

EPISODE 57

[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 U.S.-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.

Today, Alejandro de la Garza, a reporter for *TIME Magazine* joins us on the podcast. Alejandro joined TIME in 2018 and he writes on science and tech, most recently surrounding the technological implementation of various tools and strategies to combat COVID-19. During the episode, Alejandro explains more about his unique title and how it relates to the magazine, why he appreciates follow-ups, what topics he's sick of being pitched, and more. Let's hear more from Alejandro on the show today.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:01:07] BB: Welcome, everybody. This is Coffee with a Journalist. I'm Beck Bamberger, founder of OnePitch and also BAM, an agency that works with all these crazy startups in the technology industry. Today we have a reporter from *TIME magazine*, Alejandro de la Garza is here. So excited. Straight from – well, I was going to say straight from Princeton, but not actually, because that was a few years ago. But, Alejandro, welcome.

[00:01:34] ADLG: Thanks for having me.

[00:01:36] BB: Yeah. Right now you are a reporter researcher at *TIME Magazine*, correct?

[00:01:41] ADLG: Yep, that's right.

[00:01:42] BB: Tell us a little bit about that, because normally we see reporter, but a reporter researcher pertains to what?

[00:01:50] ADLG: Researcher tends to connote more, like, editorial work on the magazine, as far as I understand it, frankly. I mean, it's not always entirely clear. But, generally, it means that I was hired initially to do fact checking and reporting. And then as you sort of move up in the magazine. The fact checking starts to go down and the reporting starts to go up. So you become less researcher, more reporter.

[00:02:13] BB: More reporter. Cool. By the way, are you drinking any coffee? We just talked about – you're in Brooklyn right now and it's cold.

[00:02:19] ADLG: I just finished my mid-afternoon cup of coffee. So I've got some dregs here.

[00:02:24] BB: Okay. Excellent. How many coffees do you drink a day typically?

[00:02:28] ADLG: It depends on the size of the cup. I think we're going three small cups and then two big cups.

[00:02:33] BB: Okay. A multi-coffee person. Excellent.

[00:02:36] ADLG: I'm a one latte a day and then no more. No more. Or I'd be off the walls.

[00:02:41] ADLG: See? That's smart, but I always regret it at night.

[00:02:47] BB: Okay. Now that we got that out of the way because it is a 50-50 shot on the show if someone actually is drinking coffee. I think I've had like twice where both of us are drinking coffee. So that's quite the moment. But your inbox, how crazy is it in there with pitches?

[00:03:05] ADLG: Very. As I imagine most of the people you hear from are. I'm clicking into it right now. Yeah. It looks like about, I'm going to say 50 from today.

[00:03:13] BB: 50 pitches just from today. That's a lot. And do you do some kind of filing of these? Are you one of those master leaders? Are you – save it? Or do you have some filing system?

[00:03:23] ADLG: Oh. I hope I'm not going to offend any of your listeners, but I think I'm probably a master leader.

[00:03:29] BB: Oh, you're in that camp. Okay.

[00:03:31] ADLG: Yeah. I'm kind of a 5 pm call the inbox kind of guy.

[00:03:35] BB: Wow! Do you get to zero?

[00:03:37] ADLG: Generally I like to. Yeah.

[00:03:39] BB: Okay, religiously every day?

[00:03:41] ADLG: Well, I didn't used to. So actually my inbox has 8455 unread emails, but most of those are like multiple years old and I'm not a very organized person, unfortunately.

[00:03:53] BB: Okay. Okay. Gotcha. That's pretty good though, eight thousand something. But unread, a little stressful.

[00:03:59] ADLG: Well, yeah. I mean, those are all the old ones. So in the past like, two – I don't know, like a year or so. They're pretty cold. But I just haven't filed away the other ones.

[00:04:08] BB: Gotcha. So is there any chance then of a publicist pitch getting rent given you're a master leader?

[00:04:16] ADLG: Oh, yeah. Definitely.

[00:04:17] BB: How does one get that?

[00:04:19] ADLG: I think it's a lot of circumstance. It wasn't a pitch exactly, but someone reached out to me over the weekend offering expert services – or basically to talk about connectedness during the pandemic. And it just happens that I was working on, like, putting on the very finishing touches on a piece that was about a niche social network. Which was actually sparked by a different pitch that I got in my inbox. And then it was like, “Oh,” I totally forgot that, like, I didn't mention any other of these niche social networks there. So that was kind of happenstance. But it depends on subject matter a lot.

