

EPISODE 186

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:09] ANNOUNCER: Welcome to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist brought to you by OnePitch. Are you looking for an easier way to pitch the right journalists? Head to our website at onepitch.co to sign up for a free account today.

Our guest on today's episode of Coffee with a Journalist is Deanna Cuadra from Employee Benefit News. As a senior reporter, Deanna covers healthcare, US policy and reform, challenges faced by women and parents in the workplace, and innovation in work, culture, and leadership. She also directs and produces short films and documentaries that center on marginalized communities.

During the episode, Deanna talks about her background in film and how it lends well to her reporting, why it's important to include sources within your pitches, how many times you should follow up with her, and more. Let's dive in.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:01:09] BB: Welcome, everyone. This is Beck Bamberger. This is Coffee with a Journalist. We always have a good time on here because we always bring a wonderful journalist to tell us everything they love about pitching, inboxes, and more, how they get their story ideas. With us today, for all you health tech – well, not health tech people. No, never mind. People who are in the HR space and thinking about, well, what do we give our wonderful employees and team, is senior reporter from Employee Benefit News, Deanna Cuadra. She's here from us live. Hi, Deanna.

[00:01:41] DC: Hi.

[00:01:42] BB: Thank you for being here.

[00:01:43] DC: Thank you for having me.

[00:01:44] BB: Yes. Are you in New York City right now?

[00:01:47] DC: I'm actually currently in California but usually in New York City. Yes.

[00:01:51] BB: What are you doing in California?

[00:01:52] DC: I'm seeing family. Yes. Originally from Northern California.

[00:01:56] BB: Oh, wonderful. Well, California or New York City, the two best places to be. My opinion, of course, but let's get into it. First off, Deanna, for those who maybe don't know your outlet too well, again, Employee Benefit News, how would you describe the coverage beat?

[00:02:14] DC: Well, we are a digital and print publication that really is about all things work. So from the benefits and wellness space to HR compliance, really, of course, DI, tech. If it matters to workers, it matters to employers, it matters to us.

[00:02:32] BB: Then specifically, your coverage area as a senior reporter, I'm looking at several of your previous pieces here. But tell us a little bit more. You touch like Biden administration stuff from kids to overtime protections, excellence and benefits highlights, yes, healthcare. Like you do have a wide range, so how would you describe your coverage focus?

[00:02:54] DC: Well, I'm on the healthcare beat, for sure. So any healthcare, wellness, the good, the bad, and ugly, mental health, family health, and, of course, any policies or reform that seems to be impacting or will be impacting the workplace. I'm especially interested right now in what unions are doing across industries, an important –

[00:03:16] BB: It's a busy time –

[00:03:17] DC: Yes, of course. Yes. And the importance of what they're doing to put it lightly, in a country where there are a few safety social nets, for sure. Yes.

[00:03:26] BB: Also, this is a little unusual, so I want to ask you, Deanna. You make short films and documentaries that center on marginalized communities is what it says on your bio. Tell us more.

[00:03:37] DC: Yes. So I originally majored in film. Yes. So I do work really with friends and people I've met through school on – sometimes, there's short fictional films, currently some documentaries that are, of course, with anything that's independence and slow, slow process out of post-production. Sometimes, that's just how it is. But, yes, I love – at the end of the day, I just – I love storytelling, and film is an extension of that. Of course, reporting is as well.

[00:04:07] BB: It is. It's all in the realm of storytelling. What about your inbox, Deanna? Is it super busy in there?

[00:04:14] DC: Let's see. I try to maintain it, but that's not always the case. It's about 78 emails right now, which isn't terrible.

[00:04:23] BB: I was going to say pretty good. Okay.

[00:04:25] DC: Yes. I do delete if I see like mass newsletters I don't necessarily remember signing up for or if I see a subject line that I know doesn't really relate to our coverage, let's say, like fundraising news or executive position appointments. I'll go ahead and just delete or archive.

[00:04:43] BB: So you're a delete.

[00:04:44] DC: Yes. I do.

[00:04:44] BB: It goes just away. Okay.

[00:04:46] DC: For my sanity, I do delete.

[00:04:48] BB: You have to. You have to. Okay. Then it doesn't sound like you necessarily open every email. You're just like, “Ah, I'm just looking at the subject line, and I'm moving from there.”

