

EPISODE 156

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:09] ANNOUNCER: Welcome to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist brought to you by OnePitch. Are you curious how one pitch can help you find relevant journalists to pitch, including some of the guests on this podcast? Head to our website at onepitch.co to learn more.

This week on the Coffee with a Journalist podcast, we sat down with Kate Davis, Fast Company Deputy Editor and the host of The Way We Work Podcast. During the episode, Kate talks about what it's like juggling multiple roles, her preferences for how to format subject lines, what you shouldn't be mentioning in pitches, and more. Let's hear from Kate now.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:00:53] BB: Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist. You are here, hopefully, drinking coffee and wanting to know what journalists want. So that's what we're here to do on this show. I'm Beck Bamberger, and with us today is Kate Davis, who's been a longtime Fast Company reporter, editor, and so forth, officially now Deputy Editor of fastcompany.com and the host of a new wonderful podcast as well called The New Way We Work.

Hi, Kate. Thanks for being here.

[00:01:23] KD: Hi. Thanks for having me. I will say the podcast is not new. It's been around for five years.

[00:01:27] BB: Oh, God. Okay. Oh, geez. Awful. Okay. Well, just so people know, she's the host of The New Way We Work. I think I got tripped up, Kate, because I'm like, "Oh, the new way."

[00:01:39] KD: You're working in a new way, but we've been talking about working in a new way for a long time. The podcast actually used to be called The Secrets of the Most Productive People, and we switched the focus in about a year or so ago. That part's new, I guess.

[00:01:52] BB: Okay. Okay. No wonder I'm tripped up. All right, God. Oh, blunder. All right, Kate. Well, we're here. You've been at Fast Company for a bit, which is rare, 2013-ish and some changed.

[00:02:05] KD: Yeah.

[00:02:06] BB: How is your inbox these days?

[00:02:08] KD: Oh. Well, everybody's inbox is crazy, right? Like at least **[inaudible 00:02:12]** emails a day, like new ones coming in.

[00:02:14] BB: Oh, that's not bad.

[00:02:15] KD: Oh, I guess. Okay.

[00:02:17] BB: Yeah. I've heard way worse, but go ahead.

[00:02:19] KD: I'm a big deleter, which everyone's not going to like to hear. But it's – After decades in this industry, I can tell really quickly what's worth opening and reading. So when I get that big, long inbox, it's like delete, delete, delete, delete, pause. It's a pretty quick process.

[00:02:35] BB: Oh, okay. Yeah. You're masterful at this level, I would imagine. So for so many people who are listening here, they want to know, “Well, how do I get my email open, especially if I don't have a relationship with you?” What is it in the subject line that entices you?

[00:02:51] KD: Yeah. So really clear what it is to stand out. So if it's an interview pitch, a pitch from a freelancer versus a pitch from a PR, it's a pitch to be a guest on the podcast versus it's an article pitch, it's a – Whatever the thing is, sometimes I'll see people put that right, like whatever the thing is, podcast guest suggestion, colon, then what you're actually pitching.

If it's a story idea, I love the headline of the story in the subject line. Because if you wrote a good headline of the story, then that's going to make me want to open it. Because just like if you write a good headline –

[00:03:30] BB: There you go.

[00:03:30] KD: To make me want to read it, right?

[00:03:32] BB: So write the subject line, like the headline of the story.

[00:03:35] KD: Yep.

[00:03:36] BB: Oh. Now, people have not said that on here before. Some have said like, “Oh, just super clear. I just need it to be no gimmicky. Just cut and dry, that type of thing,” so okay.

[00:03:47] KD: Yeah. I think definitely what you're pitching, I will say, “Do you love the CEO of this company,” because I'm never going to do that. But I get that a lot, and those are easy to delete. Those are – I mean, it's also like if you know who you're pitching, right? Like I had Super Bowl stories. I don't write product roundup stories. I don't write about new TV shows. Like don't – I can tell when I'm on like a big mass dear media person list and easy delete.

[00:04:16] BB: Yeah, dear blank. Cool. Okay. So are you in the inbox zero club?

[00:04:23] KD: I'm not, but I'm in like a version of it. I use my inbox, and this is just like my own organizational system for like things that I need to still respond to or look at our reference. If I'm done with it, I'll put it in a folder. If I'm not interested, I delete it. So the inbox isn't zero, but it's – God, I could look right now.

[00:04:47] BB: Yeah. How's it?

[00:04:48] KD: It's honestly maybe like 100 things in it, and I do let things kind of push to the bottom that aren't as urgent. But it's like, “Oh, I'm not ready to put it in a folder yet,” and I also like might return to it.

