

**EPISODE 60**

[INTRODUCTION]

**[00:00:09] 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, and business news. We discuss their role, the types of stories they cover, what their inbox looks like, and how they connect with sources. If you're an avid listener to the show, we'd love to hear from you. Leave us a review to share your thoughts about past episodes and help spread the word to new listeners.

Today, Emily Canal from Insider joins us on the podcast. Emily is a senior reporter and insider covering entrepreneurship around small business and strategy. Prior to joining Insider, Emily was a reporter for Inc. Magazine and Forbes. On the episode, Emily dives right into the stories she's covering and reporting on, subject lines that catch her attention, some of her recent favorite books, and so much more. Let's listen in now.

[INTERVIEW]

**[00:01:08] BB:** Welcome, everyone, to Coffee with a Journalist. I'm Beck Bamberger who's the Co-founder of OnePitch, which is the producer of this wonderful podcast and also BAM, an agency that represents all these wonderful though crazy startups that are venture-backed. Today, actually drinking coffee, shocker, shocker for this show, despite its name, Emily Canal who recently joined BI, Business Insider. Welcome, Emily.

**[00:01:36] EC:** Thank you so much. It's a pleasure to be here.

**[00:01:39] BB:** We were just talking about New York and how much we love New York and how it's so great. You're in Brooklyn right now, right?

**[00:01:45] EC:** I am.

**[00:01:47] BB:** I cannot wait to be back. It's what we're talking about.

**[00:01:49] EC:** It misses you. I guarantee it.

**[00:01:50] BB:** I feel that. I feel it. I feel it, yes. Well, let's start first, Emily, with your inbox. How crazy is it in there? How do you keep it under control?

**[00:02:02] EC:** It can get pretty crazy. I like to – Well, my current job, our email's in a Gmail now, so I can really organize emails I get based on the topics I'm working on or stories I'm writing. Generally speaking, there's been some themes with my reporting recently like PPP and success stories, pandemic- related stuff, so I try to organize it as best I can. I typically try to tackle my inbox in the morning and making sure I'm sending all the messages I need to that day. Then again at night to make sure I'm set up for the next day but –

**[00:02:40] BB:** Smart.

**[00:02:41] EC:** Stuff rolls in. My inbox can get pretty, pretty intense, hundreds of messages in a day, but I try to read through most of them if the subject lines seem really applicable to what I do. Then I leave them unread until I've responded or figured maybe this isn't the best pitch for me.

**[00:03:00] BB:** So are you one who responds to every email pitch?

**[00:03:03] EC:** I am not. I want to be. I really strive to be but –

**[00:03:07] BB:** Very few people do, I will tell you.

**[00:03:08] EC:** Yeah. It's hard with time management.

**[00:03:10] BB:** It has, yeah. It's impossible. I've heard like one person. Speaking of, I just – Leah, who I was just telling you for Fast Company. I don't know. She's like crazy.

**[00:03:18] EC:** Good for her.

**[00:03:18] BB:** I think she has a robot or something. Also, she's been doing this for 20 plus years, so there's probably that.

**[00:03:23] EC:** Yeah. So she got a good handle on what she's doing.

**[00:03:25] BB:** She does. Yeah. Gotcha. Now, you said, okay, you get hundreds of emails. How many of those are pitches?

**[00:03:33] EC:** I would say most of them.

**[00:03:35] BB:** Really?

**[00:03:36] EC:** Yeah.

**[00:03:36] BB:** Like 80%?

**[00:03:37] EC:** Yeah. I would say about 80% are pitches, and I feel very fortunate for that because there's a lot of stuff coming in my inbox and entrepreneurs or small business owners that I may not have found. Then sometimes, it's really inundating. You walk away, maybe you have lunch, and you come back, and there's 50 emails in your once previously cleared inbox.

**[00:03:59] BB:** Yes. I know like goddamn. Yes. Okay. From those, you mentioned like a subject line. Is that the best way for someone to get your attention let's say if they don't know you?

