**[00:10:25] BB:** There go. Okay. So that worked. I love it. When you are thinking about a story to do – So, as for example, I'm seeing quite a few of your stories about social media algorithms, or your souring on Facebook, of course, although that is a continuing story. Twitter's CEO leaving. That happens to be breaking news. But maybe a more long-form, more not breaking news type of story, where do you get the inspiration for those?

**[00:10:50] AL:** Usually, I get the inspiration from those in passing conversations with people about something else. One of my rules of thumb is like if you want to know what's going on in a certain space that you're interested in, speak to people who are in that space at a time that is

not breaking news. So one thing, for example that I've been looking at recently is CFIUS. CFIUS is the Committee on Foreign investment in the US. And this is this body, this government body that reviews foreign investments in US businesses.

So for example, TikTok, one of the social media platforms that I cover closely was recently – During the Trump Administration, was under CFIUS investigation. And there's been a lot of questions about what CFIUS is doing around TikTok and other social media apps under the current administration.

CFIUS is very difficult. It's very difficult not to crack. And it's the sort of thing that often gets written about only when there's breaking news on it. And this fall, Politico, myself and a couple of our other reporters, embarked on this effort to begin reporting on CFIUS at a time when we were not in a breaking news situation. And we started reaching out to all these people. Many of them are some of the top people who are quoted on CFIUS during breaking news scenarios. But we were able to have hour, hour-plus long conversations with these people about the way that CFIUS works. What we heard was that they believed that a lot of the coverage about CFIUS wasn't great, because it got a lot of things wrong. And not specific to Politico coverage, but coverage about this committee, generally, they said was just not great. Because a lot of times it gets written about in breaking news scenarios when people don't really have time to dig into all of the details. And as a result, they said people get a lot of stuff wrong.

So we ended up speaking – I must have had hours of conversations with so many different people who are current and former officials, and those conversations led to so many story ideas about this committee that is so under covered, unless there's breaking news, that it's no way we would have ever been able to come up with that stuff if we had only tapped it during a breaking news scenario.

So I really believe like speaking to people who are living and breathing this stuff every day during a time when you're not in an emergency fire drill situation is the best way to find story ideas. And a lot of times people will say things that they think is not all that interesting to them, because like I said, they live and breathe it every day. You hear one minute, and you're like, “That is fascinating. I'm pretty sure other people don't know that. I've certainly never heard that.” Chances are, if I as a reporter find it to be interesting, or it's something that I haven't heard, the

odds are that our readership would find it interesting and that they probably haven't heard it either, unless they're shoulder deep or super well-versed in this stuff.

So I'm also really interested in intersection of tech and healthcare is another big thing that I cover. And speaking to doctors – I mean, I've got a family of doctors. So I find that a lot of our family meals, especially Thanksgiving, is really just me interrogating all my family members with medicine.

**[00:13:48] BB:** Hey, there you go. I like it.

**[00:13:50] AL:** What are you seeing? What are you hearing? What are the challenges you're facing? What is technology doing to make everything in your practice better? What is it doing to make your experience at the hospital worse? All these sorts of things. Just asking people who may not be like even the top expert on such and such topic. Getting ideas from people who are living and breathing stuff every day is really how I find my stories.

**[00:14:13] BB:** That is such a good point about when people are so deep in the trench of their own industry, their own thing, they don't recognize or perhaps know how compelling, or enthralling, or even interesting what they're upon is to other people, not in the thick of things. And so – Oh, that's good point. And I bet you find all types of gems just digging around and asking people more.

**[00:14:41] AL:** I think the hard thing from a pitch perspective is I want to pitch things when they're relevant, right? You don't want to necessarily pitch things when people aren't paying attention to them. But at the same time, there is something to be said for sometimes surfacing things when it doesn't feel like everything is exploding or you're stepping on a minefield. We'll have more time to look more closely at something at that point.

So I think if you lined up 10 journalists and asked them, “Better to pitch me when it's really topical and relevant, or better to pitch me when it's very quiet and I've got a lot less on my plate.” I think you'll probably get 10 different answers. But I do think it's sort of like a counterintuitive thing to think about.

