

EPISODE 154

[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 OnePitch 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.

Our guest this week on the podcast is Teddy Amenabar, a reporter on the Well+Being team at The Washington Post. Teddy covers Internet trends, covering a wide range of subject matter from health to climate and technology. During the episode, Teddy shares more about the Well+Being team and their coverage, like doesn't put much focus on pitch subject lines, his unique perspective on exclusive stories, and lots more. Let's hear from Teddy now.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:01:04] BB: Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist, and I'm Beck Bamberger. I run BAM and this wonderful thing called OnePitch to help you get to journalists. With us today, and I'm very excited to hear what perhaps the best soap and other things of late are in Well+Being, Teddy Amenabar. He's a reporter on part of The Washington Post's Well+Being team. I want to be well, Teddy. So tell me more.

[00:01:32] TA: Yeah, yeah. Thank you for having me. We are a relatively new team in the newsroom. We launched in September, and we are the personal health desk. We're dedicated to answering any question about a healthy fulfilled life. Anyway, so my –

[00:01:49] BB: It is fun.

[00:01:50] TF: It is fun. Absolutely, yeah. It's a lot of fun.

[00:01:52] BB: Yes, yes. You've also, as we heard in a little intro, been at The Washington Post for quite some times in different roles too. So it's fun to see you now in this particular role. But to

start off, just because, in case people maybe don't know, how would you describe the coverage of The Washington Post?

[00:02:13] TA: Wow. That is a good question. I don't know why. I grew up reading The Washington Post. The Washington Post is a major national newspaper that covers general interests usually leaning towards politics, national news, foreign affairs, and I think that we want anyone to be a reader. So it is a little hard to define. But we lately have been trying to build lanes of coverage, one of which is wellbeing. Another is climate. Tech's a big place too where we're adding a bunch.

[00:02:51] BB: Washington Post. I look at it I pretty much every day, so I'm familiar, and it is a great, great outlet. Oh, and has the best tagline in my opinion. Democracy dies in the dark, right?

[00:03:03] TA: Darkness. Yeah. That's Ben Bradlee. That is a quote from Ben Bradlee. Thank you.

[00:03:09] BB: Love it. Okay. So for you Teddy, your specific beat, you mentioned a little bit just on Well+Being, and it is related to everything I see here from fallopian tubes and things in deodorant and FDA regulations or blood donation. It really covers the gamut. But what type of pitches are you most interested in?

[00:03:29] TA: Yeah. Okay. So you're right. I'm a general assignment reporter on the team. But my mandate is to report out answers to the questions people have about the health information they come across online. So it can be something that people are searching for on Google or a video that they swipe past on TikTok or watch on YouTube. Like whatever is coming across your screen that relates to health information, how can I as a journalist answer that, get the experts to answer that to give you a better idea of that topic or the question you might have?

[00:04:07] BB: So then are you following closely Google searches? Or are you relying on pitches or both?

[00:04:13] TA: Yeah. I mean, to the second half of that question, I don't rely a lot on pitches.

[00:04:19] BB: Okay. Honest answer.

[00:04:23] TA: There's a specific type of pitch I really like. Like I appreciate when universities send me press releases about research from their academics or from their labs because a lot of the time, what I'm looking for is what is the most recent piece in a medical journal or the study that is still ongoing that can give us a better idea of an answer to a question.

[00:04:53] BB: Okay. So you – Okay. We like academics. Anything else then because you did just say you're not – You don't clearly get much out of pitches. But then, oh, how would you like a pitch to be presented to you?

[00:05:06] TA: Yeah. It's an interesting question. I like when pitches take into account what I'm reporting on. So prior to doing this, I was looking through my inbox, and I got –

[00:05:22] BB: Yes, give us something live.

[00:05:24] TA: I got – I did get one pitch yesterday about Adderall and Ritalin shortages and trying to connect me with two co-founders of a company to speak about the ongoing issue of Adderall shortages across the country. I did just write about that in the fall, and it is still very much a problem, not just for Adderall but for other drugs. I mean, I am interested in doing a follow up on that.

