

EPISODE 101

[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 and look for the video page to learn more about our new video series featuring today's guest.

On the show today, we're joined by Angel Au-Yeung young, a staff writer for Forbes. Angel writes about innovation. She was born in Hong Kong and moved to California when she was five years old. She is also currently cowriting a book about former Zappos CEO, Tony Hsieh. During the episode, angel tells us her process for managing her inbox, her honest thoughts on exclusives, her upcoming book released and more. Let's hear from Angel now.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:01:13] BB: Welcome everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist, 2022 edition. Officially, we're here. Oh, I'm back Bamberger. I have an agency named BAM. I also created OnePitch, which is helping publicists get better pitches to journalists. And that's why we do this show, to talk with our wonderful journalist friends, hear what they like about pitches, what they don't like, what they're reading, and watching, and writing, and thinking about in the overarching world of journalism. It's always a good time here.

And with us today is Angela Au-Yeung. She's from Forbes. She writes on innovation. She actually is the youngest of three sisters moved to California when she was five years old. Fun fact. Originally from Hong Kong, as we all heard in the intro. And Angel, I was going to say Angela again. Angel, welcome. Thank you for being here.

[00:02:04] AA: Thanks so much for having me, Beck.

[00:02:06] BB: Yes. And we will be talking about a book you're writing in just a little bit later. So looking forward to that. First off, we chat a little bit about it before, but your inbox. We'd like to start there. How is your inbox on the daily?

[00:02:20] AA: My inbox is a mess. I don't really know how it compares with other journalists, but it's a terror. I have many unread mails. I pick and choose which emails I want to open. And a lot of them remain unopened. But we are in January 4th. So it's a new year. So far, I've been getting a lot of happy new year emails, notes from analysts, including one from app analyst talking about the company hitting 3 trillion market cap, newsletters, DealBook, Axios, California Sun.

[00:02:53] BB: So question, since it is the start of the year, what did you do with everything from last year? Do you like let everything ride? Or do you do a mass delete dump and like start new year with zero in the inbox?

[00:03:04] AA: That sounds like a really good ambitious plan. But no, I just let it run.

[00:03:10] BB: I let it ride. Okay.

[00:03:11] AA: Yes. My inbox, it has fossils. And I prefer to keep it that way. I like to keep everything as possible. Maybe I'm a hoarder. I'm a digital hoarder.

[00:03:24] BB: You're a digital hoarder. Yeah.

[00:03:25] AA: I am. But, no. Yeah, it's a lot of newsletters. It's happy new year emails. I did get an interesting email from a person who reps a well-known billionaire, and I'm going to let the listeners try and figure out who the billionaire is. But it's an email that says that this billionaire cannot meet my deadline because, "As you can imagine, X is dealing with numerous mission critical items which require his attentiveness." That was kind of funny, but –

[00:03:53] BB: Okay. Was this an interview you had like scheduled? Or was it set up and then you got that note?

[00:03:59] AA: I was trying to set it up.

[00:04:01] BB: Oh! Dang. Okay. That's an unusual one. I haven't heard that one before. So you're first in line on that. For the myriad of emails you do get, and for the ones you open, why do you open them? Is it the subject line, for example? Or is it, "Oh, I know that person."

[00:04:20] AA: It's both. Definitely, if I know that person, I'm obviously going to open their emails. Sometimes there are little tricks that I've seen folks employ that I fall for. And this one we love. It's when you put the subject line in all lowercase. You know what I'm talking about?

[00:04:38] BB: Yeah. I always think that looks spammy, though.

[00:04:42] AA: To me, it actually doesn't.

[00:04:44] BB: Oh, interesting.

[00:04:45] AA: Yeah. Because for me, when you're typing something in all lowercase, it almost evokes like a sense of familiarity you have with that person.

[00:04:53] BB: Oh, sneaky.

[00:04:56] AA: Like you know that person well enough where you don't really care about punctuation, which I know is a good way of thinking it. But editors will email me in all lowercase. Family members –

[00:05:05] BB: Are you serious?