**[00:15:21] BB:** Hmm, I wonder how – Well, here's a perhaps a question not normally asked on here. But how would one even know how consumed you are with the new cycle versus not? Now, it might seem obvious, “Oh, if this person covers technology, and Twitter’s CEO just bounced, or Facebook is in Congress, okay, probably a bad time.” But are there any other ways or clues? Is there like, “You know what? Tuesday afternoon is my best time?” I don't know.

**[00:15:49] AL:** I don't think that there's an obvious way. I think the most obvious is what you just mentioned, right? For example, after a jump off this podcast with you, I'm going to spend the entire afternoon and evening covering the Instagram head testifying for Congress. And it's the first time he's ever testified before Congress. And all this was prompted by the Facebook whistleblower turning over documents about Instagram and how much it has known about some harms that it's caused to teens and young users. So this is a really big deal.

Anybody pitching something during that time, I think it might easily get buried. But I would also hope that if you're looking to pitch a tech story that having just general awareness about, “This is a very, very big deal in the tech world. So maybe I'll just wait till tomorrow morning, “I think is an important awareness to have.

But the other thing is I don't think that there is really like a – There's not a way to like crack the code of this is when a person's busy. This is when a person's not. But I do really feel strongly. And I know that not everybody agrees with this. I feel strongly about, I think journalists, try to set boundaries, especially tech journalists who always have to be on their technology. I really try to set boundaries with when I'm pinging people the hours that I'm working. And I may always be online. And I may be working late into the night. But I'm not going to ping a – Unless I'm really, really in a bind. I'm not going to be pinging people at 11:00pm time or texting them at 6:00 in the morning. And I've gotten pitches texted to me –

**[00:17:21] BB:** Texted? Really?

**[00:17:23] AL:** Yeah, people have texted me pictures, even at like 9:30pm or sometimes on a weeknight when I'm in bed and I'm just powering down for the night. And I find it to be – Not everyone agrees. Some people are like, “You got to be on all the time.” And I think that there can be on all the time, but I find that we try to be respectful of boundaries. And so sometimes



when I get outreach at that hour, I'm like, "I can't. I can't respond to this. And I don't really want to respond to this."

**[00:17:51] BB:** Yeah, encourages a behavior.

**[00:17:52] AL:** The longwinded response to your question is just I don't think that there's a way to know exactly when people are busy or not. I think having a general awareness of like what's going on in the beat is one important barometer for that. But other than that, it's just like kind of being human about when you're reaching out.

**[00:18:07] BB:** I'm shocked. Who sent in the pitch 9pm on Saturday?

**[00:18:12] AL:** Not going to throw them under the bus. It's happened definitely more than once.

**[00:18:15] BB:** I just want people to know that there's ways to schedule emails. Just consider that, everybody. Okay. PSA right there.

[BREAK]

**[00:18:25] ANNOUNCER:** Today's interview will continue after this brief message brought to you by OnePitch. Are you curious to see the unique ways one pitch helps PR professionals and marketers pitch journalists? Head to [onepitch.co](http://onepitch.co) learn about our new OnePitch score and see how easy it is to find the right journalists to pitch your news to. Sign up for your free account today. Now, back to today's episode.

[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

**[00:18:49] BB:** All right. Alex, I have some fill in the blanks here for you. So I'll give you the phrase and you could fill in the blank. Sound good?

**[00:18:56] AL:** Yeah.

**[00:18:56] BB:** All right. My favorite sources always –

**[00:19:00] AL:** Reference something I've written, but actually show that they've read it.

**[00:19:05] BB:** Oh, important. How often do you get something that's like, "Oh, I saw you wrote about plants last week. Here's the pitch on vegetables."

**[00:19:13] AL:** At least once a day.

**[00:19:14] BB:** It's just playing to you without clear that work to read a few sentences. Yeah. Well, the most annoying sources always try to fake you out with reading your articles?