[00:04:59] BB: Do you also do, which we've heard here a bit, your own Google search within your inbox? So, "Oh, yeah. What was that pitch I got six months ago that has something to do with cactus growers? Oh, let me look it up."

[00:05:12] KD: Yep.

[00:05:12] BB: Aha. Okay.

[00:05:14] KD: Sometimes, for people too, like we'll work with what we refer to as expert contributors, so basically academics, some CEOs, some like business leaders. I'll see – Sometimes, like a name will come on like Twitter or something, a name will come up, and I'm like, "Oh, yeah. That person, I remember them. I talked to them something a long time ago."

I also help with programming for our innovation festival, and we do workshops. So I'm looking. "Oh, that person would be a good person. I remember." But I don't remember in my own organizational system, where I filed their email. So I'll search for their name or this object. Yeah.

[00:05:51] BB: Okay. This is good to know. This is a typical, I would say, for pitching. But I've long thought, oh, pitches should have almost like a little section on the bottom key words. Kind of like when he's getting dissertations and academic papers, which I'm in an academic program right now. Because that's how you find when you search that content. I was like, "Oh, keywords on the bottom of your pitch." Anyway, that's a little unusual and avant-garde, but maybe people will do that. We'll see.

[00:06:17] KD: I mean, you should probably have them in the pitch itself, right? Like they should be in the –

[00:06:21] BB: Yes, yes.

[00:06:22] KD: Subject line because that's it. I'm like, "Oh, I remember. I got pitched a story about bad managers. I'll look up bad managers."

[00:06:30] BB: Yeah, bad manager. Yeah, exactly. Okay. It's good for people, I think, to keep those keywords prominent so that it's there. Okay. Speaking of pitches, for the elements of a pitch, so let's say the email gets opened because the subject line was good. Now, you're looking at the actual pitch. You can tell that you're not on – It's not dear blank, so and so forth. For you, what are maybe the three best elements of a pitch that you go yes?

[00:06:57] KD: Yep. So like I said, the good subject line. I mean, if you're pitching an article, again, I guess it depends on what you're pitching. So if you're pitching an article, tell me what the possible headline is going to be. Tell me who you're going to talk to or what topical research you're going to reference, what value you're bringing, and a sentence or two of what it's about. We can include like about how long it would be, about when you could turn it around. But like something as to – Everybody knows this, right? The big thing for journalists is like why now? Like why now and why this?

[00:07:31] BB: Yeah. Why does it matter? Which so often missed. Now, you just said there, and I, again, haven't heard this too often, the potential headlines, the actual headlines. So do you even like to see like, “Oh. Hey, Katie. This could look like A, B, or C,” as the headline. I mean, that's a little audacious I'd say. But does that help you kind of discern and see, “Oh, this is how this would look if we ran this.”?

[00:07:53] KD: Yeah. I think so. Or sometimes, if it's like – I think a lot of people pitch on like, “Oh, I could talk on this topic or about these things.” Or, “Are you working on any stories about quiet quitting?” I mean, that's also like a big pet peeve, is like a thing is in the news, and then you try to shoehorn your way into it.

[00:08:09] BB: Way into the thing. Yeah.

[00:08:10] KD: But if you have like a unique perspective, like everybody's talking about it, it's been around for a long time, and here's my take on it, and here's why it's different, and here's the thing about this. It kind of all boils down to something that's relatable but surprising. So like something where you hear it, and you're like, “Oh, yes. That makes sense. But I had never actually thought of that or put it that way, or nobody had ever like articulated it.”

So an example, and this was actually like an editor in a brainstorm the other day said, “Have you guys noticed that all the companies that are doing layoffs are laying off around like 6% of people?”

[00:08:49] BB: Exactly. It's a number.

[00:08:51] KD: We're like, “Oh, yeah.” I mean, we all knew it. Nobody had articulated it, and so we're like, “Let's find out why.” So if somebody like an economist or somebody had pitched me with the subject line why are all companies laying off 6% of people, I would have immediately been like, “Oh, my God. Yeah. Why? Tell me.” Then they can tell me, “I've noticed this. It's part of this trend. This is why it's happening. I can turn around an 800-word piece for you with this sort of data backing it up.”

[00:09:20] BB: Okay. Great example too. Thank you for that.

[BREAK]

[00:09:25] 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 RESUMED]

[00:09:48] BB: Now, for people who don't know you, Kate, is there a way in which they can attempt to make a relationship with you?

