EPISODE 270

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:09] ANNOUNCER: Welcome to this episode of Coffee with a Journalist! Today we chat with Nicholas Rice, Senior Editor at People magazine, about what it's really like behind the scenes at one of the world's most iconic publications. From managing breaking news to building strong publicist relationships and launching the new People app, Nicholas shares practical tips, standout pitch advice, and why the magazine is stronger than ever. Grab your coffee and enjoy!

[00:00:37] BB:

Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist. Hooray. I'm Beck Bamberger. I'm a publicist. And we made this show because we need to know how better to work with our publicist editors, freelancers, journalists that are out there, because, my God, we all need to do our job, and hopefully we have a good time doing it together. So. And apology, Nick.I was just saying this. I'm like, I don't know what's going on with my throat, but I feel fine. It's just a little summery fogginess or something. So, anyway, Nicholas Rice is with us today. Where are you calling in from?

[00:01:07] NR:

Actually, Beck, I'm calling in from Long Island, New York.

[00:01:10] BB:

Fantastic. He is the senior editor of People magazine. And you said here on this Thursday that, like, your Monday has just started because you covered the weekends.

[00:01:20] NR:

Yes. Yeah.

[00:01:20] BB:

Tell us more, because that's a little bit more avant garde.

[00:01:24] NR:

Yeah. So I run our weekend scene here at People. A little bit of my background with People, is I started...

[00:01:29] BB:

You've been there a while, sir. All the way to editorial. Intern.

[00:01:50] NR:

Yep. I started as an intern in January 2020. My journey with *People*—I always tell everybody—it officially began on paper then. Like, "Okay, you're in, as an intern." But honestly, I've been reading *People* probably since the time I could read. While everyone else was like, "See Spot go. See Spot run," I was like, "Okay, what's going on with Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie?" It's just always been a part of my fabric. I've always loved it.

[00:01:58] BB:

I love that.

[00:02:00] NR:

Yeah.

[00:02:01] BB:

So did you have any intuition then, Nicholas, of like, I'm going to work here? Like, did you have that in your mind?

[00:02:11] NR:

I mean, it was always there, of like, a goal of like, could you ever imagine working at *People* magazine? And there would be times where I would hype myself up and be like, I can do it. I'm going to do this. But then there was always that self-doubt of like, oh, my God, it's—it's *People* magazine. I'll never make it there. And there was still—here I am five years later—where there were moments where I literally *am* here, like pinching myself, being like, holy crap. Like, here I am at *People* magazine. Like I made my dreams come true.

[00:03:00] BB:

Yes. Okay. I was sharing this with someone else today. There was a little clip with Jay Shetty on the Mel Robbins podcast. And if you're familiar with it, okay, great. But he was saying—and I love this—of just the "you today" is the version 10 years ago you were dying to have. Dying to be. Five years even, maybe ago—maybe even a year ago. But like, we forget it so often because now you are here. You know, look at you now, Nicholas. You're an editor at *People* magazine. But like, the eight-year-old you would have been running around in circles, probably jumping up and down.

[00:03:10] NR: Oh, easily. Yeah.

[00:03:12] BB: Right.

[00:03:12] NR: Yeah.

[00:03:12] BB:

Oh, I love this. Okay, so at your dream job then, Nicholas, how is your inbox?

[00:03:21] NR:

It's full. Okay, it is full on full on full.

[00:03:25] BB:

Okay. Okay. So what do we do? Yeah, well, tell us. How do you manage?

[00:03:32] NR:

Yeah, so with the inbox, you know, obviously there's so much. And I think what's so interesting about People is that we are a place that covers everything. So it's not like, you know, you're pitching to one brand where it's just like, okay, they're focused on their celebrity entertainment coverage. You're going somewhere where they're known for like their politics, crime coverage. Like here, People, we're covering every single thing going on in the world. So one minute you're getting a pitch of, hey, you know, this celebrity is partnering with the sports drink. Are you interested in interviewing them about it? And then you're getting something about, hey, do you want to speak to a lawyer about the latest in, you know, the Diddy case? Like all these different things.

[00:04:09] BB:

Yeah.