**[00:19:27] AL:** Pitch me things that are fully irrelevant to my beat or that I have not covered.

**[00:19:33] BB:** You'll get a response from me if –

**[00:19:34] AL:** You keep the pitch short and sweet.

**[00:19:37] BB:** How short?

**[00:19:39] AL:** The most helpful pitches are no more than a paragraph or two. And they usually tell me, succinctly, why this is topical and why it would be a helpful voice to include.

**[00:19:56] BB:** You'll never get a response from me if –

**[00:19:59] AL:** You threaten that if I don't respond fast enough I take it to a rival outlet.

**[00:20:04] BB:** What? That's pretty –

**[00:20:06] AL:** That has happened. That has happened. Yeah, that has happened. And it's not nice. But also, I think that there's just a tendency, especially in the culture of just firing emails back and forth, to like forget that there's a human on the other end of this. Everyone's working really hard. On both ends, everyone is working extremely hard. And to get an email when you're

covering a congressional hearing, and somebody says, "If you don't respond to this, I'm going to give it to insert outlet here," which is it's sort of like sticking a knife in and twisting it a little bit.

**[00:20:43] BB:** Yeah. No need for that. No need for that. You can follow up with me if –

**[00:20:49] AL:** It's very time sensitive, and you've only already emailed once or twice.

**[00:20:55] BB:** Once or twice. So three is the max for you?

**[00:20:59] AL:** I think it depends. I think it's helpful, because people are so inundated with emails. But I also believe that not everybody who says that they are, "Oh, I missed your email. It got buried." I think that a lot of people are actually more organized without their inboxes than they let on. And so to say that, I think I do –

**[00:21:16] BB:** In this industry. Hell, yeah. Yes, they are. Yes.

**[00:21:19] AL:** Well, I think it's helpful to bump emails. But I think sometimes it's just that people – It's not relevant. Or people don't want to respond.

**[00:21:27] BB:** I had someone yesterday on here who is so good apparently with her emails. I'm not going to say who, because I want people listen to all the shows. That she's like, "I never need to follow. No. I never need to follow up." No, I got you. And I just didn't respond. Yeah. Love that.

Okay, okay. It would be a huge help if sources –

**[00:21:52] AL:** Could send me current or former employees of the companies that I cover.

**[00:21:58] BB:** Okay. Elaborate, elaborate.

**[00:22:00] AL:** Could help connect me to current or former employees of the companies that I cover.

[00:22:05] **BB**: Oh, former or current. Okay. That's needed. The best compliment I received about my work was –

[00:22:14] **AL**: That was a really fair story. Fair not as in mediocre. But fair as in maybe tough, but fair.

[00:22:23] **BB**: Tough but fair. I like it. My favorite stories to write are –

[00:22:29] **AL**: Features and profiles.

[00:22:31] **BB**: Yes. One thing I think people should know more about me is –

[00:22:38] **AL**: I used to want to be a comedy writer. And I'm a speechwriter.

[00:22:43] **BB**: Yes. The Toastess?

[00:22:46] **AL**: Yes, I am a speech writer when I'm not on deadline.

[00:22:49] **BB**: How did you get into that, by the way?

[00:22:52] **AL**: I started The Toastess. I am The Toastess and I write under the pseudonym The Toastess. And by the way, nothing Politico about anything that I'm doing speech writing for.

[00:23:03] **BB**: Yes. For weddings.

[00:23:05] **AL**: Yes, I actually started my career as a weddings writer. I was writing and fact checking stories for the wedding section of the New York Times. And from there, I ended up just being the go-to-person in my friend group and my extended family anytime anybody needed help editing anything, or writing anything, or stringing together words for a toast, I was always the person.

And living in New York City where the rent was really high, when I was in my mid 20s, I thought this would be a really great business idea. And I think people always think that speech writing is

only something that politicians can have. And they think that you have to be a public figure, or you got to be a corporate CEO, or some really big important person in order to have a speechwriter. But I think that because everything is now – Everything now lives on social media, and there's so much pressure, and people get so anxious and worked up about making speeches at personal events, and there's so much emphasis placed on them, that somebody can kind of interview you and then take your words that you might not find to be that interesting and make them compelling. It's really an art.