[00:09:56] KD: Yeah. I mean, I think emailing is what everybody does. It's really great, I mean, if you email and we've talked about this already, right? Like know what I cover and what I don't cover. It's also great if there's some sort of connection. Obviously, I mean, this kind of everybody knows, right? If you're like, “Oh, such and such colleague or mutual connection referred me.” If on LinkedIn you see that we know the same people in some way, that's cool. Just I think and

like I don't mind email versus like a LinkedIn pitch. A Twitter DM is a little odd, but I'm okay with it.

[00:10:33] BB: Okay. Yeah.

[00:10:34] KD: But just basically not – Again, like not in a swarmy way where it's like, “Hey, what can you do for me?” Like there's so many pitches like that, right? Or, “Cover my company. My company's doing something really cool.”

[00:10:48] BB: I don't know how you do it because I would just be rolling the eyes in the back of the head so far. I mean, we hear it on our side when companies are coming to us to be represented. “Oh, we're so unique.” If I hear unique one more time, I cannot.

[00:11:00] KD: Innovative, disruptive.

[00:11:02] BB: I think that's gone away, by the way. I think it has. I do not hear that. But unique is still floating in the abyss, so – Okay. What about exclusives, embargoes? Do you take either, and how do you like them?

[00:11:15] KD: We take them. We love exclusives, if it's actually something exclusive. I mean, I think that's another thing, right, where people try to manufacture the hype around it?

[00:11:24] BB: Yes, yes.

[00:11:25] KD: Exclusive announcement about this **[inaudible 00:11:26]**. Like just because you're making it exclusive.

[00:11:29] BB: We painted our walls.

[00:11:31] KD: Yeah, right. Embargoes are honestly annoying, unless there's a reason for them. I feel like a lot of people make embargoes just to kind of hype the – Like they're trying to make false anticipation, like why is it really embargoed, so not a huge fan of embargo. It also hinders journalists because like we have a time that we publish stories that works for our newsletter, that

works for social, that works for homepage. If you made this wackadoo embargo of 3:00 PM Pacific Time, like, okay, well, what does that do for us?

[00:12:06] BB: Good to clarify. What about, Kate, for the podcast? Is there any difference there for how those pitches should come to you?

[00:12:13] KD: Yeah. I mean, it is a lot of similarities in that I get so many pitches that are, “Oh, you should interview our CEO about this topic that you talked about.” I don't generally want to interview a CEO who's talking about these larger topics. I want to interview an expert on these topics or lead with the topic rather than the person, I think, because that's how we plan. So we'll plan our season.

That's the other thing is we plan our seasons out. The podcast usually does like two seasons a year, February-ish through June and then like September through the end of the year. Not to say that we can't switch things around and follow the news a little bit. But we definitely lead with the topic and then find the person to fit into the topic. So similarly, lead with the topic, and then tell me that you have a good expert for it.

[00:13:06] BB: Okay. That's good. By the way, is there a place, Kate, for everyone perhaps thinking of this, where you're noting what you're looking for, anticipating? Are you on Twitter saying, “Hey, I want to see this or that.”? I know you're active on Twitter. So how would publicists be able to maybe anticipate anything that's happening? Or is it kind of a black box?

[00:13:26] KD: Well, I don't want to think that it's a black box, but no. I mean, once in a while, I'll put a call out on Twitter if I'm looking for something. But I think, generally, it's we're following the trends in the work-life space, especially for the podcast future of work, which is a big broad term, DENI in all of its shapes, career, workplace issues. But I think it's always thinking – We're always trying to think of what's next for it.

I'm really proud that at Fast Company, we were covering remote work for years before everybody started working remotely. We were doing DENI for years before everybody realized we should maybe pay attention to this thing. I was really proud that we were covering it and that. Then when everybody started talking about it, we had that like wealth of knowledge and archive

to bring to it. We could like talk about the next step in the conversation. We're always trying to like kind of bring the conversation forward.

So, yeah, I think like think about what people are think talking about and thinking about right now and then like what's the next bit of that. Then, yeah, kind of that and then the universal things that we all think about with work. So another like example of a good pitch that I got recently, and it was from a freelancer, and this was her literal subject line, was, "Freelancer pitch: why not everyone should be a manager." It was essentially – Then she gave me like one or two sentences about the story, who she planned to interview, when she could file it, blah, blah, blah. I already had a relationship with her and knew her anyways.

But it was an old idea, right? It was the Peter Principle, basically, which has been around since 1960s or something. It hasn't been solved, and so it was like why is this thing still true? We all immediately – It was a universal thing, but a new research on like how you could advice on what you could do about it.

[00:15:17] BB: Well, I love all these examples, Kate. So good, so juicy. We do have a little rapid fire section here, so are you ready for this?

[00:15:25] KD: Sure.

[00:15:25] BB: It's kind of like yes – It's either this or that. Okay, here we go. Video or phone interview?

