

EPISODE 55

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:09] ANNOUNCER: Welcome to this weeks' episode of Coffee with a Journalist, brought to you by OnePitch. The guests in our show include some of the most notable journalists from the top US-based publications, who cover topics including technology, life sound culture, health, science, consumer products and business news. We discuss their role, the types of stories they cover, what their inbox looks like and how they connect with sources.

Today's guest is Brit Morse, an Assistant Editor for Inc. Magazine. Brit joined Inc. in June 2020 uncovers startups, entrepreneurship, and access to capital. Aside from writing, she is also a violinist, and is learning how to play guitar. During the episode, Brit tells us more about her recent conversations with employment lawyers, how she follows up with sources, her occasional interview with founders and more. Let's hear more from Brit on the episode today.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:01:16] BB: Welcome, everyone, to Coffee with a Journalist. I'm Beck Bamberger. And today, so excited. Brit, not Brittany, Brit Morse, is here from Inc. Magazine. And you're drinking tea right now, Ms. Brit, right?

[00:01:17] BM: I am. Beck, thanks so much for having me. I'm humbled, Earl Grey to be specific.

[00:01:21] BB: Earl Grey, excellent. Well, I have sparkling water. So, at least we got two drinks going here of some sort. It's very rarely coffee, actually on this damn podcast. So, here we are.

[00:01:33] BM: I if drink coffee too late, I just don't sleep. So, I stick to tea most days.

[00:01:37] BB: That's what you got to do. I like it. We're also recording, you are my second interview in 2021. This is so exciting. So, we're at the top of January here. You just move back to New York, you said.

[00:01:49] BM: I did. I just got back to Brooklyn.

[00:01:51] BB: How's it going?

[00:01:52] BM: It's good. I got some time upstate with my dad and brother and the absolute frigid cold of the Finger Lakes and upstate New York. I survived, made it back to New York, and it's good to be in slightly warmer weather and some kind of civilization. So, it's good to be back.

[00:02:12] BB: Good. Yeah, you said you didn't see the ground necessarily or you didn't touch the ground?

[00:02:17] BM: I didn't see the ground. No, there was too much snow to see much green or quite anything. But that's how it kind of goes upstate. It snows once. People like to say it snows once and it starts in November and it ends in March.

[00:02:32] BB: Wow. Sounds frigid. Unlike, I'm in San Diego. I'm like, "Huh? Snow?" We wear puffer jackets when it's 62. So, we go different over here. But let's start off with your inbox. You were saying it definitely was full post holidays, because we all had time off. You got some time off, which is great. But what is the normal inbox flurry of pitches look like for you on a biweekly basis?

[00:02:57] BM: Gosh, you know, I'm not the best person at organizing my inbox at all. I usually just sort of let it fill up as it goes. I don't know if I get a specific number per day. Maybe that depends on what time of year. I don't know, maybe like a few hundred a week, maybe probably more. Right now, it's somewhere upwards of like 3,000 in my inbox right now. And I'm working on it. I'll just put it that way.

[00:03:26] BB: Do you do any flagging system of any sort or filing? Or are you a mass delete, like you actually delete everything?

[00:03:32] BM: Oh my gosh, I'm one of those people who like hoards all of my emails and I don't delete them until I absolutely have to. So, I don't delete anything because I'm always like, "Oh, what if I need it later?" So, I actually have like a Google doc or like a really big notes sheet that I keep, and I will write down notes or sort of like copy and paste a name or something if I want it or I'll make note of an email and then I can come back to it later.

Most of the time, though, that's just sort of like, if I see a source that I'm like, "Oh, I might be writing about that in the next month or two or whatever." That same person seems really good. But I don't need it for a story right now. I'll just make a note of it. And then whenever I have free time, which is almost never. But should that day ever come, I usually go back to my notes and look it up from there.

[00:04:24] BB: So, you're the first I've heard that has a separate running document going like this.

[00:04:30] BM: Oh, interesting.

[00:04:31] BB: Yes. So, what are you doing? Copying, pasting like pieces of a pitch, pieces of just contact and it's just kind of – what does this magical document look like?

