

EPISODE 266

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:09] ANNOUNCER: Welcome to season three of Coffee with a Journalist, brought to you by the team at One pitch. Are you looking for a more efficient way to find the right journalists? Head over to our website at onepitch.co to learn more. Today we sit down with Shoshi Parks, the executive editor at 7x7, a beloved lifestyle magazine all about the Bay Area. Listen as we dive into her editor editorial process, what she looks for in pitches, and how publicists can actually get her attention. Enjoy.

[00:00:40] BB: Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist. I'm Beck Bambaker. I'm a publicist. I'm a business person. You know, whatever, whatever. The point is, we're all publicists here, and we need to understand how better to work with our reporters, our journalists, our editors, and so forth so we can all do our job well and not be annoyed with each other. So that's why we're here and with us today. Actually. Where are you coming in from?

[00:01:03] SP: So I'm in San Jose, California.

[00:01:05] BB: San Jose in California. Time. Me too. Welcome. Welcome. Shoshi Parks. She is the executive now editor at seven by seven. Previously associate editor, but she just got promoted. So congrats to you, and thanks for being here.

[00:01:20] SP: Sure. Happy to help.

[00:01:22] BB: By the way, did you get a PhD in philosophy?

[00:01:28] SP: Anthropology, actually. Yeah.

[00:01:30] BB: Okay.

[00:01:31] SP: Yes, I did.

[00:01:32] BB: Oh, we don't usually see PhD people on here normally as reporters. Yeah.

[00:01:38] SP: First career, second career, you know, you know, kind of dovetails together.

[00:01:43] BB: Yes. Okay. For those who maybe don't know, because I do like to ask this of anyone who's, you know, doing the editing or the writing or whatever, even if it's in New York Times. How would you describe 7 by 7?

[00:01:55] SP: 7x7 is a lifestyle magazine for the San Francisco Bay Area. San Francisco is the heart of our coverage, but we are expanding out a little bit more to include more of the Peninsula, the South Bay, and the East Bay as well, which we haven't historically done. We do a lot of arts, culture, food, travel. And the travel does expand to, you know, throughout California

as well as the Western U.S. Mexico, Hawaii. Yeah. So it's kind of the life you want to live in the Bay Area is the way I like to think about it.

[00:02:31] BB: Basically. Basically. Oh, it's. It's. This is what I. I would send anyone who's like, what's California about? Why would I want to be there? Boom. You go to this site and you'll be like, oh, I get it now. Okay.

[00:02:41] SP: Yes, I. I like that.

[00:02:43] BB: I like that. Okay, there we go. Now, as executive editor, how does that Change your job from associate editor if there is a big difference.

[00:02:53] SP: Yeah, well, I'm now, I guess, functionally in control of the editorial process, of the whole shebang. So a little. But now I am fielding all the writers, all our freelancers. I am doing some assignments, making some assignments. I'm still contributing some writing of my own and yeah, working with our publisher as well on all of the business side of things that she takes care of. And then I kind of, you know, stumble into and say, how can I help? And, you know.

[00:03:30] BB: Yes. Does that clarify in your view, what. What any executive adjective in front of editor means when you see the executive? It means like, oh, yeah, you're tied into the business side, the operations side. The more all the stuff of making newsroom work.

[00:03:49] SP: That's a good question. You know, I think every publication is different. We're a really tiny publication these days. We started out, we're about 25 years old at this stage. Began in the early 2000s. And once upon a time we had a print magazine and a full staff. Now it's down to, you know, just two full timers and a lot of freelancers who contribute. So. So in our case, the executive editor basically means, you know, I've got my hands in kind of everything, but my specialization is, of course, the editorial content. I don't know how that works at other publications. I don't know if, you know, there's a big difference between editor in chief and executive editor. I've always kind of thought of them as sort of the same thing, but I also don't have a lot of experience being an executive editor. So I don't really know.

[00:04:45] BB: It's new. It's new. We'll see. So let's talk about perhaps your inbox. So she. And just what is going on in there? And do you prescribe to the zero inbox cult?

[00:05:00] SP: I try, but I am a failure at organization and that keeping things, keeping. Keeping my inbox clear. So I do tend to go through it at least once a day and delete everything that is not of interest to me. So I don't even look at, say, 65 to 70% of the emails that come in because they're just either irrelevant or I have no interest in what the pitch is.

