

EPISODE 217

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:09] ANNOUNCER: Welcome to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist, brought to you by the team at OnePitch. Are you looking for a more efficient way to find and pitch the right journalists? Head to our website at onepitch.co to learn more.

Our guests on today's episode of Coffee with a Journalist is Taylor Crumpton, a freelance writer with Bylines, and Time, Essence, GRAMMY.com, Pitchfork, Marie Claire, and more. During the episode, Taylor discusses her take on going viral, her collaborative approach to working with publicists, strategies for networking with purpose, and what she's currently focused on in coverage.

[EPISODE]

[0:00:43] BB: Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist. This is a little show we do to help publicists, such as myself, I'm Beck Bamberger, navigate relationships and actually build relationships with all the journalist, and media, and freelancers that are out there. Because we need to work with media and we need to work with them better, and more efficiently, and in ways that don't put the crap out of one another, if I may say.

So, with us today is a freelance writer and culture critic. We got to get into this. Taylor Crumpton is here, she writes for various emphasis, various media outlets, spanning the spectrum. We'll get into it. Welcome, Taylor.

[0:01:23] TC: Thank you so much for having me on. What a lovely intro.

[0:01:27] BB: Thank you. Thank you. I tried to change it up a little bit every time. We're past 200 episodes at this point, Taylor, so I got to come up with stuff. First off, do you want to give us an overview of the several outlets you write for? Because it's extensive. What are your top ones right now?

[0:01:47] TC: I have had such a beautiful working relationship as of late with Time Magazine, and my editor there, her name is Rachel. She reached out to me after Beyonce released 16 Carriages and Texas Hold'em. We worked on one piece together, and that piece went viral. Since then, we've had another piece that went viral again, and she just allows me to be. So, shout out to Rachel at Time, she's such a beautiful editor. I've also had a positive working relationship with GRAMMY.com, the two editors there, John, and Jessica, the two Js. They're so lovely. I love Jessica as an editor, because she's also an author, so she has that very much, "I'm going through everything with a fine-tooth comb, but I want you to be better."

Then, the publication that I've worked with for such a long time out of the three is Essence. I believe I started writing for them in 2018. It's 2024. So, on and off for a period of six years, I've been able to contribute to their politics, vertical, their entertainment, do stuff in the magazine, do digital coverage. I've covered Essence Fest. Those have been my top three clients of 2024 as of now.

[0:03:06] BB: Good overview. Good overview. By the way, what would you say classifies as viral?

[0:03:12] TC: Viral in my definition is when it leaves the United States, and even within the United States, there's a great push, an abundance. But I think, when you start to see tweets that are coming to you in different languages, and users from different countries, countries that I've never been to. I have only been to Cuba, so when I see, or receive outreach from journalists in the UK or Switzerland, I'm like, "Okay, this made some headway, and that's a blessing."

[0:03:43] BB: Yes, that is. Ooh, okay. When it's hitting the international wavelengths and we know we're good. Taylor, how is your inbox?

[0:03:54] TC: It's chaotic. It is.

[0:003:56] BB: Yes. Tell us more. How do you manage it more so?

[0:04:00] TC: As a freelancer, you have to be your end all and be all. So, you're accountant, you're publicist. If you have to be on camerawork, you're hair stylists, you're clothing stylists,

you're makeup artists. You were managing so many positions in your career, so you have to be extremely disciplined in routine, because you're not only pitching to editors, editors are pitching to you. If you're in music journalism, which is one of the beats that I occupy, you're also in conversations with an artist's team, their manager, their publicist. So, it's having to be in communication with all those various parties, and all of them speak a different language. So, you almost have to be multilingual. How can I explain this to a publicist? How can I explain this to a manager? What about an editorial head who may not know about me, but we're working on this piece together? There's a lot of having to stop, and go, and explain.

[0:04:59] BB: What do you do with the pitches that come in from, I imagine, publicists? Or, are those few and far between?

[0:05:07] TC: I receive a number of pitches from publicist, which I'm thankful to have. But one thing that I picked up from one of my friends, her name is Shandry, she works at Netflix. Shout out to her. I hope I'm pronouncing her name right. I am from Texas, I do have an accent, so there are some words that will always just not work for me. But she told me, "Taylor, when you interact with the publicists, you also have to hop on the phone with them, have a call, have some type of introductory conversation, because they may not know your beat, or they may not know your style of writing, your intention."

Oftentimes, when I talk to publicists, they get my email from Muck Rack or a database. So, they're basing me off of the stories that I've written, which is great, but I think they have to take some time to study learn more about the writer. So, those pitches can be more tailored to invoke my name. But, I think, and also, journalists talk to each other, we're all in conversation with each other. So, if there's a blanket pitch, we know. It does not make us feel, oh, say like wanted or warranted in an egotistical way. But it's like, you know, so much of us pitching to editors is knowing the editor, knowing the publication, knowing what they want. When we get a blanket pitch, it's like, "Well, that's not just for me since you emailed 800 other people."

