

EPISODE 174

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:09] 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 a pitch, including some of the guests on this podcast? Head to our website at onepitch.co to learn more.

Today, we're talking with Fortune Health and Wellness reporter Alexa Mikhail. She is part of Fortune's well team, covering life, health, mind, family, and more. During the episode, Alexa talks about the launch and coverage behind the team at Fortune Well, the who, what, why for pitches and sources she looks for, why introductions with her go a long way, and more. Let's hear from Alexa now.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:01:00] BB: Welcome, everyone. My name is Beck Bamberger. This is Coffee with a Journalist, and in fact, episode 163. Thanks, team. I was losing count of all the ones we've done here. With us today is the health and wellness reporter from Fortune, Alexa Mikhail. First off, hi, Alexa. Thank you for being here.

[0:01:20] AM: Hi. Thank you so much for having me.

[0:01:22] BB: Second of all, how fun is this beat and what a time to be writing about wellness and health? My goodness.

[0:01:29] AM: Yeah. It is a fun one, and it's super relevant today. I think just from the pandemic alone, it's really just underscored how important it is to take care of ourselves and our mental health. Yeah, it's been great. There's a lot of pitches around this.

[0:01:43] BB: Yes. In fact, your last article I'm looking at here was about loneliness, and you have in the headline is the health crisis comparable to smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day.

[0:01:55] **AM:** Mm-hmm. Yeah. I mean, it's –

[0:01:58] **BB:** That's so sad.

[0:01:59] **AM:** It's unbelievable. But I think that the Surgeon General has also been super vocal about the loneliness epidemic and it's only been really exacerbated by the pandemic. I think that finding ways to just feel connected to one another and really focusing on your relationships, whether at work, or at home is really important now. That's a huge pillar of wellness, too. It's not just exercise and nutrition, like I think one's thought.

[0:02:25] **BB:** I think it's the next sleep, actually.

[0:02:27] **AM:** Yeah. That too.

[0:02:28] **BB:** I think it's finally becoming, yes.

[0:02:30] **AM:** Yeah. How could I forget something like that?

[0:02:31] **BB:** Yes. We had a whole thing of that for the last, I'd say, five years. Now, people are like, "Ooh, sleep. Yeah, you should get that." Now it's like, yeah, you shouldn't be alone by yourself for 10 hours a day and just talk to your cat. Yeah.

[0:02:42] **AM:** Exactly.

[0:02:45] **BB:** Well, again, thanks for being here. Alexa, for those who maybe aren't as familiar, how old would you describe Fortune's content and then more specifically, yours?

[0:02:53] **AM:** Yeah. Fortune is a business magazine. Been around for a long time. Just about a year ago, last July, we launched Fortune Well. That vertical really covers everything health and wellness. I started with the team about a year ago as a health and wellness reporter under this vertical. We have a small but mighty team and really, we're focused on how to connect with our readers in a way that helps them feel better and work smarter. As we talked about before, it's really just a pivotal time where we're talking so much more about what it means to work, what it

means to feel better. I think there's this intersection of mental health and work. That's what we're focused on.

We do have some main pillars. Health, which is just general; breaking health news, mind, so anything, not only from mental health, but also brain health and psychology and happiness, stress and burnout, and then family, so that covers caregiving and life, so that's exercise and nutrition. Then I've also been really honed in on our newest pillar, which is aging well, so anything from aging and **[inaudible 00:03:55]**, which we're talking so much more about and seems to be really top of mind for people. For me, personally, though, I am really most passionate and interested in mental health, workplace, wellness, and that aging and longevity bucket.

[0:04:08] BB: Yes.

[0:04:08] AM: Yeah. Anything where we can really make people feel better, do better at work. There is that workplace angle, which ties in our business Fortune audience. We also cover a range of things that don't necessarily need to be tied to business.

[0:04:20] BB: Got it. Did you read, by the way, *Outlive* by Peter Attia?