**[00:04:12] EC:** Yeah. If they don't know me, a subject line that will tell me enough of the story or at least be in the same vein of stuff that I cover. I like specificity when it comes to the

subject lines. So if someone – If the subject line says interesting business story for you, I'm probably not going to click on it.

**[00:04:31] BB:** Have you honestly gotten that?

**[00:04:32] EC:** Yeah.

**[00:04:33] BB:** Wow, interesting story for you.

**[00:04:36] EC:** Interesting business story for you. I'm like, "Okay, I'm going to pass." But there are subject lines that say like, "This entrepreneur did this and this." That's going to get me to click because I'm curious. I'm a curious person, probably in the nature of being a journalist but why I want to read more. The more detail, the better. Especially if it has entrepreneur in that subject line or small business owner, I'm definitely going to click on it. If the pitch is really catered to me, like this person did their homework and they see what I cover, generally speaking, I'm going to respond and say like, "This isn't right for me at the moment, but I'll keep you in mind or this person in mind." I like to save those emails because I find that this inbox can just kind of be a catalog for story ideas, for sources.

**[00:05:22] BB:** For everything.

**[00:05:23] EC:** Yeah, down the line.

**[00:05:24] BB:** A lot of people just keep their inbox totally unfiltered, totally unorganized in a sense because they just search, especially when they're using Gmail, so yeah. Speaking of, here's an audience ask that we have. It comes from Larissa Malcolm who's from Flourishing Focus, which is a – She's a therapist with a private practice creating training around COVID-19 and mental health, and she was asking us how many words of background information is enough to submit with a pitch.

**[00:05:52] EC:** Yeah. That's a really good question.

**[00:05:54] BB:** That is a good question.

**[00:05:55] EC:** I think a paragraph would usually suffice and I think every reporter is different in what they want to see in that paragraph. But I have certain things that I am looking for, so there are some awesome PR people that I work with that I've known for several years, and they all know that I'm going to ask if the entrepreneur is willing to share revenue. I think if you can build that relationship with the reporter and get to know the things that they're looking for specifically in a pitch, then you can really cater yours. But I generally think one paragraph, unless it's an amazing story and you really need the space, then I would try to keep it short and digestible.

**[00:06:35] BB:** Like that one paragraph you mentioned.

**[00:06:37] EC:** Exactly. Just get right to the point. Here's the story.

**[00:06:40] BB:** Keep it short.

**[00:06:41] EC:** Yeah. What that person's willing to talk about.

**[00:06:44] BB:** Is there a memorable pitch you can think of in the last maybe year that you've seen and you're like, "Oh, my gosh. That was the best thing ever."?

**[00:06:52] EC:** Yeah. I think this came to my editor, and she sent it to me, and it was about one of the co-founders of the company TomboyX or Tomboy Exchange. They're a line of gender-inclusive, gender-neutral clothing, and the story was focused on the co-founder and her upbringing and how she basically escaped a religious cult.

**[00:07:18] BB:** Oh, God.

**[00:07:19] EC:** Yup. She was living in New York at the time, a very young kid. Her parents were involved in it, and she didn't want to be a part of it, mostly because the cult's religious views

are very strict towards women. They were saying your role as a person is to marry a man and have kids. This founder, as a young woman realizing she was a lesbian, didn't fit with that, and so she left this cult. She was outed by a sibling. She went on and studied and just had this amazing life.

This pitch was really long, but I could not stop reading it because every day – I was like, “Yes, we're writing that story, absolutely.” It was probably one of my favorite pieces to report last year because it was inspiring when things were just so, so dark last year.

**[00:08:08] BB:** Yeah. God, I just finished reading, well, this will get into our next part, *Unorthodox*, which is a memoir. Did you read that?