[0:06:44] BB: Yes. Yes. Now, for the ones you like, pitch-wise from publicists, what stands out?

[0:06:50] TC: I always enjoy when a publicist has read some of my previous work, and I do not expect every publicist to read every piece I've ever written. That is unrealistic. I don't even ask

that of my parents, and my friends, and family. But I think knowing writing style, who I've worked with, what's my niche, what's my market. Because, the goal for every journalist is to become an expert in whatever they're covering. So, please come to me with a pitch that is aligned with my expertise, and aligned with my writing style. Because if it feels unauthentic, or misaligned, or not genuine, then it also kind of feels like, "Okay. Are you just using me to get a story? Do you not want to build a working relationship with me?"

[0:07:40] BB: Mm-hmm. Is there any way you organize your inbox for people you don't want to hear from again, Taylor?

[0:07:50] TC: I try my best to send an email, like, "Thank you so much for sending this to me. I'm not the best writer for this. I hope you can." Or, if I know a writer who is skilled in that beat, I will refer a writer. I think, like, there is so much good karma that I have received, because I have paid it forward. I think that's something and I would love for publicists, and writers, and people who are listening here in our industry. Nine times out of 10, you know someone who can do that story, so why don't you be the referral?

[0:08:25] BB: Yes. Yes. Good points. Good point. How about subject lines? Are those important components to you dictating if you're going to open a pitch or not? Or you're like, "Yes, I'll look"? Do you open every pitch?

[0:08:40] TC: I do open every pitch.

[0:08:41] BB: Wow. Okay.

[0:08:42] TC: It is because I'm a Virgo moon, so I hate notifications. They are the bane of my existence. Sometimes, I'll read it again and try to figure out, okay. If I liked the subject line, if I liked the body of the email, I think oftentimes, when you look at the subject line, I know us as writers, we're taught to write headlines that are catching and attention-grabbing. But I like when subject lines have something to do with the heart of the piece, because oftentimes, when I talk to publicist, I say, "What's the story angle? How can I convince an editor to commission me and write this if you don't know the heart of the piece?"

[0:09:27] BB: Plus one on that, just because, for publicists to realize that for freelancers, there's another pitch that has to happen. Now, you could argue a reporter has to pitch their internal editor. Okay, sure, that happens too. But, it's even doubly for a freelancer. So, if you can't tee up the pitch to help the freelancer, tee it up. What are you doing? Yes. Oh, man. Okay. This is good to know. You mentioned Taylor, like oh, calling a publicist, talking to them so they understand your style, and are able to pitch you better. Is there a way that you're looking for relationships to be developed with you from publicists?

[0:10:07] TC: Yes, because here's the thing, we are in an industry of highs, and lows, of feast and famine. One thing that I picked up from Naima Cochrane, who is an award-winning music veteran, 20 years in the music industry, teaches at NYU. She always says, "The people that you meet on your way up are the people who you're going to meet on your way down. You always want to be in relationship and community with people, because you don't know who you may meet on your way up, who will help you when you're down in the universe." We are always going to need each other. Publicists are going to need writers. Writers are going to need publicist.

When I set up that call, and we're on the phone, and we're taking time out of our busy schedules, I want to be able to work on a story with the publicist. If it goes good, or maybe the pitch doesn't get accepted, because I'm a freelancer, I'm not on staff, we have a good working relationship. That when a story idea comes my way, or a project comes their way, we can work on this together, because we know each other style, we know the approach, we know how we get things done, and see how that develops over time.

[0:11:21] BB: Ooh, good philosophy to hold tight, Taylor. I think people forget that sometimes. That's not an editor, why would I waste my time? I'm like, because that person is the future editor in three years, or five years, or 10. Yes, that's very true. Are there any sources you're particularly looking for right now, or in general?

[0:11:41] TC: Yes, at the moment, a lot of my writing is in the cultural space, which means, I fit at the intersections of music, and art, and class, and politics. A lot of my writing has always consisted of bead at that intersection of –

[BREAK]

[0:11:58] ANNOUNCER: Today's interview will continue after this brief message brought to you by OnePitch. Are you curious to learn about 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 CONTINUES]

[0:12:22] TC: Women's issues, gender issues, LGBTQ issues, social issues, which means, I may not be the best for a straightforward fashion piece or a straightforward beauty piece. So, I'm looking for sources that can speak to the writing that I am doing in the writing that I'm commissioned to do. For example, if I get a travel pitch, which I've got three travel pitches as of late, and I reached out to the PRS, I say, "Hey, how can this tell a story? What is the story to be told about this city, or this place, or this locale, or this town? Are there museums? Is their expert? Fill this out, other than me just going on a plane, going to the city and reporting."