So I think the tough thing is I'm often looking for researchers, less for like companies or medical technology or products really that will often come through my inbox, so yeah.

[00:06:12] BB: Okay. So is a good pitch for you possibly an expert, thought leader with PhD in microbiology to talk about gut health? Is that something more appealing?

[00:06:26] TA: Yeah. I mean, if you are in gut health, you should pitch to Anahad O'Connor, who's a columnist on my team, who is just completely owning that beat, and he's doing such a good job at that. But the tough thing is sometimes those pitches can get into, "Oh, well. It's Heart Health Month. So here is X, Y, and Z expert to talk to you."

But we're not going to just write about a topic because it's Heart Health Month or – But I would love to know that your university has or – It doesn't have to just be university. But I would love to know, just to go with that example, that the University of Florida or Minnesota or whatever has this preeminent expert who is often giving talks in the industry on this topic. I can just save that for later and come back to them.

[00:07:17] BB: So do you use your inbox like many journalists do, which is your own personal Google, so you can go back in there months later and look for something?

[00:07:26] TA: Yeah. I mean, I definitely rely probably a bit too heavily on the search function and outlook. I mean, I'm kind of – I think some people would call me insane because I do do inbox zero. I find it really –

[00:07:39] BB: Oh. Well, that's one of the questions here. So you are in the camp. It's a rare camp. There's only like 6%, I would say, out of the journalists. So how do you do it? I'm also a fan, but I'm not on your side. So I'm not – I love sending the pitches side. How do you manage that?

[00:07:56] TA: It's gotten harder recently, but I do open everything, which is –

[00:08:02] BB: Wow.

[00:08:04] TA: So I'll just scan through really quickly. But I do open it up in a preview and then I'm not – I'm very rarely batch archiving dozens of emails.

[00:08:13] BB: Okay. Yes.

[00:08:15] TA: So I'll read it, give it a sentence, and then archive it. You probably were going to ask about this later. But that is why I really don't like when people send follow ups because I've definitely read it. Like I've definitely looked at it, and I tried to send quick notes to say like, “Hey, thank you. If I don't respond, it's because I've already seen it.” But it just feels futile. Like it doesn't feel like it's actually worth me responding back to say, “I promise, I've looked at this.”

[00:08:48] **BB:** Yeah, you can't. Yeah. That's – Although you know what you could do? You could do that little auto response. Yes. I have received your email. And, yes, I have reviewed it because I'm an inbox zero person. So please don't send a follow up. Maybe that's something you could do. I wonder if it would deter, though.

[00:09:05] **TA:** Yeah. I mean, I don't want to – Yeah, that's a good point. I mean, it's tough because I don't want sources to –

[00:09:09] **BB:** Trying a little experiment.

[00:09:11] **TA:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

[00:09:12] **BB:** That's true. That's true. You don't want to – Yeah, see. This is a slippery path. Okay. So given that you open every email, Teddy, do you care about what the subject line says?

[00:09:23] **TA:** I don't really, no. I mean, I like straight subject lines.

[00:09:28] **BB:** Okay. Straight, direct. Got it.

[00:09:30] **TA:** So study shows.

[00:09:32] **BB:** Yes. Study shows X.

[00:09:33] **TA:** Yeah. Yeah. Then I like it when it's like a published study that's been peer reviewed. That's great. That doesn't always happen.

[00:09:40] **BB:** Academia. Yeah. Not somebody –

[00:09:42] **TA:** Does not always –

[00:09:43] **BB:** Yeah. Got it. Okay.

[00:09:45] TA: But, yeah, you're right. I don't spend too much time on subject lines.

[00:09:48] BB: Yeah. Because you read every email. Amazing. So even though that is the case, are there any recent emails, pitches that you've received where you go, "Wow, that was pretty. I like that subject line," like point to you a person?

[00:10:05c] TA: Well, I guess I was just getting into it, the – I got an email from one university. I think this was also yesterday. Study shows that just one quality conversation with a friend boosts daily wellbeing.

