

EPISODE 109

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:10] 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 from the top US-based publications who cover topics including technology, lifestyle and culture, health, science, consumer products, business news and beauty and wellness. We discuss 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 today's episode, we're joined by Gili Malinsky, a reporter for Grow by CNBC and Acorns. Gili writes daily articles about side hustles, the American job market and mental health. She also edits colleagues' stories and works with the social media team to ensure visibility and a growing audience. During the episode, Gili gives us the inside scoop about growing her beat, how she wants to be pitched a story in when, how she identifies new stories from existing ones and more. Let's hear from Gili now.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:01:23] BB: Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist. I'm Beck Bamberger. I'm the founder of BAM, an agency that works with all venture back technology companies. And also, the founder of OnePitch, which is making this podcast straight to you in your ears, because publicists need a lot of help with making good relationships with journalists. I think our relationships with journalists could be a lot better. So hence we are here on this wonderful show to talk with real live journalists to get a better understanding of what they like, what the pitches are that work and so forth. With us today, oh, exciting, Gili Malinsky from Grow, which is produced by CNBC and Acorns. We're going to talk about what Grow all entails in just a moment.

Welcome, Gili. Thanks for being here.

[00:02:08] GM: Thank you so much for having me. This is so cool.

[00:02:10] BB: This is fun. Tell me first what Grow is for those who are maybe not as familiar. I didn't even know a couple of minutes ago, so there you go.

[00:02:16] GM: Yeah, totally. Most people are in your shoes. Most people don't know. We are definitely a growing publication, pun intended. Here we go, starting with the punch lines already.

[00:02:29] BB: Yes. I love it.

[00:02:30] GM: So basically, Grow is the CNBC and Acorns' partnership site. Acorns is an investment app.

[00:02:36] BB: That's right.

[00:02:37] GM: And CNBC partnered with Acorns a few years ago to sort of grow its content creation on this particular app. Acorns had been running the site themselves. But I think as part of the partnerships, because CNBC, content and article creation, this is what we do. They decided that like the CNBC team would sort of take over all content creation for this particular site. Grow has its own URL. It's not under the cnbc.com URL, but it is a team of – we are a team of CNBC editors, writers, graphic designers, videographers creating the content for it. We're all employed by CNBC, but we make the content for this particular website. That's what our team is responsible for.

[00:03:17] BB: Got it. Now, next question could simply be, oh, does it have to do with Acorns? Is it always tying back to the app? Da da da da. What would you say for that?

[00:03:25] GM: No, it's a great question. My understanding is that part of the Acorns sort of ethos MO is financial literacy, is education about personal finance. Our attitude toward our content is really like we're writing for people who are just beginning a personal finance journey and that covers everything right. It covers budgeting, it covers savings, it covers earnings, which is what I write about. It covers investments, it covers even things that have to do with health.

That's kind of a new topic that I'm diving into a little bit. It's anything to do with your personal finance and really the beginning of your journey, like trying to break it down for people.

[00:04:03] BB: Hmm, that's quite all encompassing, because there's so much finance, education we all need, I feel, which is sorely lacking in all the curriculum of education – anyway, that's a whole other topic. We don't need to get into that. Okay. Gili, how was your inbox in terms of pitches?

[00:04:20] GM: What do you mean how? Like how full?

[00:04:22] BB: How full, how crazy, how annoying, how anything?

[00:04:26] GM: Yeah, you're asking me today at 5:21, right now, it's really not that bad.

[00:04:34] BB: Oh! **[Inaudible 00:04:34]**

[00:04:36] GM: Yeah. I think that there are probably – so there are two folders. There's like the focus folder, and then there's the other folder or something. The other folders also like New York Times stuff and just like whatever comes in there. And then the focus folder is obviously all the pitches, so I think focus folder right now is probably something like – it's like seven to ten emails I would say that I have to go back and kind of read through when I have more time and then respond with more attention.