[00:04:39] BM: Oh my god, it's really not that magical. It's actually extremely frightening. It's basically just oftentimes, like a name of a source or who they are or if it's a founder or co-founder of a company and then just the contact email that I could get in contact with them if I need too. And you know, sometimes like a long time will go by, and I'll reach back out to that person and they'll be like, "Sorry, I don't want to work with them anymore" or, you know, "I've moved on or something". I still just keep in touch that way. And yeah, it is, I wouldn't say a magical document, but I love to search and find things by key names, because I guess that's

how things stick in my brain. So, that's usually how I find things. And I'm very bad at deleting things in my email. Really, I keep everything.

[00:05:27] BB: And I like how it's a doc, like not a spreadsheet. It's just a doc. How many pages is it?

[00:05:33] BM: I don't even know. Right, now, I let me pull it up real quick.

[00:05:39] BB: I'm so curious about this.

[00:05:41] BM: It's 47 pages.

[00:05:43] BB: Oh my god.

[00:05:46] BM: Yeah, it's a little ridiculous. But it's just, I can't use, I don't really like Excel spreadsheets for some reason. They don't really work in my brain. I just see things in document for them. I hate scrolling. So, I just command find everything in the document.

[00:06:04] BB: Amazing. Okay. First time I've heard this.

[00:06:09] BM: Hey, maybe it's a rookie mistake. Who knows?

[00:06:12] BB: No. It may be phenomenal hack of sorts. So, what type of pitch gets your attention that you opened? Do you open every single pitch?

[00:06:24] BM: I definitely do not open every single pitch. I open a lot of pitches, obviously stuff that's related to what I'm covering right now. We're covering in the moment. So, right now, I've been looking at a lot of stuff related to vaccines and the workplace and COVID, and workplace safety and covering things related to the stimulus package. So, that's kind of been top of mind. But I also just look at stuff too, that could be like potential profile stories, or anything about founders or co-founders running interesting companies. I rarely actually write

upon them. But I've gotten maybe a handful of pitches in the last couple years that have actually turned into pretty fun profiles. So, I usually keep my eye out for that as well.

Anytime we see any kind of like, growth stats or anything in a headline, I mean, that's kind of like Inc. Magazine's bread and butter is, how much are you making in revenue or sales? Or how much are you growing in the last few years?

[00:07:30] BB: It's not percentages, right?

[00:07:32] BM: Yeah. Any kind of statistics too, because usually, too, if companies are willing to share that information, it means they're also a little bit more open to providing those financials, which are kind of necessary for writing for Inc., in general. So, those are like always things I look for in a lot of different pitches.

[00:07:51] BB: And then you kind of touched on it just there on, "Oh, it'll come from a pitch." So, when you're thinking of, "Okay, I want to do this profile", or you're thinking of just some story you want to do, does that come from, "Oh, I'm on a walk looking outside", or "I'm looking at my plants", or "I'm just thinking about something", or are you getting actual pitches that result in a story? In other words, how do you come up with the stories you do?

[00:08:16] BM: Oh, gosh, that's a heavy question. Well, we have news meetings, usually every morning or every few days at Inc, where we talk with all the editors, and all the reporters, and a lot of people bring in, ideas there, and we're constantly bouncing things off of each other. So, whenever it comes to news coverage, so, you know, like I mentioned, vaccines, stimulus, all that's really come from the news meeting is just come from us, bouncing back ideas back and forth, and what we need to cover. But a lot of the profiles and features, some of the best ones I've written have actually come from pitches, but I would say it's been really extremely rare. It's like, I don't know, one in a thousand kind of thing, where it just hits like the right moment. And I happen to have free time and it happens to be a really good story. Because I do obviously news coverage, but I also occasionally will just take like a random founder interview, just to see like, "Do you have a cool story? Like what it worked for us? Does it make sense? Is there a

struggle there? Is there a really interesting plotline?" So, I do take those on occasion when they seem interesting.

[00:09:28] BB: And do you do, this has come up a couple times, especially with COVID continuing as it is, do you ever just hop on the phone and be like, "Yeah, talk to me for 15 minutes. Let me see what's here."

[00:09:36] BM: Totally. Lately, that's been with a lot of different sources in like HR, and I've been on the phone with so many lawyers recently.

[00:09:44] BB: Really?