[00:15:30] KD: I don't care. I'm not going to look at the video. But I like things online because it's easy to record. But I don't need to look at myself.

[00:15:38] BB: Yep, yep. Bullet points or paragraphs?

[00:15:41] KD: Bullet points for quick glancing.

[00:15:44] BB: Okay. Short or long pitches?

[00:15:46] **KD**: Oh, short.

[00:15:48] **BB**: Yes. No one's answered long ever on that question, but just to make sure it's clear.

[00:15:52] **KD**: Basically 1,000 words. Who's ever going to say that?

[00:15:54] **BB**: I don't know. Images attached or Dropbox zip file?

[00:15:58] **KD**: I don't need images, unless I ask for them.

[00:16:01] **BB**: Okay. Pitches in the morning or the night? Or do you care?

[00:16:04] **KD**: I'm not going to read them. Well, actually, that's not true. I might read them at night. It doesn't really matter.

[00:16:10] **BB**: Doesn't matter. Email or Twitter DM?

[00:16:12] **KD**: Email probably.

[00:16:13] **BB**: One follow up or multiple?

[00:16:16] **KD**: Does anybody say multiple? Of course, just –

[00:16:18] **BB**: Some. Some people are like, “Three. I'm good with three because I got this, this, and this.” Then some are like, “I will kill you. Please. Never. Not one. I never want them.”

[00:16:26] **KD**: Oh, no. I know this is supposed to be rapid, but my biggest pet peeve is you send an email, you get my out of office that I'm on vacation, and I tell you what day I'm coming back. The next day you send it again. Then when I come back from vacation, you send it again.

[00:16:40] **BB**: God. Yeah. Does that happen?

[00:16:43] **KD:** Yes. Like I'm out until the 13th. Okay. On the 10th, I'm going to email you again. Then I'm going to email you again on the 13th. Then I'm going to email you again on the 14th.

[00:16:52] **BB:** Is it a bot or something doing those?

[00:16:54] **KD:** No. It's people, I think.

[00:16:57] **BB:** Okay. Direct or creative subject lines? I know we've covered this, but just to put the record clear.

[00:17:03] **KD:** Yes. Direct. Give me who you are, what you're asking for in the headline. Yep.

[00:17:08] **BB:** Press release or media kit?

[00:17:09] **KD:** Usually neither, but press release, I guess.

[00:17:13] **BB:** Okay. Yeah. Yeah.

[00:17:14] **KD:** I mean, give me the information I need. Again, I kind of feel like I do about images. Like if I need other assets, I'll ask for them.

[00:17:21] **BB:** Yes, perfect. Okay. Kate, we're here at the end. This has been fun. Is there anything that you want to promote, plug, discuss, end with, just for all of our sanity?

[00:17:34] **KD:** Yes, of course. Does anybody ever say no to that?

[00:17:36] **BB:** Yeah. Some people are like, "Yeah, I'm good."

[00:17:38] **KD:** Don't read or listen to anything I do. Yeah. No. I will plug The New Way We Work, which is coming into its fifth – Or sorry, 10th season, fifth year. Our new season starts on the 20th of February. I'm very excited. This is such a shameless plug that nobody will –

[00:17:54] **BB:** Do it. Do it.

[00:17:55] KD: **[inaudible 00:17:55]** to anybody but me and my mom. But we were nominated for an Ambie for best business podcast for our short miniseries ambition diaries, which was a labor of love, and I'm so, so proud of. So I would definitely encourage everybody to go back and listen to that, just because I think that it's a great piece of work that I'm very proud of.

I will also plug – We are doing a bunch of – Myself and some of the other Fast Company editors have been doing these LinkedIn audio events, and we're doing one actually today, the day that we're recording this. We're doing one about negotiation, but they're a great way to kind of engage with Fast Company journalists live and in the moment.

[00:18:31] BB: LinkedIn is doing a lot of stuff over there. Kate, thank you so much for doing this. What a joy.

[00:18:37] KD: Thank you. This was really fun.

[00:18:39] BB: This was so fun. I know you got a million things going on, so we'll let you go. And thanks again. We'll find you on LinkedIn on the audio chats.

[00:18:48] KD: Great, great. Thank you.

[00:18:49] BB: And the podcast. Perfect. Thanks, Kate. Appreciate you.

[00:18:52] KD: Thanks.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:18:54] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist, featuring Kate Davis from Fast Company. For more exclusive insights about the journalists on this podcast, subscribe to our weekly podcast newsletter at onepitch.co/podcast. We'll see you next week with even more insights about the journalists you want to learn more about. Until then, start great stories.

[END]