And so I do sort of the same thing with my speech writing that I do with my stories, which is, I interview people. They may think it's not super interesting. I hear a nugget and I jumped on it and I spin it into a narrative. It's really fun for me.

**[00:24:34] BB:** Oh, I love it. I love it. You have great testimonials on there too. Okay, okay, back to this. My perfect Sunday is –

**[00:24:43] AL:** Having coffee while listening to classical music. Going for a run. Coming back and napping.

**[00:24:51] BB:** Ooh, a or good, deep nap. Nothing like it on the weekend. My favorite hobby is –

**[00:24:59] AL:** Writing. I know that might be lame from a journalist. But writing, and more specifically creative writing.

**[00:25:07] BB:** The last song I listened to was –

**[00:25:12] AL:** Drops of Jupiter by Train on the run I went on before recording this podcast.

**[00:25:16] BB:** There you go. Quarantine has taught me –

**[00:25:19] AL:** To stop planning ahead so far out.

**[00:25:22] BB:** Is that a good thing?

**[00:25:24] AL:** Yeah, I feel like to just be more present in the moment to not be able to plan and realize, especially when you're planning a wedding, which I'm trying to do. Yeah, that you can't plan too far out.

**[00:25:37] BB:** Wait. Oh my gosh! Are you at all having this meta moment where people have asked you, The Toastess, to write speeches for your wedding? Wouldn't that be something? I'm sure that hasn't happened. But how funny if it did?

**[00:25:50] AL:** Yeah. Well, I think one article that I want to write that definitely does not have a politics or policy hook is how somebody who writes other people's vows writes their own vows, which I'm very much struggling to do. So I'm beginning the process now. I've got like nine months. But it really is difficult to do, and it's for yourself. So that's why I understand what my clients – What their needs are so badly. Because I really can't do it myself for myself.

**[00:26:19] BB:** I wonder, could you apply the same process to yourself or like give it to someone else the process of your like the client or something?

**[00:26:28] AL:** We'll see. I'll keep you posted.

**[00:26:28] BB:** Okay, Alex, what are you reading, listening to? You mentioned the music just a second ago. Consuming, watching? We'll take any stories. What you got?

**[00:26:39] AL:** I have found that since I have started on the tech beat, especially because for my first couple of years on the tech that, I was a newsletter writer. I was like so deep in tech news only. And everybody has their quota. And everybody – There's only so much time in a day. And everything I was reading with tech news.

**[00:26:58] BB:** Yeah. That's hard.

**[00:27:00] AL:** And ever since I moved off of the newsletter about a year ago, I really tried to actually decrease the amount of tech news that I'm reading, because I'm already so deeply plugged into it. And I think I've tried to really increase my reading on other areas that I sort of dropped the ball on. And I think that that's really important, because so many – Tech touches

everything now. And I think that actually to be able to like better contextualize the stuff I'm writing about in the context of what's going on nationally and globally, it's so important to not only have a lens on what's going on in my world.

I also really love, as I mentioned, features and profiles. And there's so many tech writers out there. I would say, there's people who have written for Vanity Fair, for The High, I adore. I've even read tech profiles in Vogue and the New Yorker and Glossy Magazine that online, more narrative, nonfiction-focused publications that don't necessarily have a huge tech team the way that **[inaudible 00:28:04]** or some of the other major newspapers might, but that do tech coverage. And they highlight the same people that were covering it and completely just highlight them in a different way. And I think that understanding the people that we're writing about as like really the protagonist in the stories that we're doing, I think is incredibly valuable. And reading or writing a profile of some of the people that we cover might not necessarily be a Politico story. A 3000-word like opus on somebody's life might not be a Politico story necessarily. But I find that in the coverage I was reading previously of incremental developments in Congress, and incremental developments in federal agencies in the White House. I find that I was sort of missing coverage of who these people are, or what their backstories are, or how they got where they are, or what makes them tick, all that stuff.