[00:04:58] BB: Now, wait a second. Wait. What is that? A focus filter?

[00:05:02] GM: No. I think just – I have nothing to do with this, but like our Outlook, I think it divides it up into two folders for us. Like I didn't even set this up.

[00:05:12] BB: Oh, I see. Oh, I see. Interesting. That's kind of nice.

[00:05:16] GM: Yeah, it decides for you. Well, I guess it's – yeah, it decides for you like what is most relevant and what is least relevant, and it divides these to the two different folders or the two different sections of email.

Yeah. So I would say, right now, there's between seven and ten, probably closer to seven emails in my focus folder, which is like where all the PR pitches would come in, of pitches that I have to go through, emails from people that I really want to like just take the time and read so I can respond properly. But like, yeah, I would say, depending on when in the week, it could be, there could be 40 emails in there, 50 emails in there and there could be one.

[00:05:53] BB: Hmm. Quite the array, which is unusual for the show. Because sometimes people are like, "Oh my God! It's 290 every single day, and it just goes crazy." Okay. So not too bad. And then do you have a process in which obviously, you have some kind of like an outlet hookup, which is great. But do you search your own inbox for leads, or sources six months later. Does that happen?

[00:06:22] GM: I'm pretty meticulous about my emails. I think I try to – I mean, I really try to just take at least one day a week to go through literally every single one. Sometimes what happens, our outlook just kind of automatically erases our emails within a few months, which is something that I learned six months into my role, that like this is how our particular email system works. So that if I want to hold on to some information, I have to figure out a way to do that. For instance, if there's a source that I think could come in handy later, I actually have an Excel spreadsheet where I put the PR person's email, where I put the link to what the source is. It's like tabbed under this is a work expert, or this is a side hustle expert, or this is a health expert, whatever it might be. I just have them there if I want to go back to them later, and it's certainly like a spreadsheet that I've used. I might not respond to your email., but if your source is relevant to me, I set it aside so that I can respond to you later.

[00:07:18] BB: Okay. Then we are chatting a little bit about this with, by the way, my handyman stealing stuff in the background. Pardon the noise. You were saying, you do get some rather absurd pitches. Do you care to elaborate?

[00:07:33] GM: I'm happy to elaborate because this is truly a pet peeve. I completely understand that Grow is not a publication that people are widely familiar with. It's certainly not like CNBC, which is how many tons of millions, hundreds of millions of people know. So I understand, but I think there's a bit of confusion because sometimes what happens is I'll write

an article for Grow, and then CNBC actually republishes it under.com. There's a lot of my stories that were written for Grow that CNBC, like they fit the audience and so they just republish them as well. It's possible that people find me through these articles that are on the cnbc.com website. So then it looks like I'm a CNBC reporter, writes for cnbc.com, as opposed to CNBC reporter who writes for Grow.

But to get my email, you have to go to my Twitter account. That's where I've posted my email, so I'm assuming everybody emails me.

[00:08:22] BB: Yes, public information.

[00:08:24] GM: Yes. I'm assuming everybody who emails me, to my work email goes to Twitter, where it's posted. They're in like right in my Twitter profile is a description of where I write, like what the publication I write for is, which is Grow. It's pretty straightforward. Anybody who emails me, I imagine had to pass through my Twitter account at some point, where it says that I write for Grow. And regardless, I get a lot of pitches where I have to explain to people that I don't write for cnbc.com, I write for Grow. Then inevitably, the question that follows is, "What is Grow?" So I have to explain to these people who have come to me, who have come to me with their story pitches, what my publication is that they've actually pitched to.

Often, a follow up question to that is, "Well, can I get my story on CNBC? Like can you just put it out there?"

[00:09:18] BB: No.

[00:09:19] GM: Oh, yeah. It's really frustrating and kind of infuriating series of questions that I have to address where it's like, "It's fine if you don't want your articles to go up. It's fine if you're not interested. If your subject is not a fit for growth, that's perfectly fine. I understand. I'm not hurt by that." But don't come to me with your story idea, so then I have to go through this entire process of explaining what my publication is to me when you're the one who's come to me in the first place. To you rather.