**[00:08:16] EC:** No. But I saw the Netflix show, which seems like the worst writer thing I could possibly say.

**[00:08:22] BB:** The worst writer thing?

**[00:08:23] EC:** Yeah.

**[00:08:25] BB:** Was it not good? Was it not good?

**[00:08:26] EC:** No, no. I meant that like I should have read the book. I'm a writer. I should have read the book. But instead I watched the Netflix show.

**[00:08:33] BB:** Well, now I want to watch the Netflix show, but you can still read the book. Fascinating, so great. Speaking of, speaking of, anything you're reading right now that you love?

**[00:08:41] EC:** Yes. I'm a big reader.

**[00:08:42] BB:** Do tell.

**[00:08:43] EC:** Okay. I'm currently between three books.

**[00:08:44] BB:** Do tell. I get all my books from this show. Okay, great. That's good. That's good.

**[00:08:49] EC:** When I'm in more of a serious mood, I'm reading *Red Comet*, which is this huge like tome about Sylvia Plath's life, focusing more on her just general life rather than her death. It's very academic. It's written by Heather Clark. It's intense and it's heavy. But I dip in and out of it, and I don't really know much about Sylvia Plath's life beyond her death.

**[00:09:13] BB:** This is 45 hours on Audible, so that's a hefty one.

**[00:09:15] EC:** It's a hefty one. It's a hefty one. In between that, I am in two book clubs, so I am reading *A Certain Hunger* by Chelsea Summers, which is about a food critic who happens to also eat her ex-lovers.

**[00:09:33] BB:** What?

**[00:09:33] EC:** Yup.

**[00:09:34] BB:** What?

**[00:09:35] EC:** Yup.

**[00:09:36] BB:** No. Is that for real?

**[00:09:37] EC:** For real. For real.

**[00:09:39] BB:** What parts of them? Like, "What?"

**[00:09:41] EC:** So far, I'm more than halfway in. She's killed three men and she's eaten different parts. We've got a liver, the bum, and – What was the other bit? The tongue. There we go.

**[00:09:52] BB:** Okay, wait. I have to say look at – The opening of this is, “Eat, Pray, Love meets American psycho in a seductive and sinister debut literary thriller.” I'm in. I'm in. I'm in. I'm in, I'm in. I'm in.

**[00:10:04] EC:** I can't put it down. I've been listening to it, which I don't do very often but I just, I just did a big road trip.

**[00:10:11] BB:** Was the narrative good?

**[00:10:12] EC:** She's very dry, but it's kind of great when she's talking about these like beautiful meals like rack of lamb and then also how she prepared her ex lover's liver to eat.

**[00:10:23] BB:** Oh, my god.

**[00:10:25] EC:** It's a wild ride. It is very horny. It is very food-centric. I think it's going to make you hungry or repulsed. It's hard to talk.

**[00:10:34] BB:** Yeah, all right. I'll get it. Yeah, let's do it. Okay, one less.

**[00:10:36] EC:** Then the other one, *Less* by Andrew Sean Greer. I'm starting that this week.

**[00:10:43] BB:** *Less*. Okay. What's the premise on that? Do we know? Having less, living with less, all things less.

**[00:10:50] EC:** It's the author, the narrator's name.

**[00:10:51] BB:** No. This was totally different. Okay.



**[00:10:54] EC:** It's a novel. It follows this writer, Arthur Less, and he's traveling the world on – I think it's a literary tour and then also grieving this breakup that he just had with a former lover. I think it was the podcast Pop Culture Happy Hour. One of the hosts was talking about this book and mentioning it's really important and lovely that this is about an older gay man, whereas the AIDS crisis killed so many gay men that this is almost like a peak that a lot of people haven't seen yet.