**[00:29:00] BB:** Mm-hmm. Nothing like a long in-depth narrative. Did you read Greenlights, Matthew McConaughey?

**[00:29:09] AL:** I did not.

**[00:29:10] BB:** Oh, .I think you'd enjoy that, because it's just so – And I'm not particularly a fan of his – I know him you know as the actor. Okay, great. And he seems really nice. But there were so many reviews on, I think, it was audible. Like I'm going to pull it up right now, because I have to double check that it was so – I was like, "What the hell? What's going on here?" It was so much. I'm like, "Wait. I got I just got to listen to it."

Yes. 100 – Get this. 113,679 five-star reviews. I'm like, "What is –" The book is incredible. I think you'd like that as a memoir. So that's my ad to you. Rarely am I suggesting things on here. I'm usually typing down stuff. But I think you'd like that one. Maybe you can listen to it too, all the

better, because he narrates. And it's always great **[inaudible 00:29:58]**. The voice and with the actual author. That is magic.

Well, transitioning totally not about anything of Matthew McConaughey. What do you think the future of journalism looks like?

**[00:30:13] AL:** That's such a huge question.

**[00:30:15] BB:** I know.

**[00:30:17] AL:** **[inaudible 00:30:18]** and that I can nerd out on all day long. I think that what we're seeing is just there's so much fragmenting, right? And there's so much movement of journalists into their own little newsletters and into their Substacks, and journalists breaking off from news organizations and creating their own news organizations, which even a few years ago was just extremely unusual. And now it's becoming increasingly common. I think that one thing that I've noticed is just journalists really becoming part of their stories more. And I think that that can be a really good thing. But I also think that that can be a not so great thing.

I think that Twitter and social media have made some journalists into superstars and made them really into part of the story or put more of an opinionated spin on coverage that never previously would have been opinionated. And I think that different newsrooms have different policies towards this. I think that they're not – In many newsrooms. And I've been in multiple newsrooms. And these policies are not necessarily evenly enforced. But a lot of times the loudest voices on social media become the journalist with the largest followings. And then that, in turn, allows outlets to reach more readers. And I just think like that model and that system, it's just ever changing and kind of problematic.

And so my hope is that sort of the pendulum swings back to the middle where – I don't know. As much as I'm covering social media, sometimes I wish that social media were a little bit less of a – There's going to be something else. We've talked about the metaverse coming. Like there's going to be all these unforeseen emerging technologies that will continue transforming the way that our industry operates. But I feel kind of hopeful. And I don't know if this is sort of pie in the sky and impossible now that – Impossible to take steps backwards now that we're already using



social media is such an integral part of coverage and getting it out to the world. But I do hope that there is some point where the pendulum swings back to the middle and social media, and screaming on Twitter, and all of that becomes a little bit less of the coverage process.

I think that, especially if we're talking about turning down – Everything is very politicized and polarized. And I think that it's a lot easier to attack journalists and to vilify journalists when their opinions are all out in the open. And everyone is going to have opinions behind closed doors. I think it's important to have perspectives on things. And everybody at the end of the day is human. So of course, people are going to have strong feelings. But I just think that, in the moment that we're in, it's so important to kind of reel that in and to get back to the kind of like the nuts and bolts of the journalism. And I do think that social media has really detracted from that.

**[00:33:13] BB:** Yeah, I wonder if to the pendulum swing, can it come back to being civil or just not as involved or something? I don't know. And I'm always looking in thinking of like a global construct and going like, "Is it like this in the Ukraine? In South Africa? In many other places?" And I've been all over the place. But I'm like – And definitely not in places where there's no freedom of any sort to have any discussion about any criticism of anything. But is this just an American thing? I wonder about this? Because we're just so like, loud and boisterous. And I have a thought – I mean, every American has a thought about something. You know what I mean? I wonder about that.