[00:04:10] NR:

So the inbox gets crazy for that very reason of there's just so much we're covering. So there's so much being pitched to us.

[00:04:16] BB:

Yes. Okay, now what do you then do now? And also just to be clear, and I like to ask this with like editors, especially now, senior, like you're not writing all the pieces. You got a team hopefully that can write the pieces. So you're a little bit like traffic control, I imagine how. What's your mechanism for that?

[00:04:33] NR:

Yeah, so I think what's important is, right away, just getting the pitch and it having that thing that makes you, like, stop and be like, oh, okay, this is interesting. So I think for me, a lot of the times the big thing is obviously the subject line. You know, you're in your email, and that's the first thing you're going to see. So something that's going to catch your attention. I know for me, like, I love doing the interview ops with celebrities. So if I see something in the subject line that says, like, exclusive interview op, Katy Perry—you know, that's—I'm going to be in that, right? And be like, oh, what does that say? And clicking it right away. So things like that, things that you know are going to make it stand out. I also find, too, that, like, I, through work, I go by Nicholas. My email is nicholas.rice@peoplemag.com. But I also find that, like, if the subject line says, like, for Nicholas, or more specifically, if it says for Nick, then I know, like, oh, okay. This person has really put a lot of time and a lot of effort into this pitch, and they, you know, personalized it. They wrote it tailored to me. When I see that type of stuff, I know, like, oh, okay. I'm like, this is going to be something good. Because we do get, like, so, so many spam pitches where it could just be, like, so, yeah, auto-generated. You know, hey, here's this new probiotic gummy. And there's just, like, absolutely nothing in that pitch or anything for us. So those are...

[00:05:55] BB: Wait, what kind of gummy did you say?

[00:05:56] NR: Like a probiotic gummy?

[00:05:58] BB: Oh, yeah, no, we don't need that.

[00:05:59] NR:

No, yeah, I'll have a gummy bear, a gummy worm, but a probiotic gummy. No, not for me.

[00:06:07] BB:

Okay. Nicholas, you said that you do have a couple of pitches that you've actually liked. Can you give us some sample? Because I'm sure it's not about the probiotic gummy.

[00:06:17] NR:

Yeah, thankfully, no. Like I was saying, what do we got? Yeah, yeah. So the ones where it's. It's got that subject line that's going to capture your attention. That's a great way to start off.

[00:06:27] BB:

And can we get click on a little bit more, like, oh, gets your attention—specifically written like a headline, specifically has your name in it? Like, what else grabs you where you're like, I've got to open that up? But you did say, like, okay, Perry, exclusive interview. So exclusive maybe is a grabber for you, if it's exclusive?

[00:06:45] NR:

Yeah, I think anything that kind of, like, differentiates it and makes it where it shows, like, okay, this is tailored to you. So if it says like for PEOPLE, if it says for Nicholas, for Nick, like, that type of stuff. And then of course, obviously there's like those keywords that are going to get us excited. Exclusive celebrity interview, red carpet pitch. Like, all these types of things that are gonna make you go like, okay, this is a little different than, like, flag.

[00:07:12] BB:

Yeah.

[00:07:12] NR:

Mavis Tires has a discount. And you're like, what. What does this have to do with me as a journalist?

[00:07:19] BB:

Yeah. No. Okay, so any more? So do you have, as you said, you have, like, a specific one? Do you want to share?

[00:07:25] NR:

Yeah. So a lot of the ones that stand out to me are the ones where it's just, you know, you look at it and—bam—within five seconds, you can get that feel of like, oh, okay, this is something for us. So I think, in addition to the subject line, just right off the bat: like, hey, Nicholas, we have so-and-so tied to this, or, hey, I want to pitch you this client. I want to pitch you to cover this event. I want to pitch you to attend this movie screening, this red carpet—just right there at the very beginning.

[00:07:51] BB:

Very clear.

[00:07:52] NR:

Yeah, just super clear. I'm a big bullet point guy. I'm a big organization guy, so I love bullet points. I - I love color coding. If you're going to highlight something in yellow and then highlight another key point in green, I'm going to be like, ooh, okay, what's going on here?

[00:08:05] BB:

Great.