[0:04:25] AM: I did not. I did not. But I believe there's a talk on it tomorrow, so I'm –

[0:04:29] BB: Oh, perfect. Perfect. Because it talks about health span, not just life span, which is like, okay, you live to a 102. But health span, who cares if then the last 20 years of your life you're like a potato. That's not a way to live.

[0:04:43] AM: That exact difference between health and lifespan, I wrote an article where this one expert was telling me that the gap between the two is really about 10 years, which means it's one thing to live longer, right? It's another thing to live well longer and to really optimize the quality of life. I think, we can't just talk about longevity and, and try to outlive everyone. We have to talk about how to really enjoy the latter part of our life.

[0:05:06] BB: My goal is to live to three centuries, Alexa, to touch three, since I'm an elder millennial. It's possible.

[0:05:12] AM: It's possible.

[0:05:13] BB: Anyway, we digress. Let's get in a little bit more of your inbox. How crazy is it in there?

[0:05:18] AM: Yeah, I mean, again, you mentioned health and wellness is a booming thing for me to cover. Yeah, I mean, it's definitely packed. If I'm out a day at a conference or something else, it definitely is hard to manage. But all good things, I try and look at everything to the best of my ability.

[0:05:38] BB: Does that mean you open every email?

[0:05:39] AM: Yes.

[0:05:42] BB: Wow. Really? This is always so shocking. I just had someone else on who, just let it ride inbox, several thousand. Who cares? You look at every single – You open every email?

[0:05:52] AM: Yeah, I definitely go through. Obviously, if it's not relevant to our beat, or to what I'm covering that day, I'll quickly pass it by, unfortunately. Yeah, I at least try and scroll through everything and get through it as much as I can by the end of the day. It doesn't always work. There's always some lingering, but I try.

[0:06:09] BB: Wow. Got you. Okay, and then do you have an organizational system for then, what you do with the pitches, or the emails?

[0:06:15] AM: Yeah. Definitely. I've made folders in my inbox that are relevant to different topic areas that over time, I've realized I'm covering more and more. For example, I've covered menopause a little bit. I have a folder for menopause, or a folder for women's health, again, a folder for longevity. Then one, obviously, for workplace wellness. I usually try – not all of them are sorted, because a lot of them aren't relevant to what I'm doing. If there's something where

I'm pitched an expert, or an interesting topic, I'll filter it into some of those categories. Then say, there's a breaking news story, or a new study on menopause, then I can go into that box and see, "Oh, is there any experts here, or anything interesting that I've been pitched around this?"

It might not be used right away, or it might not take that email and respond and be like, this is a person I need to talk to right in this moment. I try as much to file things away to help me in the future. That's my strategy.

[0:07:10] BB: Yeah. No, that makes sense. Then what would you say, like how often do you come back actually to those? Like, once in a blue moon are you like, "Yeah. Actually, 10%."

[0:07:21] AM: I will say that not all of the folders that I've created have gotten attention. I think certain ones that I go back to, a lot are just general doctors, because I think sometimes that can be more of that breaking news, right? I want a comment right away. Again, psychologists, mental health experts, I'll usually go back into those boxes. If it's just a general story pitch, too, that I think is interesting, I also try and keep note of that in a folder. I unfortunately don't always go into that box, but doesn't mean I don't think they're super interesting, or want to cover one day. There's just so much that we end up having to pivot to on a day-to-day basis.

[0:07:58] BB: You're mentioning some of the experts, it sounds like you to hear from. What's the total list if you want to disclose? Whom do you wish to hear from? Doctors, but like, any more specifics that we could illuminate?

[0:08:11] AM: Yeah. I definitely think experts are key for a lot of our stories, because as I mentioned before, we're really focused on helping people in their day-to-day lives. I think that a lot of times, our stories usually have attached to them tangible tips, tangible ways people can improve their lives. I think that again, general doctors are always helpful if we're doing a health story, but I would say, along the lines of workplace wellness, it's if someone's an author of something new with this new strategy on how to combat multitasking, for example, or someone that has a new interesting strategy for the workplace.