[00:05:28] BB: So how are you quickly deducing that? Is it just. It's obviously from the whole subject line because you're not. I'm sure you're not clicking into them, so you're just looking at the subject line. And what are the flags for you where you're like just doesn't pertain the actual content of it. They misspell your name, for example.

[00:05:44] SP: That is something.

[00:05:45] BB: What are your top five?

[00:05:47] SP: Yeah, so I think the first thing is—so I should mention too that I, I do, I have this position with 7x7, but I do also freelance for some other national publications. So I tend to get a wide variety of things. But really, I'm specializing in, you know, I've got kind of two channels of stuff—Seven by Seven, so stuff involving the San Francisco Bay Area or California. And when it comes to those items, I'm really looking for—well, first off, is it geographically relevant? Secondly, is it even pertinent to the types of topics we cover? If you're pitching me something about a sports team, you know, we don't do anything about sports. So that's completely irrelevant to me, and I'm going to delete that right away. Same thing with, say, you know, somebody's representing a band, for example, and that's great, but that's just not really something we do. So anything that's just, you know, irrelevant geographically or topic-wise, I get rid of immediately. Things that have a little bit more promise—you know, perhaps they are within the geographical range, there's something maybe a little intriguing about the subject line—I'll typically open those. But I'd say, you know, at least half of those then get deleted after the quick open.

[00:07:13] BB: Okay. And then once a day is all you're saying that you kind of check is.

[00:07:20] SP: I mean, I'm kind of constantly perusing my inbox. But yeah, I try not to focus on it until, you know, I try to give it one solid kind of look every day.

[00:07:30] BB: Okay. Just every. Wow, wow. I'm on it.

[00:07:33] SP: Don't always succeed.

[00:07:34] BB: Yes, it's okay. You're giving me hope. What about sources for you particularly, are you looking for? I, I don't know, park rangers in this, in the Bay Area who know about the weather, climate stuff or restaurant insiders who know what's going on with who's leasing out buildings. Like what's the get for you?

[00:07:54] SP: Yeah, all the above. I mean, I think somebody who has a inside knowledge about whatever it is they're pitching is always going to be a more attractive pitcher than, than somebody who, you know, really doesn't know what they're talking about. And I do sometimes get pitches where it seems like the, the rep, like literally is, you know, maybe it's the, maybe the job is new to them, I don't know. But it does sometimes seem like they really have no sense of what they're. They're pitching, and it's kind of, you know, all over the place. If it's somebody who really knows what they're talking about, I think, you know, you can often tell. And they. They tend to have maybe a slightly more conversational tone because they're able to actually converse about the topic as opposed to just, you know, here's what I'm selling.

[00:08:44] BB: Ooh, okay. So that's maybe how you suss out a real expert versus just can be.

[00:08:48] SP: It is one of many, I think, ways to.

[00:08:51] BB: Yeah, okay, you're saying one of many. What are some other ways. Stuff out of sorts.

[00:08:56] SP: I don't really know. I guess just, you know, if the—what I'm looking for more than anything is for somebody who, you know, I get a lot of cold pitches, as I mentioned before, from people who seem to have no sense of, you know, who I am or what I do or what the publications I work for do. And I completely understand that y'all don't have, you know, any more time than I do to figure out, you know, each individual need or each individual publication. Um, but it's just, you know, kind of wasting everybody's time to send something that is not up their alley. Um, and so I think that is something I'm—I'm always looking for is, you know, as you mentioned before, when, you know, did they spell my name right, first of all, or did they address the email to a completely different person? Which happens a lot. I get, you know, we're all just cutting and pasting, but, you know, it's not the best way to convince me to take you seriously if you're calling me Amanda. So that's—I think another thing is just, you know, somebody who has some sense of who I am as a journalist or, you know, what I do. The pitch has been meant—is meant for me. Like, me, actually. And I know it.

[00:10:17] BB: Okay. So just. It's meant. Honestly, the emails.

[00:10:26] SP: Yeah, yeah. I mean, that. That's ideal. And even if not. Even if it is just a sort of a cut and paste and. And that is completely fine, but it should at least be on point in terms of. Of topic or geographical area.