[00:08:05] NR:

I love that type of stuff. I think just, like, right off the bat, just because, like I said, we're getting so many emails by the hour, by the day, that, like, just those things are going to make it stand out where you can then go and be like, okay, 1, 2, 3, bam, I'm into this, or 1, 2, 3, not for us. Let me know we're going to pass, type of a thing. I think, too, specifically, like, if we're getting pitched, say, for an interview or something, what I love is when reps will say to us, like, hey, these are all the things that they're open to talking about. And then I do love when reps will say to us, like, hey, these are all off-limits. Because obviously, you know, we've all been there as journalists, where we get into a call and we think, okay, this is happening, let's bring this up, and then their rep shoots it down. They're like, oh, no, we're not going to talk about that. And then you're just kind of sitting there like, okay, like, where do we go from here? Like, it creates that awkwardness. So I think, you know, if right from the bat you're getting all this information, it's, right, better prepare. And, yeah, there's none of those awkward moments.

[00:09:07] BB:

Now what do you do with your traffic controlling, as we're saying with. You're like, okay, I have the writer just. Did you just, like, forward it along? Do you put it in slack? Like, how. What's your mechanism for, like, yes, I want it, but I'm not writing it. Like, you know.

[00:09:19] NR:

Yeah. So a lot of times what we do with *People* is, say, we get a pitch and somebody's coming to me and they're saying, like, hey, I have, you know, Miley Cyrus is going to promote Sonic or something. And so what I would do is I would say, okay, let me check in with the *People* team. And what I do is I go, so it's a partnership with Sonic, so that falls under our food vertical. So I

make sure all our food team is looped in on that. Now, Miley Cyrus is a musician. I make sure that our music team is looped in on that. Miley Cyrus is also very stylish. There could be a style angle in there for us. So I'll make sure our style team—just making sure that all the applicable people are getting looped into it. And then what I do is I go to them and say, hey, guys, we have this interview opportunity with Miley Cyrus tied to a Sonic partnership. Any interest? Do we want to take this on? Then all the different verticals will chime in. Music might be like, nah, we just got her in an event. No needs from us. But then the food team might be like, oh, my God, this is so exciting and so fun. She's never partnered with Sonic. Like, we should totally do it. And what I'll tell a lot of, like, reps who I speak with, too, is like, you know, just because one team's shooting it down doesn't mean that every single other team is going to. You know, one team might not have interest, but then another team might be like, we've been trying to get them for weeks. Like, yes, let's go forward with it. So then we kind of-we move from there. And if it's not one that I'm going to take on, what I'll sometimes say to the team is, like, say there's somebody on the food team—like, hey, is anybody a big fan of this person? They want to do it? 'Cause we always kind of, like, you know, when you get to talk to these people that you love, why not make it happen? You know what I mean?

[00:10:50] BB:

So that's cool. Where you can then vet it out and go, like, wait a second, who's like, a super fan, right? Where they would just be like, this would just delight me.

[00:10:58] NR:

Yeah. And we'll give it to them. We even have—we have a Slack room where we'll offer things up and we'll say, hey, like, does anybody have interest in doing this? And then there are those moments where you have, like, five people—like *The Hunger Games*. They're all jumping in. I want to do it. I want to do it. And you're like, well, this person got it first, even though it was like a split second. So we're going to give it to them. And then people are happy to be like, if you need backup, I'm happy to be backup for you. So it's very much a team collaboration where we are going and making sure, okay, is everybody getting eyes on this? Is this person approving? Is this person looped into all the behind-the-scenes stuff tied to it? So it's very much a team effort with that.

[00:11:34] BB:

I—That's so fun. I haven't heard that before. And maybe that's something I want you to ask editors of, is like, oh, do you just kind of, like, let's put it out there and see who's, like, the fan or who's, like, I have been dying, you know, to go to Italy if you're in the travel and leisure sector or something like that, you know, see, see what your staff kind of wants to do. So that's very cool.

[00:11:53] NR: Yeah.

[00:11:53] BB:

Yeah. How is it, by the way? Because I usually don't have such a person working on the weekends, like the traditional weekend. Do you kind of love it because no one's around on Wednesday bugging you, or are you like, oh, I can't?