I mean, a lot of these that I get are perfect E-bike Awaits, Wreaths Across America. I mean, I think I get a lot that is really, really doesn't pertain to my work at all. So I used to read through them more, and lately it becomes so overwhelming that I'm deleting based on headlines, unless there's really something that actually seems like it could spark an article.

[00:05:16] BB: It grabs you. Got you. So speaking of that, in terms of articles and the ones that you do, and you kind of have a multitude of angels you do, which is everything from vaccines and contact tracing, a battle against misinformation. You have tech and you have all these other things that you do. And looking through your articles, there's quite a lot, which is great. How do you get inspired to do a story?

[00:05:42] ADLG: That is a great question, and I wish I knew. And actually, it's getting a little bit more complicated, because up until around this week or next week, I was more on sort of tech. And sort of my beat was artificial intelligence generally, but that's a pretty difficult beat to cover as we found through the course of the past eight months. Because artificial intelligence is kind of everything and also nothing at this point. Because every single other beat, whether it's politics, whether it's commerce, economics, like, takes a bite out of that. So we were finding that it was difficult to find niche areas where you're not stepping on other people's toes

within that beat. So I've actually been moved over. I'm going to start writing articles on green tech starting this week.

[00:06:27] BB: Oh! This is like a breaking piece of news. Fantastic!

[00:06:32] ADLG: Yeah, let everyone know.

[00:06:33] BB: You heard it here first, people.

[00:06:34] ADLG: Alejandro de la Garza, green tech reporter, new and improved.

[00:06:38] BB: Green tech. Okay. Oh! Okay. So just then to answer that question, there's no systematic way. You're not like, "Oh, I go on a walk or I use my shower time to kind of think randomly about stories." Or, "Oh, I get all my stories from my inbox," or "I just do what my editor tells me." It just is, it's seemingly organic, it sounds like.

[00:06:58] ADLG: I think every single one of those things has happened at different points to spark an idea. One of my favorite articles that I did for the past few months was on those contact tracing apps. I think that was like, I had a meeting with my editor – I mean, hopefully he doesn't listen to this, or he might – but I had a meeting with my editor and it was coming up in like five minutes and I didn't have an idea and I was like, "Uh, uh, uh." And then just told him, like, "Let's do contact tracing apps." But it was a super deep rich subject and one that I think was difficult enough to report and complicated enough that there hadn't been like that much done on it previously, but a lot there. So that was a really great article to report out.

[BREAK]

[00:07:38] 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 journalist to pitch your news to. Sign up for your free account today. Now, back to today's episode.

[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

[00:08:01] BB: I got a little section of the interview here, which is about filling in the blank. So just fill in the blanks. My favorite publicist always –

[00:08:11] ADLG: Has read my articles before.

[00:08:13] BB: The most annoying publicist always –

[00:08:16] ADLG: Insistently follow up on pitches that are clearly nowhere close to my beat.

[00:08:22] BB: Yes. You'll get a response from me if –

[00:08:26] ADLG: You're lucky.

[00:08:27] BB: Yeah. Yeah, if you're lucky. You will never get a response from me if –

[00:08:31] ADLG: I keep getting these sex toy PR pitches very insistently, like three a week they'll just be like, “New from blah-blah-blah.”

[00:08:40] BB: Three a week?

[00:08:40] ADLG: Yeah.

[00:08:41] BB: How huge can that market be?

[00:08:42] ADLG: I don't know what journalists are like covering that beat, but maybe someone's covering it or someone's made a publicist –

[00:08:51] BB: You'll never get a response to me if it's a sex toy pitch.

[00:08:56] ADLG: No, absolutely not.

[00:08:59] BB: It's also *TIME Magazine*. I mean, what are people thinking?

[00:09:02] ADLG: Yeah, it's not – I don't think that's our reputation at all. I mean, maybe it's – I guess it depends what you're into.