**[00:11:24] BB:** I'm happy to tell you. I had it already in my wish list, and it won a Pulitzer Prize.

**[00:11:28] EC:** Yes, it did. I am very excited.

**[00:11:30] BB:** Wow. Oh, my gosh.

**[00:11:33] EC:** I try to keep it balanced, a fair bit of cannibalism, a little bit of biography.

**[00:11:37] BB:** Yeah, memoirs.

**[00:11:38] EC:** Memoirs. Yeah, exactly.

**[00:11:40] BB:** Awesome. This is why I love this show because I get all the juicy recommendations from here.

**[00:11:46] EC:** Well, if you're looking for one more, *Detransition, Baby* is one of the best things I've ever read.

**[00:11:51] BB:** *Detransition*.

**[00:11:53] EC:** *Baby*.

**[00:11:54] BB:** Okay.

**[00:11:54] EC:** Yeah. It deals a lot with I guess a recently broken up with, yeah, trans couple and parenthood, adulthood, self-identity. It's amazing.

**[00:12:07] BB:** Juicy. Emily, look at you. So many good ones.

**[00:12:13] EC:** Not a lot to do right now.

**[00:12:16] BB:** Hey, hey. You got to escape in books. I hear you on that. Is there one story from the year or recently that you wish you wrote that you're like, "Damn, I wish I got that pitch."? Or any other journalist that you're just like, "Oh. That was a good piece I see over there."?

**[00:12:32] EC:** Yeah. There was a story in the Times recently about. I think it was rent prices and real estate that the author found from Reddit. It was people talking about this these phenomenons, these trends on Reddit, and I just thought that was so smart, and it actually prompted me to start looking more at Reddit, which is a site I've ignored. Now, I'm finding all these interesting story ideas there, so it just taught me basically to keep an eye out, keep checking different platforms. Obviously, Reddit grew in prominence, thanks a lot to GameStop. It's always been a big, big social media tool, but that was fascinating.

**[00:13:10] BB:** Very good and that's cool. Now, I got to look up that piece. Oh, my gosh. I tell people I have sometimes a crisis of content, too much. There's too many good things.

**[00:13:20] EC:** I believe it.

[BREAK]

**[00:13:23] 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](https://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 RESUMED]

**[00:13:48] BB:** Little fill in the blank segment here for you. Okay, Emily. So here, let's start with this. My favorite publicist always –

**[00:13:57] EC:** Follows up with me.

**[00:13:58] BB:** I am shocked to hear that you like when people follow up with you. Wow.

**[00:14:04] EC:** I can be difficult with email, and it's not intentional. It's just since it's almost the last thing I do in the day. Sometimes, I don't get to everything. For the publicist I like to work with, I trust, I know they know what I work on. Sometimes, I need to be pinged again, and I tell them like, "Just ping me again." I will respond but sometimes I need a nudge.

**[00:14:26] BB:** That is freaking cool.

**[00:14:27] EC:** It helps. I need a reminder sometimes.

**[00:14:29] BB:** Yeah. I hear you on that. The most annoying publicist always –

**[00:14:34] EC:** I mean, follows up with me about an hour afterward, like if especially –

**[00:14:39] BB:** An hour?

**[00:14:40] EC:** If I don't know. It's different if it's a time-sensitive story and we know each other. But sometimes, I'll get an email at the start of the day, a couple hours later, maybe the end of the day, and it's like, "Okay, cool down. Cool down."

**[00:14:54] BB:** You'll get a response from me if –

**[00:14:57] EC:** If you email me asking to have a quick maybe a 15-minute phone call about what I cover and how we can work together. I really appreciate when people do that. I think it's really helpful and builds a symbiotic relationship. But I also like to know that this person took the time to look at what I actually cover. More than just business, I want them to see that I cover entrepreneurs, small businesses. I'm doing a lot with PPP right now. Just take a look at my stories.

**[00:15:24] BB:** Yes, take a look.

**[00:15:26] EC:** Yeah. And just do a little homework, and that's going to make me want to talk to you and see how we can find a way to work together if possible.