[00:12:05] NR:

Go to that party, you know. I mean, I tell everybody, I couldn't sit here and tell you I love working every single Saturday, I love working every single Sunday, because people would just look right through me and be like, Nick, we know you're not telling the truth. And it is a lot. For myself, for the other editors on my team, the other writers on our team, it is a lot to get every single one of your weekends. You're missing out on plans, family events, this and that. But what I choose to focus on more, and I think this is what makes this role so special, is that we're such a small but mighty team of people. I call us weekend warriors. You know, we're going and we're keeping the-the news. It's so... because we know the news just doesn't stop. The news doesn't take a holiday, take a day off. It could happen at 2 a.m.-that's right, 2 p.m. It could happen on Christmas Day. It could happen on a random Tuesday. It happens all the time. So what I think is, like, we've been tasked, and like, we're in these roles specifically because people at People, or people, people will recognize, like, wow, these people are dedicated, they're hard workers, they know what they're doing. We want them on this, off our shift. That is a tough shift because we know they can handle it, that they can do all this. So while, yes, it's like, oh, okay, like, you might have to say to someone, oh, I can't make it to the movies. You know, I have to work my shift at that time. There's just such this, like, excitement of being like, here I am in this role really, like, dictating the news coverage. Because like I said, we're such a small team where we're kind of able to call the shots of, like, okay, let's go all in on this, or this isn't so much a priority. And just the fact that the team really feels like we want these people in this position, it makes it all worth it. Where it's like, okay, yes, we're giving up a lot of our Saturdays and Sundays, but this is pretty weird.

[00:13:49] BB:

Yeah, yeah.

[00:13:49] NR:

And everybody is like, we know they can do it. They got that. So that kind of outweighs the negative parts of it.

[00:13:55] BB:

That's okay. Good perspective. And also, are you going to be doing that for 20 years, Nicholas? You know, probably not. Like, it's just a moment in time in your people, life, lifetime, if you will. So that's good. Okay, I like that. Great. What about sources for you? Are you looking for sources?

[00:14:14] NR:

Yeah, I would say.

[00:14:15] BB:

What types are we talking about?

[00:14:16] NR:

Yeah, I mean, we're definitely always looking for sourcing, whether it's something tied to a specific person, whether it is tied to perhaps an event. We have sources we work with who might be in the know about certain people's lives, and they can give us a little bit of insight. Okay, is that person maybe going through a divorce? Is there something that we need to be on the alert for? There may also be sources where it's like, hey, I'm going to be covering the MTV VMAs or something, and they might be able to say to us, hey, there's a whole big surprise performance, and give us a little insight.

[00:14:47] BB:

Oh, okay, then on our end, do you like scoops? You like people with scoops?

[00:14:50] NR:

Yes, yes, definitely. Because you know what? At the end of the day. It helps us where it's like, then we can pre plan. Right. So rather than in the moment where it's like you're watching the show and then bam, Beyonce does a surprise performance and everybody's scrambling.

[00:15:03] BB:

Yeah.

[00:15:04] NR:

Like, beyond the beehive.

[00:15:05] BB:

Must be so fun when you're like, yeah, I knew that was coming out. Like, boom. Publish a published article within a minute.

[00:15:12] NR:

And they're like, wow. Like, they're fast. And we're just like, hair flip. Yep, we know.

[00:15:18] BB:

Yes, Nicholas. Oh, that must be that. That has to be like, so fun.

[00:15:21] NR:

Yeah.

[00:15:22] BB:

Oh, I really like that. Okay.

[00:15:23] NR:

And it's great because then at the end of the day, you know, you're for the first job, you're generating all that traffic, you're getting all those clicks. So it's a win. Win for everybody.

[00:15:30] BB:

Everybody. Is that the aspiration to, like, you want to be the first to have or like, you want the only out, you want to break the thing? I mean, we're the first with that story, with that scoop, etc.