[00:10:20] BB: Yes, I would agree with that.

[00:10:22] TA: I've been writing about friendship and the health benefits around friendship recently. There is a lot of peer-reviewed research showing why it's so important to have good friends. So it's definitely up my alley, and I'm grateful that that person pitched that email. I don't know if I'm going to write about it now because I just wrote about that topic. But it's helpful to know.

[00:10:46] BB: Yeah. Then you have it. So perhaps three months later, it comes back around, something like that.

[BREAK]

[00:10:52] 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]

[00:11:16] BB: Do you ever want an exclusive or embargo? Like would you want an exclusive to have first eyes on a report?

[00:11:23] TA: Yeah, yeah. I mean, for embargoes, I always say yes because why not? Why not agree and just learn what the information is?

[00:11:30] BB: Yeah. There you go. Good.

[00:11:32] TA: I mean, the one thing with embargoes is I don't – I've only had this happen like once or twice, but I don't like that when embargoes – There are different embargoes for different people. When you are in one embargo, but a different group of media outlets are in a different embargo. I have definitely talked to PR people in the past about I used to report one day a week on the gaming industry for the post, and I used to run into that, and that would frustrate me.

As for exclusives, I mean, I feel like I'm often more pitching exclusives than the other way around. I just – I guess what I mean there is I'm often trying to make the case why a person or a group should chat with me because I've done the reporting. I'm going to give the full picture. I'm going to be able to take the time to tell the whole picture. But, yeah, I mean, I think – Look. I like exclusivity and access journalism. It can lead down a path that doesn't feel great.

So I don't know. My goal is always just to report information that hasn't otherwise been reported. So if somebody is going to give it because they trust that I can tell that accurately, then great. But like I'm not looking for any special favors.

[00:12:59] BB: Okay. This is good. No special favors. Teddy, for you, you're in the DC area. How does one that assumes you want to be in person build a relationship with you?

[00:13:13] TA: Yeah.

[00:13:13] BB: Of any sort.

[00:13:14] TA: When I first started on this new beat in September, I got a couple of emails, very nice emails that were some version of, “Do you want to grab coffee sometime? Or what topics are you interested in?” All very well intended, and none of those actually panned out. I think the tough thing with the general assignment is I couldn't tell you I wrote a story today that I didn't think I was going to write at the beginning of the day. I often can't necessarily say. It's helpful for me to know what organizations or groups you're working with, if you're an independent agency.

In terms of building a relationship, I don't know. The times where I've really built a relationship with someone in PR, it's usually when it's like I'm doing ongoing reporting on that organization or that company. Just by nature of like emailing – Or actually, to take a step back, I'm often emailing with like PR from Mayo Clinic or Johns Hopkins University. It's in my interest as well as theirs to just have a good relationship because I am absolutely going to reach out to them again and see if they have some cardiologist who can talk to me.

So I guess my answer is just, to me, it kind of just happens over time, and I appreciate when people are human with me. I try to be really human with them in terms of like hey whatever, just being realistic about like we're all dealing with life and juggling a million things. But I don't necessarily do the whole like coffee or drinks for an open-ended reason because I just – It's hard to find the time.

[00:15:06] BB: Yeah. Hard to find the time. That is totally fine. Good to know. So you do not want to, “Hey, I'm in the DC area. Have a coffee?” No, no. So is it just then – Is it consistency of responsiveness, good material, anything like that? Obviously, you're going to open every email, as you said, but is it that that helps you maybe prioritize and open when you see someone's name?

[00:15:32] TA: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. I mean, I would just say yes. I can't think of anything else except for I want to – I'm sometimes on a tight deadline, and that is not always what neither I nor you want. I think some understanding there really helps. Yeah. I mean, the best relationships I've had so far is like with hospital systems, PR hospital systems, or just can connect me with their medical experts. I try to always leave it with like, “Please, just tell me in the future, if there's other things that you think I might be interested in. I write about practical health information, so –”

[00:16:12] BB: I have to say, Teddy, you're the first I've had on here who's like, "Hospital systems, yes."