[0:13:11] BB: Yes. I feel like so many are just so, "Here's a new resort." You're like, "Okay. Well, what am I going to do about that?" I call this plating the story, which I think publicists, we need to get a lot better at. Which is, "Hey, reporter. Here's my piece of news. With that are these three experts, and these two clients of that expert, and some new information, maybe some data from a third party, government entity, something like that. Here's the global, how it ties to a global trend that's happening, and this is why the story is important." Put all the pieces of the story there, even if they only take some parts of it. Who cares? You plated the story, so that I could see as a reporter or journalist, that's really helpful, one. Or two, I can see how this all unfolds as a whole standalone piece, instead of me having to do more work to figure out, "Okay. Well, I'm going to need an expert for that. I'm going to need a source for this piece. Okay, how am I going to find that?" That's your job, yes, but it can be really helpful if you're going to be a publicist and can tee it up.

[0:14:14] TC: Exactly. Right now, especially as a freelancer, there is no abundance of freelancers right now. There's an index, which I feel like conversation for different time, and different podcast of why that is so. However, you're going to need to have a distinctive voice and

a distinctive pitch to stand out in an editor's inbox. Freelance budgets are getting cut across the board, and with that comes travel budget. So, if I am working with this publication, if I'm working with this publicist, it needs to be tight, precise, tell the story, has the timeline, has the trend. Everything needs to be wrapped up in a pretty bow, so by the time I send this pitch into the editor, all they have to do is say, "Yes. I trust you, go and do it." Instead of, "Let's talk back and forth." Because if you're having to continually email to an editor, by that time, you're kind of getting tired, and it's looking like the piece is not going to be accepted.

[0:15:19] BB: Yes. Ooh, good point. So, time kills deals. We're the same. Okay, good to know for people. Is there anything, Taylor, you would like to just get off your chest about publicists, overall? I know we were talking a little bit and you had some thoughts?

[0:15:33] TC: I do.

[0:15:35] BB: Yes. Please, elaborate.

[0:15:40] TC: If there's one thing that I could tell to publicist, and some of my friends who publicists, so I'm not disrespecting the profession, and all the work and the labor that all the publicists do. The secret moving the engine that helps all these various industries go.

[0:15:57] BB: Seriously. It's an invisible hand. Yes.

[0:15:59] TC: Very much so. I hand that I acknowledge, and a hand that I appreciate. But please, take some time to know the editor, and the writer, and the publication, and understand that there are people who are working in these industries. Often time, a freelancer may be balancing six to eight stories at once, or 10 to 12. There are freelancers who I know who are also mothers, and parents, and occupying all these different positions. Some people may live in different time zones, different countries.

I think there is an element of humanity that needs to be extended, and know that freelancers are having to fight a battle of not being on staff. So many freelancers right now are experiencing bouts of economic insecurity, because their regular roster of clients had to kill their freelance budget with layoffs. They're losing their big breadwinner clients, so they're having to go off to a

smaller one. Some freelancers are switching into different industries, because freelancing is not really stable right now.

I think, whenever you're sending these emails, and especially when you're sending follow up emails, maybe take some time or insert in the body, like, "Hey, what's going on right now? I know things are happening with layoffs. I noticed this publication you used to work for. You haven't written for them in a while. What's going on?" Just make sure to do that check in. You're working with a freelancer, so you can figure out if they even have the capacity to help you with this story.

One thing I tried to do, and I've done this as late. A publicist reached out to me about this rising artist that they have. They did all of the things. They're being mentioned in this magazine, and they've performed at this festival, and they've received cosign from these artists, really selling me the artist. I'm very grateful, but I responded to them, "Right now, at this moment, the stories that I'm being conditioned for don't fit this artist. But I will keep an eye out if coverage changes, and there's an opportunity for that artist."

[0:18:16] BB: Uh-oh, don't tell me what they say.

[0:18:17] TC: They were actually very receptive.

[0:18:19] BB: Oh, good. Okay.

[0:18:21] TC: And you know, and a bit like that in February, when someone was trying to pitch me an author. And I told them, "Right now, the coverage that I'm doing doesn't align with this author and the content of her book." They're like, "Okay. Well, can you tell me when you think that this kind of trend of coverage will be over." The coverage that I'm talking about is like Cowboy Carter. So, a lot of the writing that I've been doing since February has been around country music, women in country music, women in color in country music, black women in country music, the history of black people in country music, black woman singers now in country music.