[00:10:40] BB: Yeah, yeah. Okay. We don't have any audience asks. I'm looking at our little sheet here. That is totally fine. Oh, but let's get into story approval. Okay. Give us an insight into how that works.

[00:10:54] BB: Now, I know you're now just, you know, in the executive type of role, but as Maybe a freelancer who's coming to you to, to say, hey, let's run the story. How does that work? How do y' all decide this is what's going to run for this week?

[00:11:08] SP: Yeah, so usually at the moment I've got about a three week lag time, so I'm taking pitches right now for July or, you know, or down in the summer, if it's something that is timely that pops up, you know, and I wasn't aware of, I can occasionally make space for something like that. But, you know, unfortunately it is, you know, we all have calendars we need to work off of. And so it is important to have to know what's coming up in order to get that pitch out so that I can assign it, you know, in a timely way. I don't know. Did I, I did not answer your question fully. Can you repeat the question and I will answer the rest of it?

[00:11:56] BB: Yeah, just how does it go about from an email pitch to the actual publication? And I like to ask, particularly for editors, because sometimes for a reporter you're like, well, I gotta get four stories out this week. Okay, I like that. I'm gonna run it. It's, you know, but often from like the editor's lens, it's like, wait, you know, I maybe send it over to that reporter. Okay. They come to me and other times with saying, hey, here's what I'm thinking. Here's, here's my stories. Because so often reporters have to pitch what they want to do to their heads at B to determine that. And then maybe you workshop and say, like, no, we're not going to do that. Okay, I like that. Oh, continue with that, and so on and so forth. So just a thought.

[00:12:36] SP: Yeah, I mean, we do both, both pitches from PR or other representatives as well as writers pitching to me specifically, you know, their ideas as well. And in both cases, I, I am the decider. Now, there is no other decider but me. But I do try to. Having been in the freelance game for a decade, I completely understand how frustrating it is not to get a response to a pitch. While I cannot respond to all of the PR pitches I get, I do at least try to respond to every freelancer writing pitch that I get. So any reporter that has an idea, I really do try to, to respond to them personally and let them know either, you know, why I am not accepting their pitch or, you know, maybe how they could tweak it to, to perhaps make it a better fit for us.

[00:13:36] BB: That is so generous of you.

[00:13:38] SP: I just know how it feels to be on the other side, you know, And I. It's not a fun place to be, so I try to at least just give some feedback.

[00:13:47] BB: Yeah, generous, as I said. Speaking of, I'm sure you went through this process. You have a book coming out?

[00:13:54] SP: I do, yeah.

[00:13:57] BB: You know, we research some things. Do you have it coming out next year? Right. The Human Zoo is what it's called.

[00:14:03] SP: That is the tentative title, yeah.

[00:14:06] BB: What is the Human Zoo? Every workplace or what?

[00:14:11] SP: It's. So it's a. It's a pop history slash science book. And it is about. So at the turn of the 20th century, there was a really popular form of entertainment that scholars, modern scholars call human zoos. Essentially, they were indigenous people being exposed by the colonial rush who were brought to Europe or the US and often put literally in zoos for people to watch in their living habitats. So, you know, the. Like, when you go to the zoo today, there, the polar bear has their pool and their rocks, and that's actually began. The man who invented that for animals started out with humans and creating that type of environment. So it's. It's about that. And then also very closely tied to that is the science of anthropology. It really began using

these places as. As laboratories. So. Yeah, so it's kind of a dark history of, you know, between 1870s and World War I. Meant for a popular audience.

[00:15:20] BB: Oh, wow, okay. Meant for a popular audience.

[00:15:23] SP: Yeah. So it's not a. It's not a, you know, academic book. It's a. Yes, it's meant for. For all of us.

[00:15:29] BB: For all of us. Wow. Okay, wait, I know this is like. That doesn't pertain to. In this podcast. Who cares? How did you. How did you get onto this?

[00:15:37] SP: So I started out in the world of academia in anthropology. I got a PhD.

[00:15:43] BB: Yes.

[00:15:44] SP: Was very unhappy in that field and left ultimately after a few years after I got my PhD. But I have always, you know, even my freelance writing is. Is really, I think, ultimately almost all anthropological. You know, it all deals with kind of this intersection of history, science, and travel. Seven by seven, I' branched a little more into the lifestyle arena, but the, the science, history, travel is kind of my. My backbone. So anyway, this is a story I. I learned about in, in graduate school. And I just kind of kept thinking about it, kept thinking about it, thought, hey, if I ever get a chance to write a book, that would be it. And lo and behold, here you are. I got the chance.