**[00:15:34] BB:** You will never get a response from me if –

**[00:15:36] EC:** You think that Canal is my first name.

**[00:15:38] BB:** Oh, no. What?

**[00:15:41] EC:** Happens all the time, “Dear Canal.” I'm like, “Oh, all right.”

**[00:15:47] BB:** I don't know. I don't know what to even say to that. So yeah, okay. It would be a huge help if –

**[00:15:54] EC:** I guess if I also knew maybe best practices for working with publicists. I have some that I like to – I'll ping if I'm working on a story I think they might have clients for. But sometimes, it's last minute, and I feel bad, but that is often the news industry. Yeah. I guess it would also be helpful for me to know what helps when getting in touch. I've kind of realized that from talking to some publicists that they'll want to know my deadline, what kind of questions I'd like to ask the source. You build that over time but it's very specific.

**[00:16:27] BB:** My perfect Sunday is –

**[00:16:31] EC:** Okay. I'm thinking it starts off with like a cup of milky coffee. I love milky coffee.

**[00:16:36] BB:** Me too.

**[00:16:38] EC:** We have so much in common. In all likelihood, I'm probably starting my morning by reading for a couple of hours. I really, really love to read.

**[00:16:47] BB:** I love it.

**[00:16:48] EC:** Is this in the pandemic times this Sunday or is it in the non-pandemic time?

**[00:16:53] BB:** Whatever interpretation you wish of that. Yeah.

**[00:16:55] EC:** I would say if I can try to see some friends, that'd be really nice, which is hard these days. But I live near some close friends, so that makes it easier and cooking a really good meal with my fiancé. I love to cook, and I like when we can do it together and have that and experience together, and we get to experiment.

**[00:17:16] BB:** The nicest thing I ever heard about my work was –

**[00:17:20] EC:** This is a tough one. I think effect any change. That's always nice, and it's hard to keep track of that. But even if I just get an email from someone that says like, "I really enjoyed your piece," or, "Thank you for talking about this. I'm going through something similar." Yeah. I guess that's probably what I would say. It's rare but it's nice.

**[00:17:45] BB:** The last best thing I ate was –

**[00:17:49] EC:** Oh, man. I made for Valentine's Day red wine, soy-sauce-braised short ribs.

**[00:17:58] BB:** Delicious.

**[00:17:58] EC:** Yeah. It's got mirin in there and have it with rice and homemade kimchi. That was pretty great.

**[00:18:07] BB:** That sounds delicious. That's awesome. Quarantine taught me –

**[00:18:13] EC:** More patience. Yeah.

**[00:18:16] BB:** I feel you on that. One thing I think people should know more about me is –

**[00:18:23] EC:** I really like to learn. I really, really like to learn. Yeah. I'm always open to having conversations and kind of exploratory coffee meetings or things like that. I just – I'm always looking for a story and especially if it's in an area I don't know a lot about because I love to learn and dive in and research. That's one of the best parts about being a journalist is that no day looks the same. You just get to learn. Yeah. I guess I would say that.

**[00:18:48] BB:** That's a good one.

**[00:18:49] EC:** Thank you.

**[00:18:50] BB:** Well, speaking of journalists, what do you think the future of journalism is?

**[00:18:58] EC:** I think it's going to be more pay walls, which is good. I think it's going to be more creative. I think we're going to see people interacting with journalists, almost like social media. But I think with apps like Clubhouse, you can get texts from journalists now about their stories. I think it's going to be more personal and delivered to the reader, rather than – I think there was a time where you really had to hunt out a lot of news. But now, it seems that as the reader you can really just have whatever you want delivered to you and your interests. So

newsletters, tweets, texts from journalists, things like that, I think that's going to be the future and then just pay walls to support the people working at those publications.

**[00:19:50] BB:** Looking back at yourself, your college self, let's say, would you be like, "Yeah, do this. Definitely do this."? I know when you were at Paw Print Newspaper as editor-in-chief, the student newspaper at York High School. Would you tell yourself like, "Yeah, make sure you do this as a career."?