I would say, yes, doctors, experts have credentials, but also, let's say, we're thinking about wellness at work. Well, maybe it's one step further, they just came up with this interesting

program where they're really trying to have co-workers be able to engage with one another, or something in a hybrid environment. I think experts are great, but I think if they can bring something that really hasn't been out there, that obviously catches my attention. Yeah, I would say just overall, interesting authors. I try and look through a lot of the books that I'm pitched. Yeah, that's helpful.

[0:09:18] BB: Yeah. Okay. Oh, and so authors. Okay. I'm sure fancy people with MDs, PhDs, etc., behind them. Not just like, "I wrote a book."

[0:09:28] AM: Yeah. I mean, I think that there's a wide range of experience that we look at that classifies as an expert. I think just lived experience is also really important.

[0:09:36] BB: That's true. That's true.

[0:09:36] AM: I think, it's important along with someone that has that medical background, for example. It's also great if someone has an experience that they've had in the workplace, or say, someone felt undervalued and that experience helps then illuminate what the expert is saying. Every day people are also great for our stories.

[MESSAGE]

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Now, back to today's episode.

[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

[0:10:18] BB: What about exclusives, or embargoes? Are those ever of interest?

[0:10:22] AM: Yeah, definitely. I would say within the subject line of an email, if it says an exclusive, or an embargo, I'm definitely going to be reading it more carefully. That's something that I would keep of note. I think, yeah, definitely the subject line, having them is important. I try and look at embargoed studies regardless of if I'm pitched them, just based on certain news alerts. If it's really relevant to what I cover and it's an embargo, I definitely am more keen to take a look.

[0:10:50] BB: Since you open every email, I guess it doesn't depend too much for you, Alexa, like the subject line, but are there subject lines that really get you up where you're like, "Ooh, that's a good – oh, I got to open that first," for example.

[0:11:03] AM: Yeah, I would say, definitely embargoes and/or exclusive comes to mind first. I would also say, given that right now, or for example, here, I'll say that again.

[0:11:12] BB: Yes.

[0:11:14] AM: Given what's trending within health and wellness, if that's top of mind for us and our team and my editor at the moment, if I see that in a subject line, it really stands out. Obviously, that's hard for people to be able to predict, but I would say, if for example, we're covering a lot of longevity talk, or the Mediterranean diet, or something's trending, and I get pictures around that, I think that I'm more likely to open it. There's something that's widely circulating in the news and someone has an expert on it, or just a different angle that they're pitching. I'm usually going to take that pretty seriously.

Then, I think, yeah, just anything around happiness, wellness at work, again, aging. I feel like I'm repeating myself, but I think I try and really look at those, because that's definitely directly in my wheelhouse. Then I'll even look at that aren't, just because you never know, but yeah.

[0:12:03] BB: Okay. Now, for those who maybe don't know you, they like to, how would they build a relationship with you?

[0:12:10] AM: Yeah. I think it starts with an introductory email. You can follow me on Twitter, on LinkedIn. I try and connect with people through my LinkedIn and through my email. I'm local to

New York area, and so I've definitely tried to grab in-person coffee chats with as many people as I can. Obviously, it's hard to do that. It's hard to build those relationships, but it's always helpful to put a face to a name. When I can, I try to meet someone in person, because then if I hear something that they might have a client for, or they're a PR manager and they have this expert, I'll remember a little bit more easily now that I had met them in person.

[0:12:46] BB: Yeah.

[0:12:47] AM: That always helps. I can't always do that. I think just sending an email and a follow up, obviously, if I missed it in my round up, just to introduce yourself, tell me the kinds of people that you might have that might fit my coverage and I'll definitely keep that in mind and file it away, even if I don't use it within the next days or weeks.

[0:13:07] BB: Mm-hmm. Okay. See her in New York. Do you have, by the way, a preference? Do you like a morning meeting coffee? Do you want to go somewhere in the evening? Anything like that?