[00:05:08] AA: Yeah. Sometimes I fall for that trick. I find myself falling into that hole.

[00:05:13] BB: O wow! Okay. Oh, I can't even stand the thought of something all lowercase that I'd send to a journalist. That's like – Wow! Okay. So if you're familiar with the person, sometimes it's the subject line. Okay. What about perhaps related to this, because it could be in the subject

line if they put something like exclusive. Do you like exclusives or embargoes? This is the big long debate.

[00:05:38] AA: Yeah, I prefer exclusives over embargo. And I think every journalist respond with that. Embargoes, I'm fine with respecting them. But I go into it knowing that it's obviously not going to be exclusive, and that there's going to be five other stories that are the same exact story is the one that I would write about this. So I would always prefer embargoes over exclusives. Exclusives can be a tricky thing because –

[00:06:05] BB: Oh, tell us.

[00:06:06] AA: Well, they can be used in strange ways. I think this is maybe more – This is more to do with this one story that I was doing, and involved a billionaire, who I think wanted press.

[00:06:20] BB: Angel, I'm getting the sense that you talk to a lot of billionaires.

[00:06:22] AA: Yeah. Forbes, right?

[00:06:26] BB: Yep, there we go.

[00:06:28] AA: But there was this one billionaire who I believe wanted a good amount of press coverage. And so he told me about this exclusive that I later learned was actually not real.

[00:06:41] BB: The story wasn't real? Or they were struggling it to 200 other reporters?

[00:06:46] AA: No. The exclusive wasn't real. **[inaudible 00:06:49]** sayings the exclusive was not actually happening. So they can be tricky. But if I had to choose between the two, I would always want an exclusive from a source over an embargo.

[00:07:00] BB: Hmm, okay. And then for an exclusive, do you have a set amount of time you prefer? I know this varies a lot between people.

[00:07:07] AA: Yeah. No. It really depends on like what the exclusive is. I mean, I feel like with all these stories, everything is so fluid. There's no rulebook to do really anything, because you're dealing with real people. And people, it's messy. So there's like no real **[inaudible 00:07:24]** to any story. But yeah, it really depends on like what the exclusive is like. Are you launching a new business? Are you launching a new product around a funding? And depending on what the news is, then you adjust and respond?

[00:07:39] BB: Mm-hmm. Got it. Okay. For people who are listening who may not be thoroughly understanding of what Forbes covers, which does include, of course, billionaires, how would you advise people to consider pitching the outlet overall? Like what's within the realm of Forbes' interest according to you? We always like to get it firsthand from not necessarily you, the journalists on your beat, but just overarchingly for the publication.

[00:08:06] AA: Sure. I mean, Forbes, we're known to – We really tried to celebrate the successes of business where we can. But we're also not afraid to be skeptical and critical of businesses that need to be held accountable. But with the magazine, we've never done a graphic cover, as in we've never **[inaudible 00:08:27]** cartoon kind of a cover. It's always been focused on a person. And we've never really put a person on the cover that we don't believe has something good to offer to the world.

So I think a lot of Forbes content, at least on the editorial side that we're the staff writers contribute to, we do like to celebrate the successes of the business world, whether that be tech, manufacturing, food agriculture. We look at the whole gamut. But we do also do – There is a section in the magazine and online that takes on a more investigative lens. So if there are any whistleblowers listening, then we're **[inaudible 00:09:09]** stories.

[00:09:11] BB: Yes, yes. I love that you mentioned the covers, because that is something definitely Forbes is known for, is beautiful photography of people always of faces in business. Never artsy landscape. Nothing – Never like that. So that's a nice signature that I think people should also know from a visual perspective.

[00:09:31] AA: Yeah, definitely.

[00:09:31] BB: Good. Cool.

[BREAK]

[00:09:34] 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 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]

[00:09:59] BB: Walk us through, Angel, if you could, an article that you've recently done that you particularly love, and how that came to be. For example, we were talking earlier, and I was mentioning, "Wow! That was an in depth piece you did at the end of the year featuring and talking about the uprising of employees at a level we've never seen before." And that that's going to continue, by the way, throughout next year. It that maybe story – You can pick that one or another one. But how did it come to be? And walk us through one?