[00:15:44] NR:

Yeah, a lot of times it's very exciting, and it is something that we do strive for. But at the same time, you know, as we all know, as journalists and all that type of stuff, you have to make sure you're accurate. So there might be something that's breaking, but you can't easily verify it right away. So you have to make sure that you're getting it. And I think especially with *People*, *People* is just known as, if it's in *People*, it's true, it's legit. They backed it up. They do their research, their fact-checking, all of that. So I think it is a big thing. And obviously, you know, being able to have an exclusive where, let's say it's, you know, a wedding, for example—let's say we get somebody's wedding—and then, you know, oh, that must be exciting. Yeah, we get the exclusive. And then to be able to go and see, oh, okay, this publication is citing *People*. This outlet is saying, according to *People*. It's very exciting. So it's a bit of a mix where it's like, yes, like, you—you want to be first. You want to be the one everybody's clicking to and just making sure at the same time that everything is accurate and that all the information you have is right there and it makes sense.

[00:16:47] BB:

Super. What else, Nick? What else is helpful for you to know as a publicist? Oh, actually, do you want to make relationships with publicists? Like, do you want to see these people?

[00:16:57] NR:

I think—so I think it's nice. There are a lot of publicists who we are Instagram friends with, and—even when it's moments where it's not like, hey, I have this pitch I'm coming and I'm going to send to you—there might be a moment where they post their adorable dog. And I'm sitting there going, oh my God, look at this little cutie patootie. And I think it makes it more exciting because I think, in a way, when you're building these relationships with these reps, they might say, like, hey, I'm coming to you with this pitch first. And then that's exciting in its own way. And then there may even be moments where it's like they might come to me and say, hey, you know, we're thinking about maybe working with this one person. We're also thinking about working with this person. What's your insight into it? What do you think? And because you have that relationship with them, you can feel like, okay, I'm comfortable letting them know, you know, to be honest, I think this person might be a little bit more exciting for you guys.

[00:17:47] BB:

There you go. Is there anything coming up, Nicholas, within the realm of People magazine that we should know about, that we should be looking forward to?

[00:17:56] NR:

I mean, so much. People is the strongest it's ever been. We recently launched our People app, which we were just beyond excited about. Yes!

[00:18:06] BB:

There wasn't an app beforehand. Really? No, I've been behind.

[00:18:10] NR:

Yeah, it's been long in development.

[00:18:11] BB:

Okay.

[00:18:43] NR:

It came out recently, and I believe it is available on Android now. So we had it available to our iPhone users, and now our Android brands can come and join us. And it's just the most amazing app. You're going in and you're getting your news in such a fun, futuristic type of vibe, where you're going and you're watching videos, you're scrolling out, kind of like on TikTok in a way, and you're going in, you're swiping through the slides, you're reading all the news. There's an interactive element to it. There's, you know, these bold colors and these exciting visuals. It's so fun. So we have that, and then all our big things—we just had one of our issues where we dig deep into, you know, all the reasons we love our country, all the exciting things going on. We'll have our staple, you know, Sexiest Man Alive, at the end of the year, and that's always so fun..

[00:19:01] BB:

I would imagine that's. Yes. So favored. Everyone loves that. Then you have award season, of course, but that's a ways away. But yes. How exciting.

[00:19:21] NR:

Yeah, just so, I mean, there's always so much going on. Like I said, we're covering everything. So even in a moment where it's like, okay, it's technically not an award season right now, but there's so many reality shows going on that.

[00:19:21] BB:

Oh, God, yes.

[00:19:22] NR:

Yeah. So there's always so much exciting stuff. And like I said, I think People is the absolute strongest it's ever been. We have such a brilliant, brilliant team who is leading us, leading us into the future, who is teaching us and guiding us. And I just, I mean, it's crazy to me to.

[00:19:42] BB:

What an endorsement. I love it.

[00:19:44] NR:

Right? And it's crazy to me because, like, I think back to like being in middle school, sitting there with my People magazine and reading it and just being so amazed and so wowed by it. And

now to be here and see the behind the scenes process of how it's all done and to know the hard work, the love and the dedication that is put into every single digital article, every single page in the magazine, every type of thing in the app, Social team, you know, or Instagram, how we run that, our TikTok, our Twitter, like, just to see all of it and just like to, to be feel a part of the people family. It's. There's nothing like it.

[00:20:20] BB:

That is freaking great. Okay, but my question—the middle school you—what did you think back then? That is totally not true? Now that you're in the machine and you're the adult and you're running the things.