[00:09:45] BM: Yeah, a lot of like employment lawyers to talk to me about like what's legal in the workplace and how to set up workplace ramifications and how to set up your workplace for COVID. There are all these really indicate nuances there, especially when people are starting to bring employees back to work. And I talked to them about like, "How does that work with vaccines? How is this going to work in the next six months? How is it going to work in the next year? What is legal? What's not legal?"

[00:10:14] BB: Yeah. Can you ask somebody, "Hey, have you had been vaccine?" Can you ask that as an employer?

[00:10:19] BM: That's a great question. I assume you can, although it may be in considered some ways to be health information.

[00:10:28] BB: Yes, is that HIPAA compliant?

[00:10:30] BM: It might be considered under HIPAA. I'd actually have to talk to someone about that. I'm not entirely sure. It's a great question.

[00:10:37] BB: There you go. Yeah. It just struck me.

[00:10:39] BM: Hey, you may have just sparked another story for me, so thank you.

[00:10:40] BB: Hey, look at that. I love it. No, but that's a real question. Because you know what, little signs, like I was going to the zoo, and they have you read the sign and it says, "Have you been exposed?" And it's like, anybody could go on this and lie out of their teeth, which I'm sure happens all the time. That is a very sad –

[00:11:00] BM: Yeah. And I mean, it's crazy right now, there isn't really like one great method to bring employees back to work right now. Companies are kind of having to figure it out on their own. And part of that deals with individual state and local guidelines and having to follow those on a really localized scale, especially since states are doing vaccine distribution and all of that. But a lot of it has to deal too with the fact that businesses are mostly on their own right now, having to figure out what to do about COVID and how to handle it. So, I guess, yeah, there isn't really one great answer, which is one thing that my reporting is come up with, and that business owners don't always love to hear. I can give the best advice, but there is no one real answer.

[00:11:46] BB: Fascinating. Well, these are the things you get to explore and look into and I like it.

[MESSAGE]

[00:17:06] 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 journalist to pitch your news to. Sign up for your free account today.

Now, back to today's episode.

[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

[00:12:18] BB: Well, let's do a quick word association game. I have a couple of words. Let's see what you say.

[00:12:24] BM: Okay.

[00:12:24] BB: Are you ready?

[00:12:25] BM: Sure. I will do my best.

[00:12:28] BB: Okay. Food.

[00:12:29] BM: Thai.

[00:12:30] BB: Drink.

[00:12:32] BM: Tea.

[00:12:33] BB: Hobby.

[00:12:34] BM: Music.

[00:12:36] BB: Poetry.

[00:12:37] BM: Lyrics.

[00:12:41] BB: Violin, because I know you're playing the violin and the fiddle.

[00:12:44] BM: Oh, guys, Bluegrass. I was in the Bluegrass band in college. I played for –

[00:12:50] BB: How fun is that?

[00:12:52] BM: I went to like one of the only schools in the nation where you can actually major in Bluegrass, small fact.

[00:12:57] BB: What?

[00:12:57] BM: Yeah, it's pretty crazy.

[00:12:59] BB: That's awesome.

[00:13:00] BM: So, I started playing classical when I was six. Played Bluegrass in college also picked up the mandolin and guitar on the way. Just about –

[00:13:09] BB: How many instruments?

[00:13:11] BM: How did you find that out?

[00:13:11] BB: Yes. Oh, we do our research. How many instruments can you play?

[00:13:15] BM: Three and sing badly. So, two and a half.

[00:13:22] BB: Great. Okay. Next word. Oh, COVID-19 vaccine.

[00:13:27] BM: Workplace safety.

[00:13:29] BB: Startups.

[00:13:30] BM: Fast growth.

[00:13:32] **BB:** Entrepreneurs.

[00:13:33] **BM:** Badass.

[00:13:35] **BB:** Journalism.

[00:13:37] **BM:** Difficult.

[00:13:39] **BB:** Small businesses.

[00:13:41] **BM:** Mainstream.

[00:13:43] **BB:** Pitch.

[00:13:44] **BM:** Oh my god.

[00:13:45] **BB:** Inbox.

[00:13:47] **BM:** Frightening.