[00:04:57] DC: Yes. Sometimes, I can kind of just tell by subject line. I do try to read the ones that even sound potentially like it could be relevant to me or someone on my team. But, yes, subject line is huge, for sure.

[00:05:11] BB: Then tell us further. What's your subject line needs that you want to see?

[00:05:17] DC: Well, first, it's always helpful if I can tell from the subject line that it does touch on something EBN covers. Not necessarily what I cover but –

[00:05:24] BB: Makes sense.

[00:05:25] DC: Just a topic that would be of interest to us. Yes. Of course, if there's a recognizable name, whether it's the company or the source, that's always helpful to add. Bonus points if that subject line can sort of hint at some sort of solution being offered. I think, especially in healthcare news, you see a lot of negative news. So when something's being pitched where there's a solution or expertise or advice, that catches my attention.

[00:05:54] BB: Okay. Expertise or advice, expand on that a little bit. Like from whom?

[00:05:59] DC: So they can either be in the benefit space. They can be someone who – healthcare workers, of course, whether they're nurses, doctors, of course, in the healthcare or tech space. So if you have a company that is working to be, let's say, a modern or an alternative kind of benefits broker, or you're working to offer a solution, let's say, to provide healthier foods and for preventative care. Things like that where there's – you're representing some side of the healthcare experience, not necessarily just the traditional end of it. All of it's important, of course.

[00:06:33] BB: Okay. Then do you have any like top pet peeves that you see in subject lines/pitches? We'll expand to that.

[00:06:41] DC: When it's a little bit – I guess when they're – it's definitely maybe just a me thing. But maybe they're a little bit too on like the creative or salacious side, if that makes sense.

[00:06:52] **BB:** Like what? Like when you see like first ever Employee Benefit ever seen in the world, and you're like, "Yes. No, that's not clearly –"

[00:07:01] **DC:** Yes. Or there's like emojis. Or they're referencing like something.

[00:07:05] **BB:** Wait, wait, wait. They have emojis in their pitch subject line.

[00:07:09] **DC:** Sometimes, yes. Listen, I love emojis.

[00:07:12] **BB:** Me too.

[00:07:12] **DC:** But I'm just not – it's not always like the best use of like that little bit of space you get in the subject line.

[00:07:19] **BB:** Well, what kind of emoji do they use, though?

[00:07:21] **DC:** I honestly can't recall because it's kind of just like a blur for me when I see like the yellow colors. I'll be honest. Sometimes, I still click. But like it's just – again, it might be better used to focus on like something a bit more critical you could tell me about the pitch.

[BREAK]

[00:07:39] **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 brands engage with the right journalists? Head to onepitch.co and create your own custom media list in five minutes or less. Now, back to today's episode.

[INTERVIEW RESUMED]

[00:08:02] **BB:** Exclusives or embargoes? Are those of interest to you perhaps?

[00:08:06] DC: Yes. I think me and my team are happy to receive them, as long as it just feels relevant to what EBN covers. Ideally, in the perfect world, you would get them a week-ish in advance. But I'm good with it being a few days before, as long as you have a source you can jump on a call and offer a few comments, a few quotes on the topic.

[00:08:27] BB: Okay, a couple quotes, a couple comments. What's one of the best pitches you've received and why?

[00:08:34] DC: Like the subject line?

[00:08:36] BB: Yes. Or just the whole process where you're like, "God, the subject line was on point. I love the pitch. I did the interview. Oh, it was great." Like you know what I mean?

[00:08:45] DC: Yes. One solid – I mean, there's been many. I think, in general, I'm pretty fortunate with the pitches I received. But one that comes to mind is there was a pitch on, and the subject line read as Deloitte analysis, all Americans can live longer and healthier, while spending less on healthcare. That kind of tells you like right away this is touching on healthcare. There's a solution being offered. There's expertise being offered. You jump into the pitch, and you click, and you see that there's a bit of an intro to what this report's about, what about it would be relevant to EBN, and then some bullet points on the data in the report.

Then, of course, it's always great to kind of end a pitch with, "I can connect you with so-and-so, or I have a source or an author of the report who we can schedule an interview with." So it's always good to make sure you kind of make sure you say in your pitch like, "We do have someone you can talk to." Not just leave it with just the information.