[00:20:36] NR:

Back then I probably thought, you know, you watch movies like, like the Devil Wears Prada.

[00:20:42] BB:

Exactly. You think it's. That you're walking.

[00:20:45] NR:

Yes. And you're-it's just absolute chaos, and it's, you know, people shouting at each other and people being mean, and just like you're getting home at the end of the day, like, what have I done? Why have I chosen this career path? And I think there was that kind of vibe, like even, like, you know, being in high school and starting to get the idea of what do I want to pursue in college, where do I want to go from here? Type of a thing. And even in college, you know, taking these classes, there was always that, like, is it going to be this cutthroat industry? And I think at People, as crazy and as chaotic as it gets—like I said before—it really comes down to being a People family where there's just so much love and so much dedication put into everything. There's so many moments where, you know, I always love when one of my team members-they get their first, like, People cover. Even if it's something where we're doing-we do digital covers as well now, in addition to the actual magazines that you hold in your hand. And that, to me, is just always so exciting because you get to see someone and just have the team rally together to be like, oh, you know, baby's first cover. They got their first cover, their first digital cover. And I think what's always surprised me is like, yes, it's crazy how the news cycle is because, like we said, there's no days off, news breaks at all times of the day. But just seeing how much heart is behind it, and there isn't that whole idea of like, oh, my God, I gotta make this deadline or this person's gonna literally fire me and I'm done. Like, there's just so much love. And I think that's been the biggest difference from what I imagined it was gonna be. There's no evil Meryl Streeps around us. We just have love and amazing, brilliant mentors.

[00:22:21] BB:

This is like, so heartwarming, Nicholas, of just like the, the people at People magazine love People. How about that?

[00:22:27] NR: All the theme just.

[00:22:29] BB:

I love it. Oh, well, Nicholas, I have loved this so much. Oh, we do have this little, like, short, quick fire question set. So let me, let me just toss it out to you and you tell me what you think. If that sounds good, let's go. Okay, here we go. But wait, wait. Let me find my spot. Okay. Yes. Video or phone interview?

[00:22:46] NR:

Video.

[00:22:48] BB:

Same. Same. Bullet points or paragraphs in a pitch?

[00:22:52] NR:

Bullet points.

[00:22:53] BB: Okay. Short or long pitches?

[00:22:57] NR: Short and to the point.

[00:22:59] BB: Okay. Yep. Who wants a long pitch? Yes. Images attached or a Dropbox zip file?

[00:23:07] NR: Images attached.

[00:23:09] BB:

Yes. Same. I don't want to be clicking on the next thing. Okay. What about DMs of any sort or is everything, should it be in your email?

[00:23:18] NR:

Yeah, I do feel strong. I think email is the best spot. I do think there are those exceptions like, say something is like extremely inaccurate or something they're trying to get you as fast as they can. Yes, but it's just so much easier. We're always looking at our emails. We're always reading every single email. So we're not going to miss anything.

[00:23:37] BB:

I see. One follow up or multiple?

[00:23:41] NR: I would say two at most. [00:23:45] BB: Two and done. Okay. Yes. Press release or media kit?

[00:23:45] NR:

Both.

[00:23:45] BB:

Okay. Both are good. Both work. Okay. And then is there a time you usually read pitches or is it just all the time?

[00:24:00] NR:

It's all the time. We don't.

[00:24:01] BB:

Saturday, Sundays, edited. Yeah, exactly. Yes. Very good. Oh, Nick, thank you for being on. Nicholas Rice—he is the senior—wait, let me make sure I get it right—senior editor, of course, at *People* magazine. Used to be an intern and dreamed about having a job at *People* magazine when he was in middle school. Nick, I love this. I don't think this is truly the first—the first in all the episodes we've done, probably like 200-plus at this point—of someone who's like, I read the outlet that I am now at, that I dreamed about.

[00:24:35] NR:

Yeah, that's. It's still. I'm quite here this morning. I have to pinch myself still.

[00:24:40] BB: I love it. Oh, what a great story, Nicholas. Thanks for being on.

[00:24:44] NR:

Thank you. Appreciate you so much for having me Beck.

[00:24:47] BB:

Delightful. See you.

[00:24:50] 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.