[00:13:50] **BB:** No one has had a positive expression for that word yet. Just giving you the data.

Okay. Well, what are you reading right now, Miss Brit?

[00:14:03] **BM:** That's a great question.

[00:14:05] **BB:** For fun. What are you reading for fun? We'll also take watching, listening, podcasts are acceptable, Netflix series, anything here. I get all my ideas from this part.

[00:14:16] **BM:** The best thing I read this year actually was *Just Kids* by Patti Smith.

[00:14:23] BB: *Just Kids*, okay. I'll agree with that.

[00:14:25] BM: Fantastic memoir about her and Robert Mapplethorpe, and so the last like museum opening, I guess, this was before everything closed. Last winter. They had an exhibit at the Guggenheim and I remember it because it was like the last thing I did in public before everything shut down, was I went to the museum and I saw the Robert Mapplethorpe exhibition, and then I read the book after and it was really fantastic.

[00:14:52] BB: Wow, it has a ton of reviews on Audible, thousands.

[00:14:58] BM: Yeah, it's really great. It's amazing. Highly recommend.

[00:15:02] BB: Buying it with my one audible credit right now. Awesome. Done.

[00:15:05] BM: I also finished the Queen's Gambit recently.

[00:15:08] BB: How was it? Everyone likes it.

[00:15:09] BM: It's fantastic. I mean, if you haven't seen it, you should see it.

[00:15:13] BB: It's on my list.

[00:15:14] BM: Very well written, very well produced. And the Bachelor started again this week and that is – I'll go into like really cool stuff.

[00:15:23] BB: It did? Back in 2020, early?

[00:15:28] BM: It was. It was filmed in 2020. They go through the whole quarantine thing. It's honestly, like the most basic thing about me, but I am a huge Bachelor fan.

[00:15:39] BB: No shame to that.

[00:15:41] BM: No shame. No shame. I like my wine on Monday nights and my Bachelor. I need it.

[00:15:41] BB: Yeah. What season are they in like, 29 or something ridiculous?

[00:15:53] BM: Oh, I have no idea. I don't even know if they hit 30 –

[00:15:56] BB: That franchise is long lasting.

[00:15:59] BM: But I've been watching forever.

[00:16:00] BB: Wow. Okay, well, that's the first time I heard Bachelor on this on the show also, but hey, we will take it. Great book recommendation too. I always like anything. Any podcast you love or are into right now?

[00:16:13] BM: I am obsessed with Radiolab, I have been, since it came out. I always listen to Radiolab. I listen to a bunch of them on my drive back to New York from upstate. It's just sorts of like my go to for any kind of –whenever I'm driving or just in the subway. It's just so well done.

[00:16:29] BB: Yeah, that stays on the charts. I was just looking at like, you know, the top 10 on Spotify and everything, then that stays there. Radiolab. Awesome. Well, what are we thinking to turn a little bit in my reboot related to what we just mentioned, the future of journalism? What do you think about it?

[00:16:48] BM: Oh, that's so frightening. I mean, I just joined journalism. Hi, hello. I only been in this industry for about three years. So, I, at the moment just sort of like feel lucky to have a job. If I'm completely honest. I had a lot of friends who were laid off at various publications because of COVID and I don't know, I'm feeling really grateful to still have a job. I'm hoping that

continues. I think journalism is just going to keep changing. I really find it interesting what people are doing with newsletters, what people are doing with subtext, I think is really cool. I'm not getting text messages from journalists now, which I actually really like because I'm not a huge newsletter person.

[00:17:34] BB: Oh, interesting. Because those are blown up so much and it's too much. It feels like.

[00:17:39] BM: Yeah, I really like it.

[00:17:40] BB: I do too. I'm a fan. I'm curious to see what the tipping point of that'll be because, you got this person for \$3, you got another person \$5 account, it's similar with the content streaming services. How many of these can you have before it's \$300 a month you're spending on streaming?

[00:17:57] BM: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I think, for me, I obviously follow all of the Inc. journalists. And then all my colleagues and everything, but you know, I have like a few journalists who I really, really love, who have subtext. And so, I follow those pretty religiously. And I just absolutely – I don't know, I'm not a huge –email frightens me. So, the last thing I want to do to look for something fun is to go to my email and click read a newsletter. I don't know. My brain automatically is like, "That's scary." So, I don't know. When I get a text. It's just like, maybe it's something psychologically, but it's a more like happier response.