[00:09:44] BB: Yes. So I want to call out a couple points on that, bullet points on the data, emphasis on who they have for you to speak to. Then also, you mentioned something about they mentioned why it's a fit for your outlet.

[00:09:58] DC: Yes. You don't have to be like, "This will fit your outlet because –"

[00:10:01] BB: Yes. A, B, and C. Yes. But you clearly picked that up from the yes. Yes. Okay, very good. Anything else that you want to elaborate on in like terms of, “Oh, dang. Really good pitch.”

[00:10:14] DC: I am a sucker for a good data point. So even if you're not pitching me a report or necessarily research, if there's a data point that really drives home why that topic's important and, of course, you cite it, that does help like capture my attention or at least like kind of tell me, “Oh, okay. I need to like look into this or look more into that data.” It doesn't have to be your own data. It can come from any reputable source. But I do like a number.

[00:10:41] BB: You like a number.

[00:10:42] DC: I do like a number.

[00:10:43] BB: Now, let's qualify that a little bit more because a number could be, “Oh, we interviewed our 11 employees, and 92% of them say stupid data.” What to you is good usable data?

[00:10:57] DC: Well, let's say just recently we're seeing healthcare costs take a huge jump in 2024. This is necessarily a pitch I've seen, but you're telling me the percentage is going to jump, and you're telling me who is surveying that, who is seeing that, whether that's – well, it's Towers Watson or another consultancy or research company who's – it's good to see who you're, of course, citing.

If it is data from your own company, it is good to see, okay, well, who are you surveying, how many people are being surveyed, what was being asked. It's always good to get a quick little bit on the methodology.

[00:11:32] BB: Okay. So you got to emphasize the methodology. So it's not just we pulled our people on a Slack's survey, and they said this.

[00:11:39] DC: Yes. No.

[00:11:40] BB: No, no, no. Okay. Good to qualify. How do people make a relationship with you, Deanna? Do you like to go to coffee, drinks, walks, et cetera?

[00:11:51] DC: Yes. I'm always open to doing virtual coffees or just chats. As a consequence of reporting on healthcare, I am still relatively COVID-conscious, so –

[00:12:02] BB: Good.

[00:12:03] DC: I am open to meeting in person, especially if I've worked with you before, and we already have sort of a working relationship. But I usually – I do try to be a bit cautious around that, so yes. Again, I've been pretty fortunate. A lot of like PR professionals I've worked with have been great. So I'm always open to developing that more and learning more about their side of the job.

[00:12:24] BB: Oh, my gosh. You said they've all been great. How exciting.

[00:12:27] DC: Yes. For the most part, people are cool.

[00:12:30] BB: People are cool. Yes, although some never get it. But for the most part, people are cool.

[00:12:36] DC: Yes, for the most part.

[00:12:37] BB: Yes. I like that positive energy. Okay, Deanna, we have a rapid-fire question session here. Let us know your answers. Does that sound good?

[00:12:48] DC: Yes.

[00:12:48] BB: Okay. Video or phone interview?

[00:12:51] DC: I'm going to say video, but I feel fake for saying video because I usually do it camera off. Like my connection is just bad, so – but for some reason, over the phone, the sound quality is worse in my experience. I don't know why. I'll say video but like with an asterisk.

[00:13:07] BB: Okay, okay. Bullet points or paragraphs in the pitch?

[00:13:11] DC: Short paragraph in the beginning and then bullet points, as long as you want them.

[00:13:17] BB: Short or long pitch that might tie directly to that?

[00:13:21] DC: Short in the beginning. You can go as long as you feel is necessary. Just try to hook me in first.

[00:13:26] BB: Okay. Hook you first, which should come from the subject line and then expand from there.

[00:13:31] DC: Yes.

[00:13:32] BB: Okay, very good. Now, images attached or Dropbox zip file?

[00:13:37] DC: Attached.

[00:13:38] BB: Okay, attached. Why is that, by the way? Everyone differs on this.

[00:13:41] DC: Maybe because I am just technologically not the greatest. Sometimes, accessing those zip files or Dropbox, I especially can like need an account to open something. So attached is usually easiest.

[00:13:55] BB: Okay, attached. Great. Oh, no. Email or Twitter DM or X, whatever we're calling it?