[00:09:09] BB: They got you confused with Cosmo. Okay. You can follow up with me if –

[00:09:14] ADLG: If I respond, I would say. I respond because it sparks my interest and then it kind of gets buried under other stuff. So, I mean, always appreciate if people reach back out.

[00:09:24] BB: It would be a huge help if –

[00:09:26] ADLG: You are concise.

[00:09:27] BB: Perfect. My perfect Sunday is –

[00:09:30] ADLG: Email free.

[00:09:32] BB: Oh, yes. The nicest thing I ever heard about my work was –

[00:09:36] ADLG: I actually don't know how to answer that one. Being buttered up does nothing for me. It moves my emotional state zero. So I don't need to be complimented on my work.

[00:09:45] BB: Okay. Okay. The last best thing I ate was –

[00:09:50] ADLG: I had a handful of blueberries, and it was wonderful.

[00:09:53] BB: Oh. Were they real, like, real blueberries? Not like ones that have been in a can or something?

[00:09:58] ADLG: Yeah. No. It was a very exciting development. Yeah. Real blueberries.

[00:10:03] BB: Quarantine taught me –

[00:10:05] ADLG: Nothing good.

[00:10:08] BB: We can keep it at that. My favorite stories to write are –

[00:10:12] ADLG: Stories with human characters and relevance to issues that affect real people.

[00:10:18] BB: One thing I think people should know about me is –

[00:10:21] ADLG: I'm always interested in stories that pertain to deeper issues in society. Basically I'm interested in writing about tech insofar as it relates to the more difficult, like, intractable things that we're dealing with. So that's always going to be my primary motivation and that's going to be the thing that is like moving me to be doing this job at all and it's also going to move me to like want to write any other story that I'm writing. So whether I achieve that or not is an open question, but that's what I'm driving towards.

[00:10:52] BB: Now we have an audience ask. So Alice Good, she's over at Clearlink, had the following question for you. We got these off of Twitter because we tell people we're going to be talking to you and they get all excited. And her question is, "What topics are you sick of being pitched?" Besides sex toys.

[00:11:10] ADLG: I'm really tired of being pitched gadget reviews, like gadget themed things. Where it's like, "This article is, look at a gadget." And I mean, like that's service journalism and it's like important and we do do it and my colleague does it. But, I mean, if you looked through my byline, I've never written about a gadget. So I would say you should know which tech journalists are your gadget journalists and which ones never write about gadgets.

[00:11:36] BB: Yeah. And all the gadgets, as we obviously heard. So okay, people, be known. No gadgets. What's one thing you wish you wrote? In other words you're like, "Damn! That person got that story." Or, "Oh, I wish I cracked that."

[00:11:54] ADLG: This was a reach and I think it took, like, I don't know, three or four writers. But the big Palantir cover story in Bloomberg in like 2018 or 2019, that was much a good story, and I read that. So amazing. That was like a big jealousy moment. And then it was like – well, after that, it was like they had like the big Palantir story had already been written. So it's like what are you going to say about Palantir after that?

[00:12:23] BB: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Ugh! So this is a newer question that we just added. So I'm curious to see if – how strong the journalist jealousy is, the JJ. We're going to call it JJ, journalist jealousy. What about pitches that have stood out to you where you're like, "Oh God! I'll never forget that pitch. That was just so dead on." If there are any, by the way, I should say.

[00:12:52] ADLG: There was one that came in a few weeks ago, which I wrote about – or I'm working on writing about, which was about a niche social network. And I can try to find it in my inbox. But I guess I think it's like just about timing. Like, it was something that I had been thinking about anyway and, like, loneliness in the pandemic and I think it happened that people weren't quite prepared for how much this January was going to suck. And so that pitch came in and sort of resonated with some things that I've been thinking about on a more personal level. And then also topics that I was interested in writing about. But I don't know that it was anything that the person said in particular except for the fact that it was very brief, it was to the point, and it communicated really clearly what they had and what the story was. And it

happened to work. So it was a great pitch for that reason. It was luck in combination with like being brief enough that I actually looked at it. That was I guess why it ended up sparking an article.

[00:13:53] BB: So timing had a lot to do with it you'd say.

[00:13:55] ADLG: Oh, yeah, definitely. I mean, I think that probably knowing when – I mean, I don't know your business, but I would imagine that it's a big consideration knowing, like, when to pitch a client and when is like the exact right moment.