[00:10:31] BB: Yeah. **[inaudible 00:10:32].**

[00:10:34] AA: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I've been following the workers movement within tech for a couple months now. I mean, last year, 2021, was really kind of a flashpoint year for tech workers. And I think that when people outside of Silicon Valley think about worker uprising in tech, they immediately start playing like a small violin for them. Because for the most part **[inaudible 00:10:55]** workers as very educated and super well-paid. And they get a lot of cushy benefits, all of which is true. Most workers, pre-COVID, they got free breakfast, lunch, dinners, on site dry cleaning, on site parlors.

[00:11:11] BB: Massage, mm-hmm, nails, everything.

[00:11:13] AA: Exactly. Those were all real benefits. But what I found when I spoke with a lot of these workers who were organizing within these big tech companies, they more or less were not

really fighting for benefits for themselves. They were fighting for benefits for the non-salaried workers. So the contractors, the temp workers, which includes people who work in the data centers, to the janitors at HQ. And I thought that that was a really interesting and important distinction that I think a lot of people can miss if they just read a headline of tech worker uprising.

So through that, I just got to talking to a lot of these employees that work at these big tech companies. And it was just really interesting to hear about people who are fighting for something bigger than themselves. And that really seems to be kind of the sentiment of 2021. Particularly, we thought the pandemic was over. And now it doesn't seem like it totally is. So. Yeah, I mean, I've loved writing those types of stories, because I really got the chance to talk to people that I feel like I can actually relate to. Because as a Forbes reporter, especially for me, because I started on the billionaire beat, which is –

[00:12:29] BB: Yeah. Not exactly relatable?

[00:12:30] AA: Yeah. I mean, you end up talking to a lot of people that billionaires are billionaires. I wouldn't say that they are the most relatable people for the average day person, especially the average journalist.

[00:12:41] BB: Yeah. Okay. Can I ask? Has there ever been one that you've spoken to where you're like, "Dang, that seems like a normal person?"

[00:12:51] AA: Actually. I mean, yeah, of course.

[00:12:52] BB: Yes?

[00:12:54] AA: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. At the end of the day, like all these billionaires are regular, normal people. And there're just small things that you can relate with them to that makes you forget the fact that this person is like the fourth richest person in the world. And those types of connections, you can really only get in person, which fortunately, due to the pandemic, those chances have been less than less. I would say that I think there are fewer billionaires that I've spoken to that strike me as not normal, rather than –

[00:13:25] **BB:** Really? Oh, fascinating.

[00:13:27] **AA:** At least in my experience.

[00:13:29] **BB:** Yeah. Wow. I wouldn't have thought that. I was going to think you would say, "No, they're all extreme, weird, on the spectrum, perhaps whatever out there, out there people." But wow!

[00:13:40] **AA:** I mean. It's cool. You would be surprised. **[inaudible 00:13:43]** those billionaires do exist.

[00:13:46] **BB:** Yes, yes. I think we know some. Yes.

[00:13:48] **AA:** Yeah, even the people who I thought would be really out there, once I actually got to chatting with them in person, I was kind of surprised at how many things there were that I could easily relate to, if that makes any sense.

[00:14:00] **BB:** Yeah. Wow. I'm glad to ask that. Cool. Okay, Angel. Now, what are you reading, writing? Well, not writing. We know you write every day. Reading, streaming, listening to, we'll take podcasts, we'll take Audible books, anything you've got. I know you're also working on a book. What do you got?

[00:14:19] **AA:** Yeah. So you're actually catching me at a particularly bookish and TV consuming time for me. Because of Omicron, kind of canceling all the holidays. And I also just got a Kindle, which I was very against most of my life, because I love the feeling of actual books.

[00:14:37] **BB:** Me too. But have you conformed? Are you okay with it?

[00:14:41] **AA:** I actually got a Kindle last month, and I love it.