[00:18:37] BB: Okay. So, you have a positive connotation to it. I get a text from Obama. He has like a text thing going. I'm like, "Oh, it kind of feels personal." Even though it's not. I know it's not, but I enjoy the thought that it is.

[00:18:52] BM: I was getting them from Biden for months ago.

[00:18:55] BB: See? Same effect. It's intimate. Your text messages. That's why it gets annoying when you get those stupid like, "Oh, do you want to do a survey?" You're like, "How is this in my my text messages?"

[00:19:06] BM: Totally.

[00:19:07] BB: Anyway, that's just me. Okay, great. Let's go into our mad lib part, which is super fun, and sometimes quite accurate. We'll have to see what happens. You can tell us from here.

So, I'll give you a word, a thing and I'll fill in your answer and then I'll read you back the whole thing. Does that sound good?

[00:19:26] BM: I will do my best.

[00:19:27] BB: Okay. A catchphrase. Any catchphrase like, Nike is, "Just Do It.

[00:19:33] BM: Does cowabunga count?

[00:19:35] BB: Sure. That's a new one.

[00:19:42] BM: All right.

[00:19:41] BB: Cowabunga. Okay, a scare phrase that you would hear in your job, in journalism.

[00:19:48] BM: What do you mean by a scare phrase?

[00:19:50] BB: Deadline?

[00:19:51] BM: Okay. Can we talk about this?

[00:19:57] BB: Can we talk about this. Yeah, that usually doesn't go great. Okay, an empowering word or something like positive that's in journalism.

[00:20:10] BM: It's live.

[00:20:13] BB: It's live. Okay. An adjective.

[00:20:17] BM: Grateful.

[00:20:20] BB: Grateful. A part of a pitch.

[00:20:24] BM: Hey, Brit.

[00:20:26] BB: Hey, Brit. Another adjective.

[00:20:29] BM: Smooth.

[00:20:31] BB: Smooth. Another part of the pitch.

[00:20:35] BM: Just following up.

[00:20:38] BB: Just following up. So annoying.

[00:20:43] BM: Amount of time.

[00:20:45] BB: I hate those. I don't even get pitches. Okay. What's up an amount of time?

[00:20:50] BM: A month.

[00:20:51] BB: A month. An adjective.

[00:20:55] **BM:** Bright.

[00:20:56] **BB:** Bring. A singular noun.

[00:21:00] **BM:** New York.

[00:21:01] **BB:** New York. How about a topic? Almost done.

[00:21:06] **BM:** Music.

[00:21:08] **BB:** Music. And then a verb ending in ing.

[00:21:12] **BM:** Laughing

[00:21:14] **BB:** Laughing and then just any verb you want.

[00:21:20] **BM:** Any verb, playing?

[00:21:23] **BB:** Play? Playing? Here we go. I'm going to read it back. Are you ready?

[00:21:28] **BM:** Sure.

[00:21:29] **BB:** To me, tech journalism is cowabunga. It consists of can we talk about this, and it's live on the daily. If a pitch has a grateful, "Hey, Brit", I will absolutely respond to it. However, if a pitch is a smooth, "Just following up", you can expect no reply from me. If a month goes by and you don't see an email back from me, you can just assume I'm not right about it. The best stories always have New York and are usually about music. The best way to reach me is by laughing to me, but you can also play it to me. I kind of like this one.

[00:22:06] BM: I feel like that was pretty good. I feel like that was pretty good. I thought of the smooth just following up really well to me. That really got to me.

[00:22:14] BB: That was quite perfect there. That was a good one. I enjoyed. Brit, thank you so much for being on here today and sipping your tea with us and telling us your favorite, that book too. I already have it downloaded. It's coming right now.

[00:22:28] BM: Yeah. Awesome. I hope you read it. And thanks so much for having me again. This has been great.

[00:22:33] BB: So fun. Thanks again.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:22:35] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for tuning in to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist, featuring Brit Morse from Inc. Magazine. 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.

To learn more about the latest tools on OnePitch, 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]