**[00:33:57] AL:** And to be sure, I'm not accusing journalists and being uncivil.

**[00:34:00] BB:** Oh, I'm not either. Just people in general, specifically American.

**[00:34:04] AL:** Any industry you're in, you're going to find people who are the big talkers, and who likes to run around the prof and like to kind of like ruffle their feathers. But I do you think, in journalism, there used to be sense for like keeping the journalists behind the scenes and letting the others do the talking. And I do feel I'm on every social media, and it's been a great tool for work. But I do believe that it's the pendulum is like swung a little too far in the direction of people using it. I think, like using it sort of in a way that I think sometimes undermines the reporting that we're all doing.

[00:34:37] **BB**: Mm-hmm. Well, we will see how this continues. What a time. What a time to be in this world. I'll say that.

Alright. Well, Alex, transitioning once again here. Now we have just hopefully fun, hopefully silly, sometimes very accurate mad lib, that we'd love to play here at the end here. So I have some certain words, and you could give me your word back to fill it in. Then I'll read over the whole paragraph. Is that sounds good to you?

[00:35:04] **AL**: Sounds great.

[00:35:04] **BB**: Okay, first, an emotion.

[00:35:08] **AL**: Excitement.

[00:35:08] **BB**: Excitement. An adjective.

[00:35:12] **AL**: Grisly.

[00:35:14] **BB**: Hmm, grisly. Another adjective.

[00:35:17] **AL**: Outrageous.

[00:35:18] **BB**: This is great already. A greeting.

[00:35:22] **AL**: Hey, there.

[00:35:25] **BB**: Hey, there. A verb.

[00:35:27] **AL**: Thwarted.

[00:35:30] **BB**: Thwarted. A noun.

[00:35:32] **AL**: Artificial intelligence.

[00:35:37] **BB**: Okay. An adjective.

[00:35:39] **AL**: Slawed.

[00:35:39] **BB**: Slawed. I haven't heard that one in quite sometime. A cringe-worthy PR term or phrase.

[00:35:48] **AL**: First of its kind.

[00:35:51] **BB**: First of its kind. And a part of a pitch.

[00:35:56] **AL**: A part of a pitch?

[00:35:57] **BB**: Yes. Like media pitch.

[00:36:00] **AL**: The peg. The news peg.

[00:36:02] **BB**: The news peg. Okay. Okay. Yeah, perfect. In other words, how is it tied to the news and relevant. And a length of time.

[00:36:09] **AL**: 24 hours.

[00:36:12] **BB**: The name of a real person ideally alive.

[00:36:15] **AL**: Mark Zuckerberg.

[00:36:17] **BB**: And then an emotion.

[00:36:20] **AL**: Anxiety.

[00:36:22] **BB**: There you go. Okay, here we go. Here we go, Alex.

**[00:36:25] AL:** Hit it.

**[00:36:25] BB:** When I think of the future of journalism, I feel excitement. The pitches I receive have gone from grisly to outrageous. If I receive a pitch that starts with, "Hey there, I get thwarted. When I write stories on AI, I get slawed. My favorite pitches include first of its kind and the news peg. I normally take around 24 hours to respond to my emails, but if it's Mark Zuckerberg, I will respond immediately. If you do get a response back for me, you should know I'm very anxious for you.

There you go.

**[00:36:59] AL:** That is so funny. And the Mark Zuckerberg piece, definitely spot on. Some of the other stuff about how I want my responses to make people feel anxious, definitely not spot on. That was really fun though.

**[00:37:12] BB:** Thank you, Alex, for being on here today. This was really fun. Alex Levine from Politico, tech reporter. Pincer her correctly, please, everybody. And if it's Mark Zuckerberg, she'll get right back to you real quick.

**[00:37:27] AL:** Thanks, Beck.

[OUTRO]

**[00:37:29] ANNOUNCER:** Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist featuring Alex Levine from Politico. If you enjoy listening to our show, make sure to subscribe on iTunes, Spotify, Google Podcasts, and anywhere else you listen to podcasts. And if you have a moment, please leave us a review to share your thoughts about the show and today's guests. To learn more about the latest tools on OnePitch, and to subscribe to our weekly podcast newsletter, head to our website at [onepitch.co](http://onepitch.co). We'll see you all next week with a brand-new guest and even more insights about the journalists you want to learn more about. Until then, start great stories.

[END]