[00:16:33] BB: Wow. Okay. Cannot wait to see that. Back to more publicists. And I'm sure you're going to have publicity for the book and that's going to be exciting relationship building with publicists. So how can we make your life easier?

[00:16:51] SP: Don't follow up with me 30 times, please.

[00:16:53] BB: Yeah, okay, 30 was at the top. Or you're just mean.

[00:16:57] SP: No, I mean, maybe I'm exaggerating a little, but I think two follow ups are. One follow up is good. So one initial email. A follow up is good because yes, sometimes I do miss, you know, subjects that I'm interested in. After that, I think you can assume that I have intentionally ignored you. If you want to do a third, you're starting to get on my cranky side. If you go into 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th follow ups, we are not friends anymore. Anymore.

[00:17:29] BB: I like that. Not friends. Excellent, Excellent. Okay, what else? I was, you know what, actually. Okay, we don't want the follow ups. You talked about making the life easier. Is there relationships to be formed with you? Do you want to be at a blue bottle in San Francisco having a coffee with a publicist ever? Or you're like, you know what, please stay in my inbox. That's all I can cover.

[00:17:55] SP: Yeah, that's a really good question. I'll be honest that, yeah, almost every publicist I've ever interacted with has been absolutely lovely. There's something about this field that really draws warm, interesting, kind of easy-to-talk-to people, and I love that. That said, I don't have a lot of time, and, you know, sitting down with somebody for coffee is a challenge. It feels like, you know, unless it's something that we're going to be diving deeper into, or it's perhaps somebody who represents a lot of businesses or organizations or whatever in my region that might be relevant to what I do, it, I think, is probably more of a waste of time than just sending me an email.

[00:18:56] BB: I think about this all the time. This is why we put together all these super efficient media events for our journalists and people in the tech world, especially on the brand side. Because, like—how is a journalist supposed to have 27 coffees?

[00:19:11] SP: Yeah. Exactly.

[00:19:12] BB: On any day or anything. One on one. No, like, it's just, you just can't at this point.

[00:19:18] SP: Yeah. It's just impossible. I mean, I'd love to if that were that alone could be my job, just having coffee with publicists.

[00:19:25] BB: You know how you get nothing done. You write no stories. So there you go. Got you. Okay. You already did the rapid fire questions for us before, so I wanted to give Everybody, just a reminder that if you want to see what the answers are, you. There's a pitch guy for Soci here and she's. It's on our website, so. Oh, and on our blog. So FYI, for people to know that. Okay, final thoughts. So she. Is there anything that we can do to promote, to celebrate, to tout your stuff, other than buy your book when it's out next year?

[00:20:02] SP: I mean, read 7x7. Go take a look. Especially if you're in the Bay Area or Northern California or just the west in general, planning a trip out here. I think we. I would like to think we are in a little bit of a niche just in that, you know, not a lot of. There's tons of publications out here, but there aren't a lot covering sort of the more fun things like arts and culture and the outdoors. So if you're, you know, if you're into any of those things or if you kind of want to see this region with a slightly different perspective, you know, versus like a. A travel guidebook or something like that, then check out 7x7.

[00:20:48] BB: Excellent. And check out your book. And congrats again. So she on your promotion? Killing it. Got a book coming out now. Executive editor. Look at you.

[00:20:58] SP: They're happening. Yeah.

[00:21:00] BB: Ah, living the California dream.

[00:21:02] SP: That's right.

[00:21:03] BB: Top. Everyone, this is Shoshi Parks. She's the executive editor at 7x7. She's not going to meet with you for coffee, but by all means, drop a good email and you could get the answer there. Especially if you're a freelancer. She was going to answer you if you're a freelancer because she understands how that goes.

[00:21:20] SP: That's right.

[00:21:21] BB: Thank you again.

[00:21:22] SP: Thank you. Thanks for having me.

[00:21:26] ANNOUNCER: Thank you for listening to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist. Do you want to pitch our next guest or ask them a specific question? Head over to our website at [onepitch Co](#) to learn more about our private networking community for PR pros and apply to join we'll see you next week. But until then, start great stories.