[00:09:49] BB: Yeah. Oh, oh, faux pas, big time.

[00:09:52] GM: Yeah. A lot of major faux pas in there.

[00:09:55] BB: Oh! Okay. Let's talk about something maybe more positive. Okay. What are some of the best subject lines you've ever received?

[00:10:05] GM: That's a really good question. Often, subject lines are quite long, and then they get cut off.

[00:10:10] BB: Exactly. And then you're like, you can't read the whole damn thing I know.

[00:10:13] GM: I know. I often decide whether or not this is an appropriate pitch for me, like from the subject line. I might skim the email, because again, like this came up a little bit earlier, but like I – or when we were chatting a little bit, when we're chatting. But a lot of the pitches that I get are like really this wall of text, right? It's like somebody, a PR person is writing me like a book, basically about their subjects and why they're relevant. I understand there's a lot of important information, and then you need to pass it off, you need to explain it to me. But there's a time for that, and that's for me, as far as I'm concerned, after I've told you that I'm interested. So, I'll skim the wall of text, but often, I'll just go straight to the subject line and see if there are like three words in there that are relevant to what I'm doing.

[00:10:59] BB: So sad.

[00:11:02] GM: Horrifying. You know what I mean? It's like, when you are inundated by pitches, like you just know how to pick up pretty quickly of like whether or not this is what I'm writing about right now, this is what something I'll write about in the future, whatever it might – or this is the pitch that's come to me literally five times in the last five days. It's the same pitch over and over again. I would say – to answer your question, I mean, the best subject line that – I can't remember anything specific, just that they're usually very long, and if you can keep them on the shorter sides so they don't get cut off. That makes everybody's lives I think a little bit easier. Certainly mine.

[00:11:37] BB: Okay. So short. Short and sweet.

[00:11:39] **GM:** Yeah. I would say keep it short, and keep the email short as well.

[BREAK]

[00:11:43] **ANNOUNCER:** Today's interview will continue after this brief message brought to you by OnePitch. Are you curious to see the unique ways OnePitch helps PR professionals and marketers pitch journalists, head to onepitch.co to 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 CONTINUES]

[00:12:09] **BB:** We talked about that in your pitch tips, yes. Do you ever do exclusives or embargoes or anything of that sort? That's usually a popular topic on this show.

[00:12:18] **GM:** Yeah, for sure. Why not?

[00:12:20] **BB:** What do you feel about exclusives?

[00:12:23] **GM:** Exclusives are great. It's fun to receive them. What's fun about my beat, I write a lot about anything to do with earning money. Like side hustle, or entrepreneurs or jobs in demand. A lot of the people that I ended up profiling are unknowns. They're just kind of everyday people who have figured out a hack for earning money on the side, or for creating a small business for themselves. These are not typically people who are getting profiled by like Time Magazines or like New York Times.

[00:12:54] **BB:** Yeah, or CNN.

[00:12:54] **GM:** Just kind of by virtue of looking for the sort of like stories in between the cracks, and the people on the ground, like really doing the work and in a way that might seem unsexy. But it's ultimately I think, super, super intriguing and really cool. Like end up getting exclusives because these are not people who get profiled a lot.

[00:13:13] BB: Oh, so interesting. For example, you have a story. This goes into my next question too. You have a piece on a Millennial Mom on track to save 3.5 million. You have a sales person who became an Olympic bobsledder, like you have some coverage on that stuff. There's quite an array. You have an Atlanta single mom making \$10,000 extra a month. Are people pitching you those specific stories?