[0:13:16] AM: Yeah. That's a really good question. I think that I'm in the office a couple of days a week. Usually, the days I'm in the office are great for meeting. Usually that's Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday for me. Meeting for early morning coffee before I'm usually given my story for the day, or stories that I want that week is always helpful. I would say, early morning coffee, middle of the week is prime.

[0:13:40] BB: Okay. She likes the coffee. Very good. Very good. Okay, Alexa, I have a quick little speed, rapid fire question session here for you. Are you ready?

[0:13:50] AM: I'm ready.

[0:13:51] BB: Video, phone or in-person interview? We just touched on it.

[0:13:55] AM: I know. I would say, to be quick, in-person is great, but I honestly do a lot of them over the phone. It's just easier to be able to record and take notes and make it as easy as possible.

[0:14:05] BB: Mm-hmm. Exactly. Bullet points, or paragraphs in pitches?

[0:14:09] AM: Definitely bullet points.

[0:14:10] BB: Okay. Why?

[0:14:11] AM: I think that it just is really easy for me to be able to grasp all the information and not miss anything when it's in bullet points. Even if you highlight, or bold certain things like the expert, or the specific angle right away, then that also helps within the bullet points.

[0:14:26] BB: What types of sources do you look for and how do you want them pitched to you? I know we talked about lived experience and the doctors and everything. The last person I just talked to was like, lawyers and bankers. I mean, fascinating story on that front. But, I guess, the question is from a publicist perspective, how do you like that pitch? Even though we know you'll read everyone, but what's the pitch that you're like, "Yes. I want to book a call"?

[0:14:49] AM: Yeah. I think that a source that really stands out to me is someone who either has a new study coming out, a new book coming out. They really specialize right in workplace wellness and mental health and aging, or longevity. They have an interesting perspective and relevant perspective to share and potentially, also a timely perspective to share as well. I think that just outlining who they are, what they've done right away, either attaching their study, or the title of their book is always helpful for me to take a look.

[0:15:23] BB: Title of the book. Drop it in. Okay. Images attached, or Dropbox zip file?

[0:15:27] AM: Definitely attached.

[0:15:29] BB: Why is that?

[0:15:30] AM: I don't know. I think it's just easier for me to click on it right – clicking to another tab.

[0:15:35] BB: I know. Same. Same. I don't want to log into a thing and then it asks me a thing and da, da, da, da, da. Yeah. Exactly.

[0:15:40] AM: Left clicks are better. Fewer clicks.

[0:15:43] BB: Yes. Okay, Alexa. Just for last words. Is there anything that you have to promote, emphasize, shout out, etc.?

[0:15:53] AM: Yeah. Well, last week our Fortune Well team published our Fortune 50 best places to live for families.

[0:16:01] BB: Yes.

[0:16:02] AM: It's like what you mentioned at the top. This really helped to outline that living in a community that has strong support systems around people that are really going to uplift you is really important for people in a survey that was conducted on behalf of Fortune. Definitely check that out and check out our story on loneliness. That was in recent magazine edition that you can find at your local bookstore.

[0:16:24] BB: Yes.

[0:16:25] AM: That's our list that came out. That was a larger project we were working on for the last couple of months. Yeah. Then just keep in touch with my coverage and definitely pitch me. I'll try and get to it. If I don't, feel free to follow up.

[0:16:38] BB: That is so generous. I'll try to get to it. I mean, it's so sincere from you, I could tell, Alexa. Like, she's going to try, people.

[0:16:44] AM: I try, but I feel bad when I can't respond.

[0:16:46] BB: She's going to try. I think that's freaking great. Well, Alexa, thank you so much for doing this today. Such fun. If I was in New York, I would totally be getting coffee with you, but I

will be later in September, so stay tuned. We'll take it from there. Send your book author, people, her way.

[0:17:03] AM: Yes, please. Thank you. It was great. Thanks so much.

[0:17:07] BB: Thanks, Alexa.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:17:09] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for listening to this week's Coffee with a Journalist episode, featuring Alexa Mikhail at Fortune. 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.

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