[00:14:44] BB: Wow. Okay. I got an iPad for flying, because I do helicopter flying. I was like the same thing with you where I'm like, "I'm never going to read something on here." And now I'm reading on that thing all the time.

[00:14:54] AA: Yeah. Because with COVID, I was taking a lot of that. And I will say Kindles are waterproof and makes that whole ordeal just a lot less daunting because if you look into a big tub of water can be – It's more stressful than you would think. In terms of what I'm reading, so because Joan Didion just passed away, I reread a lot of her stuff. So *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, *The White Album*, *The Year of Magical Thinking*. And I was rereading a lot in the last week or two because, for me, my Christmas was cancelled. I couldn't see my family because we got COVID. So the gist of that. Whenever something like that happens, I always like to reread stuff, because it's like revisiting old friends.

[00:15:38] BB: Yeah, it is.

[00:15:39] AA: Yeah. So I was rereading Joan Didion, and I was rereading Jia Tolentino as well. She got some amazing book, *Trick Mirror*. And I was also rereading some of her essays for *The New Yorker*.

[00:15:51] BB: Oh, yes. I saw this. This is in my wish list. Yes. *Reflections on Self-Delusion*. Okay. Oh, I'm going to get that then next.

[00:15:59] AA: She's great. In terms of new books that I picked up, right now I'm reading *Going Clear* by Lawrence Wright, about Scientology. The writer, Lawrence Wright, he did a good job of giving scientology the benefit of the doubt as much as possible. He gives them the chance to prove their case, which kind of makes his book even more credible. He's given them so much of a chance to prove that they're not this kind of wacky, culty religion that most people **[inaudible 00:16:32]**. More like he's giving them a chance to prove themselves, it still comes across that way. So I love how he's presenting scientology.

[00:16:41] BB: Oh, and he's a Pulitzer Prize winning author who wrote the *Looming Tower*. That was the al Qaeda 9/11 attack. Big, big book. Yeah. Wow.

[00:16:51] AA: And he does like a really good job of showing like a best use case of one of the best advice I ever got from another journalist, which is, yeah, when you're writing something that does not present the source in a positive light, like you're writing a negative piece on them, you still have to bend over backwards and give them as much of an opportunity to present their case and respond to every allegation that is out there against them.

[00:17:17] BB: To make it as unbiased as possible, right?

[00:17:20] AA: Exactly. Yeah.

[00:17:22] BB: Yup. Despite your biases perhaps.

[00:17:24] BB: Yeah, exactly. And just make sure you're hearing everything out and presenting both cases. I think Lawrence Wright does a good job of that in this book.

[00:17:32] BB: Oh, I just got it on Audible. Got it. This is where I get all my reads. Excellent. And then tell us about the book you're working on?

[00:17:39] AA: Yeah. So it's a book biography about the late Tony Hsieh. He passed way in late 2020. He was the former CEO of Zappos, the online store that was acquired by Amazon some years ago, over a decade ago. But yeah, my cowriter, David Jeans and I, we wrote a story pretty quickly after his passing that talked about really the events that led up to his death. And through that, we got to talking to a lot of people that knew Tony quite well. People who knew him in elementary school, to people who really only met him in 2020. And so through that, we decided to write a book because we really feel like he was this larger than life character that deserves an accurate and truthful telling in the book form.

[00:18:27] BB: Was it hard to interview people?

[00:18:31] AA: Yeah, I was honest –

[00:18:32] BB: Just emotional? Just because it wasn't very shocking death.

[00:18:36] AA: Yeah, totally. I mean, especially for that first story that we wrote that really came out. It must have been less than two weeks after his passing. We were dealing with sources who had very raw emotions. Yeah, of course, I tried to never respond emotionally during **[inaudible 00:18:56]**. But I do remember – It's hard. It's hard. And I remember like going, like after some of the calls I would just like – I was just be sad for them. They lost a really dear friend. So yeah, it was probably one of the harder stories, emotionally anyway, to report. But now we're writing a book about him. And I have a good feeling about the book.

[00:19:17] BB: When is that out? Do we know yet?