[00:13:40] GM: Um, it's a combination of their pitching me and I just kind of like know how to go after the stories that I'm interested in. I think actually, all three of those examples – I believe all three of those examples, definitely the Etsy mom and the Olympic bobsledder had been covered before. Like certainly, the Olympic bobsledder if course, like she's – I would not be the person breaking her story, most likely. With the Etsy mom, for instance. She's somebody who came up in a couple of interviews that I had with other people who just knew about her and –

[00:14:12] BB: A couple of times? So you're talking and interviewing people, and they're like, "Hey, do you know about this Etsy Mom?"?

[00:14:17] GM: Yeah. When you interview people who write about side hustles, these side hustle experts like they are –

[00:14:23] BB: They're in know.

[00:14:23] GM: Yeah, they're super tuned into the people who are making it work in this particular way, who have like exploded with their side hustles. It just kind of like – it will naturally come out of them that they know this person who's like made all this money with like a traveling bar or they know this person who's made all this money like teaching people how to use Excel on TikTok or something like that. As a journalist, I just know, okay, well, that's somebody that I should be speaking to. Can you please give me their information?

[00:14:52] BB: Hmm, very cool.

[00:14:53] GM: Yeah. I think the way that I found out about the Outschool Mom, the Atlanta-based mom was actually – the first story I wrote about her was about a year ago. I think that

actually Outschool told me about her specifically. A lot of times what happens is, like these outlets, where people do their side hustles, we'll reach out with like five success stories of varying degrees. Like it could be somebody who's making 5,000 a month, it could be somebody who's making half a million dollars a month. And then they'll send me sort of like a blurb about that person and I'll say, "Okay. That looks like it fits. Let's do an interview and see what happens."

[00:15:30] BB: Oh, I hadn't thought of internal comms people from certain platforms like Etsy coming to you and pitching their users. But that's a very smart pitch.

[00:15:39] GM: Yes. Well, Etsy did not come to me with the Etsy mom. That, I get you.

[00:15:43] BB: But in theory, they could.

[00:15:45] GM: Yes, exactly. That's the idea. Like a lot –

[00:15:48] BB: Oh, it is. Oh! Very interesting. Okay. Gili, what are you reading, listening to, binging, watching, we'll take anything, any stories you got that you love, right now?

[00:16:00] GM: Yeah, for sure. I mean, I read a lot about labor and work.

[00:16:04] BB: But for fun?

[00:16:05] GM: For fun. So for fun, I listen to a lot of like – okay. Well, probably my favorite podcast of all time is the Marc Maron podcast.

[00:16:14] BB: Oh, okay. Okay.

[00:16:16] GM: So if you're not familiar, he's a long-time stand-up comic. Oh, he's incredible. So he's a long-time stand-up comic.

[00:16:21] BB: Oh, I had to get this. Okay.

[00:16:23] GM: Yeah. Mark Maron. Did you ever watch the show Glow?

[00:16:26] BB: No, but I'm familiar.

[00:16:28] GM: Yeah, Glow is amazing. It's a Netflix show about women wrestlers in the '80s. It's phenomenal.

[00:16:33] BB: Oh, wow.

[00:16:33] GM: Yeah, it's such a fun show. But anyway, **[inaudible 00:16:35]** Netflix killing it. Totally. But anyway, he played a character on that show, which is why I referenced it. He's had this podcast for years and years. He basically, I think, probably started out like just interviewing comedians, because he's super tapped into the comedy scene writing and he's been doing it for so long. It's just sort of grew from there to the point where he's interviewing people like Obama and Jane Goodall. I just listened to his interview with Jane Goodall, which was really phenomenal. It's so interesting to hear a scientist talk at this particular moment.

[00:17:10] BB: Wait what's the podcast called?

[00:17:11] GM: It's called WTF with Marc Maron.

[00:17:14] BB: Oh, okay. Now, it's popping up. Now, it's popping up.

[00:17:18] GM: That's my like fun podcast that I just like love listening to because he is really psychoanalytical. He just likes to get into like the brains of these people, their minds and hearts. Right. So it's like, what happened in your childhood that made you be this way? Like as a child of a psychologist, I'm also super interested in stuff like that. I love how deep he goes with people.