[00:14:11] BB: For sure. Timing is a lot to do with success and opportunity and all those things that just have to magically line up including pitches.

[00:14:21] ADLG: Yeah. I imagine it's a lot of jet lag.

[00:14:23] BB: Yeah, it is. But that's part of the fun of it and the luck of it. True. Are you reading anything you love right now or we will also take listening, podcasts, books, Netflix? What you got?

[00:14:35] ADLG: I just finished *Paradoxes of Power* by Stephen Kotkin.

[00:14:37] BB: Oh, yeah. How was that?

[00:14:41] ADLG: It was brutal.

[00:14:43] BB: Wow! Okay. Wait, wait. So this is the power of paradox. How we gain and lose influence?

[00:14:47] ADLG: This is the biography of Stalin, the first volume. I've gotten into this thing where I think I just download really, really, really long brutal biographies and then listen to them while I run on Audible.

[00:15:01] BB: Me too. I do Audible listening too, and I love memoirs and biographies, for sure. I've got to add this one. So the author offers a biography that, at long last, is equal to the shrewd sociopathic charismatic dictator in all his dimensions. Ooh! Would you recommend it?

[00:15:19] ADLG: Oh, absolutely. I recommend looking to it I. don't know if I could have read – I could have sat down and read this book.

[00:15:24] BB: It's 976 pages.

[00:15:27] ADLG: Yeah. The last brutal audible book was *The Power Broker*. And so I was looking for something sort of comparable to that because, I don't know, there's something so inspiring. Obviously not the characters who it's about. I mean, the researchers, the historian-journalist, biographers who were writing about these people. When you have a thousand pages of just unbelievably detailed narrative washing over you.

[00:15:49] BB: Oh my God! The volume one is 38 hours and 47 minutes. That's volume 1. Volume 2, I'm looking at Audible, is 49 hours. Oh my God!

[00:16:05] ADLG: No. I needed a break from it. I'm not starting volume 2 anytime soon.

[00:16:08] BB: Wow! Oh, man. Okay. And then what was the other one, *The Power*?

[00:16:16] ADLG: Oh, the previous one was *The Power Broker* by Robert Caro. So that was the other brutal biography. But, like, I think that in terms of my work, in terms of the kinds of things that I'm thinking about trying to achieve and trying to get for our readers, I mean, there's the normal level of effort. And then there's the Robert Caro's, Stephen Kotkin level of just absolutely, I mean, insane amount of effort that they put towards research on these topics. And so, like, being able to emulate like one iota of what they've managed to achieve and just like thinking about what's possible, it's really incredible.

[00:16:57] BB: This one is also a 66-hour, nine minute read. But listen to this overview, “Everywhere acknowledged as a modern American classic. Winner of the Pulitzer Prize and chosen by the Modern Library as one of the hundred greatest books of the 20th century.” That's what it said about *The Power Broker*. This is why I love this segment because I get all my best recommendations from everybody I interview. That is great. Good recommendations.

[00:17:22] ADLG: Thank you. You're welcome. Read *The Power Broker*.

[00:17:25] BB: Wait a second. Guess what? It has 2943 five-star reviews. Holy cow! That is amazing.

[00:17:34] ADLG: Yeah, it's an unbelievable book. I mean, it will change the way you think about the country. It will change the way you think about New York. It'll change the way you think about cities.

[00:17:44] ADLG: Ugh! I can't wait. I cannot wait. Oh! This is exciting. Okay. It's on my list. Let's now talk about what you think the future of journalism looks like. Are you positively skewed? Negatively skewed? What'd you say?

[00:18:01] ADLG: I would say cautiously optimistic about the future of journalism. I mean, I'm no expert on the future of journalism and I have no idea what's going on in the business side. But I think that there's investment that's been happening in the course of the past few years and that you're seeing smaller players or medium-sized players who are starting to figure out the new digital-first world and how to be profitable in that a little better than they were five or six years ago. But, I mean, the pandemic hasn't been hasn't been good for a lot of people, I guess, unless you're like *The New York Times*. I mean, obviously not good for them on a personal level, but they got a lot of subscribers. But I think people are coming around to the idea that, like, reporting isn't free and reporting on the internet isn't free. And I think that people are finding ways to navigate their different niches.