**[00:20:07] EC:** Yeah, I would.

**[00:20:10] BB:** That's great.

**[00:20:10] EC:** Yeah. I would definitely want to warn myself that you're in for a hard time because when I went to college I think by my sophomore year, other professors being like, "Think long and hard about this industry. It's dying. Newspapers are dying." All I wanted to do was be a newspaper reporter, and obviously that has changed and evolved as the industry changes and evolves. But, yeah, I love it. I love it. I love it so much.

**[00:20:38] BB:** Yeah, I could tell. I could tell. I can tell.

**[00:20:42] EC:** It's lucky but also unnerving to have a very specific goal.

**[00:20:48] BB:** Well, lastly, Emily, let's play our mad libs if we can. I'm going to give you the word and then I'm going to fill them all out and I'll read it back to you. Does that sound good?

**[00:20:56] EC:** Okay, yeah.

**[00:20:58] BB:** What is an emotion?

**[00:21:00] EC:** Happiness.

[00:21:01] **BB:** Happiness. An adjective.

[00:21:04] **EC:** Smart.

[00:21:05] **BB:** Smart. And another adjective.

[00:21:08] **EC:** You think I'd have an arsenal of adjectives that's ready. Yeah. Thirsty.

[00:21:14] **BB:** Thirsty. What about a greeting, any greeting?

[00:21:18] **EC:** A double wave.

[00:21:20] **BB:** Double wave, yeah. And then what about a verb?

[00:21:25] **EC:** Definitely not dainty.

[00:21:27] **BB:** Not dainty. Okay.

[00:21:30] **EC:** I'm excited for this.

[00:21:31] **BB:** Sometimes, they're shockingly accurate. Sometimes, they're just purely silly. They arrange. They arrange a lot. Okay, a noun.

[00:21:39] **EC:** Deer.

[00:21:40] **BB:** Deer. An adjective.

[00:21:43] **EC:** Flighty.

[00:21:44] **BB:** Flighty. Great. Cringe-worthy PR term.



[00:21:50] **EC:** Synergy.

[00:21:53] **BB:** You're still getting those?

[00:21:55] **EC:** Yeah. Everyone's synergizing.

[00:22:00] **BB:** A part of a pitch.

[00:22:02] **EC:** First line.

[00:22:03] **BB:** First line. Length of time.

[00:22:07] **EC:** Half hour.

[00:22:08] **BB:** Half hour. Name of a real person, ideally alive.

[00:22:14] **EC:** First and last?

[00:22:15] **BB:** Yeah. Or you could say like my mom. I don't know.

[00:22:19] **EC:** I'll do my fiancé.

[00:22:21] **BB:** Okay. It's a good one. Then lastly, an emotion.

[00:22:26] **EC:** Peaceful.

[00:22:27] **BB:** Peaceful. I love it. Okay. Here we go, Emily.

[00:22:32] **EC:** All right.

**[00:22:33] BB:** When I think about the future of journalism, I feel happiness. The pitches I receive have gone from smart to thirsty. If I receive a pitch that starts with, "Double wave, Emily," I am not dainty about it. When I write stories on deers, I get flighty. My favorite pitches include synergy and have a very specific first line. I normally take around half an hour to respond to my emails. But if it's my fiancé, I will respond immediately. If you do not get a response back from me, you should know that I am very peaceful for you. I love that line. I love it.

**[00:23:09] EC:** I love it too. I love the line about deers and being flighty.

**[00:23:14] BB:** It's great. It's great. That's perfect. It's perfect. Thank you, Emily, for being on today. This was so fun.

**[00:23:21] EC:** Thank you so much for having me. If you ever want to talk books, let me know.

**[00:23:26] BB:** Sure will.

**[00:23:26] EC:** Yeah, sure.

**[00:23:27] BB:** Well, let me get through those three though first that you mentioned.

**[00:23:29] EC:** Yeah, definitely. Let me know what you think.

**[00:23:31] BB:** Yeah, I will. Thanks again, Emily.

**[00:23:33] EC:** Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

**[00:23:35] ANNOUNCER:** Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Coffee with A Journalist featuring Emily canal from Insider. If you enjoy listening to our show, make sure to

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[END]