[00:17:41] BB: I like it.

[00:17:42] GM: So that's for fun.

[00:17:44] BB: Okay. That's for funsies. What else?

[00:17:46] GM: For funsies. I mean, I think I read a lot of, obviously, I read a lot of a cnbc.com. Like amazing coverage on there.

[00:17:53] BB: Mm-hmm. Make sense.

[00:17:55] GM: Yes. That's our family right there. A recent piece that I read on the New Yorker is called Notes on Work.

[00:18:02] BB: I've seen that, yeah. Notes on Work, I'm pulling up. Yep.

[00:18:06] GM: Yeah. I think her – we pronounce it Weiki Wang or Weiki Wang. I'm not sure. It's a beautiful piece that basically talks about what it means to be what are the expectations of you as a worker as an Asian woman, as a millennial. She just kind of goes into the, yeah, just like the deep psychology of what work means to her, because of all her various identities.

[00:18:31] BB: I love this one opening line from her February piece, which is, "Sometimes I feel as though I have five jobs, and then I realized that this is in fact the case."

[00:18:40] GM: Yeah, it's so beautifully written. It's so beautiful. I mean, as everything on the New Yorker is obviously like, these people produce art. Yeah. That's like a recent piece that I just loved. I think her honesty and her openness. And again, like really anything that gets into the sort of like mind and heart of the person writing it, like I'm always super into that, because I think when you can – as a writer, when you can mirror what people are feeling to themselves, and as a reader, when I can see myself in something like, that's when I feel most connected. I think that that's – I think people feel the same way.

[00:19:13] BB: You mentioned that on the video clip we did by the way. Everybody, watch for the little video clips on the film of blank with what's the best thing you ever heard from your work, the highest compliment when people are like, "Oh, I feel seen. Oh, you get it." Yeah, that's powerful writing.

[00:19:27] GM: Yeah. Thank you, yeah. I think that's when I really feel like I'm doing my job right.

[00:19:33] BB: Yeah. Well, speaking of your job, Gili. What do you think the future of journalism holds?

[00:19:40] GM: Yeah, it's such a big question. I imagine that with the internet, we'll continue to discover, like what journalism and storytelling can look like. Sometimes it won't be great, but I think – well, in terms of like write – the building blocks of journalism is that we're telling the truth, right? Unfortunately, even before the internet, people were sort of like breaking that code of conduct. But I think the way people tell the truth as journalists will probably continue to evolve along with the internet, people will continue to get really experimenty with how they pass up stories. I think that there will always be the diehards, the people who want to read straight news or who want to read like long form pieces. There's always like this fear, I think that people will stop reading because of X, right? First, it was the radio, and it was television and it's like – maybe it's now, it's the internet. But I think that there just will always be readers in the same way, I think that there will always be people who look for specific types of journalism. I don't know if any particular type of journalism is going to die out long form, news, whatever. I think that there will just always be the people who are looking for it, I think. But my guess is like, there will just be more innovation around how we pass off stories as journalists, always with an eye toward telling the truth.

[00:21:00] BB: Mm-hmm. With an eye on telling the truth. I think we can end it there, Gili.

[00:21:05] GM: Okay, cool.

[00:21:05] BB: That was fantastic. Thank you so much for spending time with us, Gili. Appreciate it. Everyone check out Grow by CNBC and Acorns. Thank you, Gili. Thanks for being on.

[00:21:18] GM: Thanks so much for having me. This was so lovely and fun.

[00:21:21] BB: This was great. Thanks again.

[00:21:22] GM: Totally.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:21:25] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist, featuring Gili Malinsky from Grow by CNBC and Acorns. If you enjoy listening to our show, make sure to subscribe on iTunes, Spotify, Google Podcasts, and anywhere else you listen to podcasts. If you have a moment, please leave us a review to share your thoughts about the show and today's guest.

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[END]