[00:14:00] DC: Email, safest. Yes.

[00:14:02] BB: Yes. Safest. You're the second person this week who I've chatted with who's like, "Oh, yes. People were sending me Gmail emails pitches from not a professional website

but just Gmail.” The person emphasized like, yes, it's a little bit of a digital safety issue and things of that sort. So by the way, do people send you pitches through like a Gmail account?

[00:14:23] DC: It depends because sometimes I do get the opportunity to interview like everyday workers who might not necessarily be communicating from their corporate account. I love talking to people who are actually contributing every day to their workplace. So depending on the context, it's fine. But if it's just kind of like a random pitch from like an unidentified organization, that can be a red flag.

[00:14:47] BB: Okay. Got you. One follow-up or multiple?

[00:14:50] DC: I'll say up to three because I know that I can –

[00:14:53] BB: Up to three. Wow. Okay.

[00:14:54] DC: Up to three because I know that some days, I cannot look at my inbox. Either it's just been a busy day or you're just a little bit burned out, and you can't start your screen anymore. I know that in that case, I may have missed. I would say three is a safe number.

[00:15:12] BB: Okay, very good. Three. That's the top I've ever heard for this answer. Okay. Direct or creative subject lines? We touched a little on that.

[00:15:21] DC: I just go direct.

[00:15:22] BB: Yes.

[00:15:22] DC: Yes. I go direct.

[00:15:24] BB: Just keep it straight. Okay. What time do you usually read pitches?

[00:15:28] DC: Let's see. I would say late afternoon. Towards the end of the workday is when I kind of start glaring at my inbox to see what damage has been done.

[00:15:38] BB: Oh, what damage has been done. Okay. Then sources, you touched a little bit on like, “Oh, people I could talk to.” But do you want to expand on like, “My favorite sources are,” dot, dot, dot?

[00:15:49] DC: My favorite sources have been doctors, have been nurses. Even people in academic spaces had some really insightful interviews. Of course, your c-suite folks are always great, people who do work in, let's say, advocacy spaces, people who do work on political reform. Non-profit organizations I've always enjoyed talking to. Yes. I think, ultimately, if you have an experience that does relate to some bigger issues that are happening in the world of labor, I think you have something valid to share, even if it's not necessarily a whole article.

[00:16:28] BB: But just commentary. Got it. Also, not on this little list but just to kind of wrap this up before I ask you what other things you'd like to highlight or champion or whatnot. For the federal level and legislative pieces that you do, which is quite a bit, as I'm looking through your articles, where are your best sources from there? Are they in government currently? Are they in maybe big NGO type of organizations?

[00:16:54] DC: I often talk to lawyers, and I talk to advocacy organizations. I'm open to having more sources that are more within that government space. But when dealing with things like compliance, when trying to figure out like what rules employers should be following, what things they need to be careful of, lawyers can be a great resource. Of course, when thinking about, let's say, if there's a policy that are impacting caregivers, talking to an organization like MomsRising, which does focus on reform for families in the US, is also a great way of learning more about the topic.

[00:17:36] BB: Is there anything lastly, Deanna, that you would like to promote, highlight, et cetera? Do you have any films, for example, that you're working on that you want us to see?

[00:17:46] DC: I'll just say this. Please check out EBN. We cover a wealth of information on the work world, whether you're someone who's looking for a job. You're someone who is trying to figure out how to navigate the career world, navigate that benefit space. Or you're just trying to keep up to date on some of the bigger issues that's happening in politics and policy world of it. Yes, please check us out.

Of course, we do love to hear from you, whether you're c-suite, a recent grad. Your experiences about the work world are important to us. Hopefully, our stories can offer some clarity for you as well.

[00:18:19] BB: Clarity, that is a good reason for journalism. Deanna, thank you for being on today. This was lovely.

[00:18:25] DC: All right. Thank you so much.

[00:18:26] BB: I learned no emojis in the subject lines, for instance.

[00:18:31] DC: I love them in text, though. Keep them.

[00:18:33] BB: Keep them in text, not in your subject line. There you go.

[00:18:36] DC: Or Slacks maybe.

[00:18:37] BB: Maybe.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:18:39] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for joining us on this week's Coffee with a Journalist episode, featuring Deanna Cuadra from Employee Benefit News. 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]