[00:19:19] AA: We don't really know yet. We probably shouldn't say when, because we're just not quite sure. Yeah, I'm hoping at some point this year.

[00:19:28] BB: Okay. Ooh, we're going to keep our eyes out for it. Ooh, thanks, Angel. Thanks for telling us about that. We always want to hype our journalists who are writing books, too, because that's a whole other landscape of storytelling, frankly. Yes.

Well, maybe speaking to that, I don't know, what do you think the future of journalism looks like?

[00:19:48] AA: The future? I mean, so much was said about Substack last year?

[00:19:52] BB: Yes. Yes.

[00:19:54] AA: And I really think that trend is only going to continue, especially with the journalists that have a very big following outside of the newsrooms that they write for, because I really think we're going to see a lot more reporters trying to break off on their own, whether it's on Substack, or even a media startup. Just today, Ben Smith, he's leaving the New York Times to join a media startup.

[00:20:14] BB: Oh, I didn't catch that. Wow.

[00:20:17] AA: Yeah. And Ben Smith is a big name and media.

[00:20:19] BB: Big, big, big, yeah.

[00:20:20] AA: Yeah. And so I will follow him to the startup that he's going to just to see some of his work. So I think that that trend will continue. But that doesn't mean that it's going to take away from the traditional newsrooms. I mean, so many people are moving around everywhere right now. I feel like when you go **[inaudible 00:20:36]**.

[00:20:36] BB: Yes. Very much, though.

[00:20:37] AA: Yeah. When I go on my Twitter feed, so many journalists are leaving this newsroom to go to that. And I really think that this shake up is – It could be really interesting. There are some really strong voices joining newsrooms that I can already kind of map out this journalist leaving for this newsroom will probably this editor. So these stories are going to be great. And I think there's just going to be a lot more movement within journalism in terms of people switching newsrooms, as well as journalists breaking off on their own, because they feel like they can.

[00:21:09] BB: Mm-hmm. I think 2021 was a huge momentum of that. People starting their own things. People going to startups. People go into VC funds, even though which is the landscape I live in all the time. And that's been fascinating to see. So it almost sounds like, to me, that perhaps for one of the first times a journalist is deemed highly desirable to startups, funds, agencies, other places that maybe didn't really ever consider a journalist. Do you know what I'm saying? It doesn't seem like that was ever kind of a thought, even though it seems so obvious. It would be like hiring teachers for finance firms or something. But it's become a thing. And they're so in demand.

[00:21:52] AA: No, totally. And especially within tech, because I think that the tech narrative for companies, it's very important for other companies to be able to tell their story correctly. And I mean, there's definitely a level of mistrust between companies and journalists right now in tech. And so given that there is this mistrust, I can only imagine it being a benefit for tech companies, VCs, to hire former reporters to help them with their strategy. Because you're talking about people who have been behind the lines who know how journalism works and understand how journalists view companies and what they're looking for, what they're not looking for, what they

think is or isn't important in a story. I mean, I know a good amount of reporter friends who have joined VC firms actually.

[00:22:40] BB: If only this thing.

[00:22:41] AA: Yeah, it is. It is. But then there's also a lot of reporters who are also just starting their own Substack.

[00:22:48] BB: Very true, too.

[00:22:49] AA: Trying to figure out a new model for, frankly, what is a broken revenue model for journalism. So yeah, I mean, I definitely see that trend that you're talking about.

[00:22:58] BB: Gosh, what an exciting year upon us, Angel, my goodness. Well, Angel, thank you for being here today. Thanks for giving us a little insight into your book that's coming out. Congratulations in advance. Angel Au-Yeung, thank you so much for joining us today. She's from Forbes. You heard it on our little video. Give her a call. I still can't believe that, Angel. Goodluck finding her number. Yes, that first. But also, wow. And I love it. And Happy New Year.

[00:23:30] AA: Happy New Year, Beck. Thanks so much for having me.

[OUTRO]

[00:23:33] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist featuring Angel Au-Yeung from Forbes. 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. 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]