[00:16:16] TA: Oh, my gosh. They're great. They're great.

[00:16:17] BB: It's just not a common thing you hear, so I love it. That's good to know. Okay, Teddy. We have a little rapid fire section here, which is just either or. So are you ready for this?

[00:16:30] TA: Yeah. Okay. Sure.

[00:16:31] BB: Okay. Here we go. Video or phone interview?

[00:16:35] TA: Phone.

[00:16:36] BB: Bullet points or paragraphs?

[00:16:38] TA: Bullet points.

[00:16:39] BB: Short or long pitches?

[00:16:42] TA: Short.

[00:16:43] BB: How short?

[00:16:44] TA: I think a paragraph.

[00:16:48] BB: Paragraph. Okay.

[00:16:49] TA: No. I just said bullets, so –

[00:16:51] BB: That's true. But maybe you need four bullets because that would be a paragraph if you wrote it out. Okay. Images attached or Dropbox zip file?

[00:16:59] **TA:** We're just not usually dealing too much with images, so I don't have a strong opinion.

[00:17:05] **BB:** Okay. Pitches in the morning or evening or who cares?

[00:17:10] **TA:** Oh, I guess the morning. But, yeah, I'd say morning.

[00:17:14] **BB:** Email or Twitter DM?

[00:17:16] **TA:** I also check a lot of my Twitter DMs, but email would be better. I'm going to forget about Twitter.

[00:17:21] **BB:** Oh. Well, we already know the answer but just to emphasize. One follow up or multiple?

[00:17:28] **TA:** Oh, yeah. No, yeah. You don't have to follow up with me.

[00:17:31] **BB:** And say what? You already answered this but to emphasize for our little checklist here. Direct or creative subject lines?

[00:17:38] **TA:** I like direct. Yeah.

[00:17:40] **BB:** Press release or media kit?

[00:17:42] **TA:** Press release I would say.

[00:17:44] **BB:** Okay. Then, Teddy, just as last words, just to kind of like close this out here, is there anything you want to promote or mention or emphasize? For example, sometimes, we have people on here, and they're like, "Yeah, I got a book coming out. Buy my book." Great. We want to support you. What do you got?

[00:18:01] **TA:** I can't plug a book. I don't – I really like when –

[00:18:09] BB: There's some of those journalists out there. They're like, "Oh, you know. I made this," and you're like, "What?"

[00:18:14] TA: It's crazy. I admire them so much, so maybe one day. But I would say this is not really a plug for myself. But I do really appreciate when PR in-betweens help to clarify the title for a person because what's on a website is not necessarily what a person prefers, is not necessarily what the organization prefers.

[00:18:41] BB: So you mean, specifically, PhD in x, instead of mentor or board member of x?

[00:18:49] TA: Yeah. I mean, there's – The tricky thing is we're not necessarily going to copy and paste it. So if your hospital system, for example, has a very long name because somebody donated a lot of money to have that long name, we're going to pick the name that makes the most sense to the reader. But it's very helpful for me to know that out of the 50 titles that one person has, what they most identify as is professor of psychology at the University of Florida.

[00:19:19] BB: Yes. Got you. Okay. It's good to know. Anything else?

[00:19:24] TA: No. I think that's it. But thanks for having me.

[00:19:27] BB: Thanks for being on, Teddy, and thanks for being here, not all the way but digitally, all the way from DC. I love that place. It's such a fun town.

[00:19:36] TA: I do too. It's a lot of fun.

[00:19:38] BB: It is great. Teddy, thank you for being here today. So fun having you. I'm not going to ask you for coffee if I'm in the DC area, but I will be sending you a direct fun email, which you, I know, will open, so there you go.

[00:19:49] TA: We can get coffee, but yeah. Thanks for the time.

[00:19:52] BB: Oh, thanks, Teddy. That just applies to me, everybody. Just so you know, don't be trying that. Okay. Thanks, Teddy. Have a good one. I appreciate you.

[00:20:01] TA: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:20:02] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist, featuring Teddy Amenabar from The Washington Post. 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]