[00:18:54] BB: We will see how it goes. I was going to say you're kind of a newer entry into journalism. So sometimes the answers depend if it's someone who's been in the business like 27 years versus five, or whatever it is. So we shall see.

Okay, to wrap us up for today, Alejandro, we're going to play the mad libs portion. So I'm going to give you a word and you let me know whatever you want to say it is and then I'm going to read you back the whole mad libs. Are you ready?

[00:19:26] ADLG: Yep.

[00:19:26] BB: Okay. First thing, what's an emotion?

[00:19:29] ADLG: Troubled.

[00:19:30] BB: An adjective.

[00:19:31] ADLG: Colorful.

[00:19:32] BB: Colorful. Okay. And another adjective.

[00:19:35] ADLG: Difficult.

[00:19:37] BB: Difficult. Okay. Okay. What about a greeting?

[00:19:41] ADLG: Howdy.

[00:19:41] BB: And a verb.

[00:19:43] ADLG: Bake.

[00:19:44] BB: All right. A noun.

[00:19:46] **ADLG:** Jar.

[00:19:46] **BB:** And then an adjective.

[00:19:48] **ADLG:** Sunny.

[00:19:50] **BB:** Sunny, yes. A cringe-worthy PR term.

[00:19:55] **ADLG:** Oh my God! Revolution.

[00:19:56] **BB:** Oh God. Part of a pitch.

[00:19:59] **ADLG:** Can I look at a pitch?

[00:20:01] **ADLG:** Yeah, look at one real quick.

[00:20:03] **ADLG:** Getting intimate when you feel the least attractive.

[00:20:07] **BB:** What?

[00:20:09] **ADLG:** Sorry to put someone on blast like that, but –

[00:20:12] **BB:** Okay. I'm writing that one now. Ah, okay. Length of time.

[00:20:16] **ADLG:** A decade.

[00:20:18] **BB:** The name of a real person.

[00:20:20] **ADLG:** Let's do Robert Moses.

[00:20:22] **BB:** Robert Moses. Yes, the author. Okay. And then lastly, an emotion. Any emotion.

[00:20:28] **ADLG:** Inspired.

[00:20:30] **BB:** Inspired. Great. Okay. Here's your mad libs, Alejandro. Here we go.

[00:20:33] **ADLG:** I'm very excited.

[00:20:35] **BB:** When I think of the future journalism, I feel troubled. The pitches I receive have gone from colorful to difficult. If I receive a pitch that starts with Howdy, Alejandro, I bake. When I write stories on jars, I get sunny. My favorite pitches include revolutions and are very specific, 'Getting Intimate When You Feel Less Attractive in Their Kitchen.' I normally take around a decade to respond to my email, but if it's Robert Moses, I will respond immediately. If you do not get a response back for me, you should know that I am very inspired for you.

[00:21:12] **ADLG:** I love it. That's great.

[00:21:13] **BB:** I love it too.

[00:21:13] **ADLG:** I think the decade is spot. That's about how long my response time is.

[00:21:19] **BB:** I love it. That was a good one. Fairly accurate.

[00:21:24] **ADLG:** Yup, that was great.

[00:21:25] **BB:** Well, Alejandro, thank you for being on today. So appreciate it. Congrats on the new beat. I'm sure you're going to get a new wave of all these new pitches coming into you real hot, and you heard it here first, people. You heard it here first, hopefully.

[00:21:39] **ADLG:** Thanks so much for having me.

[00:21:40] BB: Yes, Alejandro. Enjoy the sunny Brooklyn day that's over there. Thanks, Alejandro. Appreciate it.

[00:21:46] ADLG: Thank you.

[OUTRO]

[00:21:47] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist, featuring Alejandro de la Garza from *TIME Magazine*. If you enjoy listening to our show, make sure to subscribe on iTunes, Spotify, Google podcasts, and anywhere else you listen to podcasts. And if you have a moment, please leave us a review to share your thoughts about the show and today's guest. To learn more about the latest tools on OnePitch and to subscribe to our weekly podcast newsletter, head to our website at onepitch.co. We'll see you all next week with a brand new guest and even more insights about the journalists you want to learn more about. Until then, start great stories.

[END]