Since February, I have been writing, and those are the stories that I have been commissioned to write about. When a PR, a publicist has come to me, and it doesn't align with those areas of coverage right now, like, I can't. The editors that I'm working with right now, that is not what they're looking for. I think you also have to be very mindful publicists about those global trends that are going on, that are very hot. If you're trying to pitch me something that isn't the global trend, or what people are wanting right now –

[0:19:30] BB: That's kind of hard, yes.

[0:19:31] TC: You may have to wait or tailor it to fit that global trend. Because, one thing about freelancers, we have to keep up with everything that's going on. I have a robust reading diet. I'm reading all the time. I'm listening to podcasts all the time. So, if you've sent me something and I know that that's not what's going on, I might have to tell you like, "Hey, you may have to wait for a down period, or you may have to make this fit into Cowboy Carter right now. Because if not, I can't –".

[0:20:07] BB: It's a no. Yes.

[0:20:09] TC: It's a no.

[0:20:10] BB: Yes. Yes. Oh, yes. I feel that's generous of you to give this feedback. I know you can't respond to every pitch and such. But, yes, people, it's got to be fitting in, especially for someone, Taylor, who's writing about culture, and the intersection of all the aspects of that. It has to be a now thing. It can't be a predicted thing five years from now, necessarily. Anyway, okay, Taylor, this has been wonderful. I have a quick rapid-fire session of questions here. Are you ready?

[0:20:39] TC: Let's go.

[0:20:40] BB: Let's do it. Video or phone interview?

[0:20:43] TC: Video.

[0:20:44] **BB:** Bullet points or paragraphs in a pitch?

[0:20:46] **TC:** Paragraphs.

[0:20:48] **BB:** Paragraphs. Why is that?

[0:20:50] **TC:** Paragraphs, you're able to read in between the lines, and see how those bullet points connect.

[0:20:57] **BB:** Good point. Short or long pitches?

[0:21:00] **TC:** I'm going to go long.

[0:21:06] **BB:** Long, fascinating. Okay. Images attached or Dropbox zip file?

[0:21:80] **TC:** Images attached.

[0:21:09] **BB:** Email or a DM of some sort?

[0:21:11] **TC:** Email, please.

[0:21:12] **BB:** Please. One follow up or multiple?

[0:21:16] **TC:** One with details that I've listed previously.

[0:21:20] **BB:** There you go. Direct or creative subject lines?

[0:21:24] **TC:** These are such good rapid fire. Oh my God. I'll say direct in the interest of time.

[0:21:30] **BB:** Okay. Press release or media kit?

[0:21:32] **TC:** Press Release.

[0:21:34] **BB:** Time you read pitches, if any?

[0:21:36] **TC:** I feel like hours, maybe one to three hours a day.

[0:21:39] **BB:** Oh. Just any time though, or do you have like a 9am PT?

[0:21:42] **TC:** Early morning.

[0:21:44] **BB:** Early morning.

[0:21:44] **TC:** Early morning for me.

[0:21:45] **BB:** Okay. Texas early morning?

[0:21:46] **TC:** Yes.

[0:21:47] **BB:** There you go. Okay. We already talked about sources, so we'll wrap it with that. Taylor, is there anything you want to promote, tout, celebrate, for example, this book essay I'm looking at? Tell us more.

[0:21:59] **TC:** Yes. That book essay was published a couple of years ago. It's, beautiful love letter to Dallas. It was part of a series commissioned by New York Times bestseller, Shea Serrano. His intention was to pay freelance writers to write a 3000-word book essay that we could use to get a literary agent. So, that was the intention behind Halfway Books. Because of Halfway Books, I did sign to a literary agency and I have a lit agent, which is exciting. But at the moment, I'm not doing any book writing, but I'm doing a lot of freelance writing. I'm doing a lot of freelance culture writing. So, if you are interested in my clips thus far, you can reach me across social media at @taylorcrumpton. My website is taylorcrumpton.com. I'm always looking to work with people who are thinking about arts, and music, and women, and culture in the way that I do. If you're interested in that, just send me an email, go to my website. I'm not really a fan of DMs, because you can't keep track of DMs, but email me, please. I check my email all the time.

[0:23:08] BB: Okay, look at that. She wants to be emailed. She wants to be emailed, everybody. Taylor Crumpton, thank you for being on for today. What a delight. Think about not sending an email that she's going to check with her 97 other friends to know that it was not sent just to her. So, that's my little hot tip for everybody, I think that they need to know.

Oh, that's great. Thank you again, Taylor. Appreciate it.

[0:23:31] TC: Thank you. Have a good day.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:23:33] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for listening to this week's Coffee with a Journalist episode with Taylor Crumpton, a freelance writer with Bylines, and Time, Essence, GRAMMY.com, Pitchfork, Marie Claire, and more. 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. But until then, start great stories.

[END]