

Carol Tice:

We're on. Can everybody hear Linda as well as me? Awesome.

Linda Formichelli:

Yes.

Carol Tice:

All right.

Linda Formichelli:

Can you hear us in the Netherlands, Germany, Asia, Washington?

Carol Tice:

California?

Linda Formichelli:

The island I live on? Woodburn, Oregon? Canada?

Carol Tice:

We were just tripping out on where everyone is from. Indiana, Alabama.

Linda Formichelli:

I see New York. Wisconsin, Iowa, Colorado, Wyoming, San Diego, Philippines, wow. Memphis, more Philippines. Houston. UK, Virginia, wow. Hey, North Carolina. Oh, I know you, Frank. I know Frank.

Carol Tice:

Chicago, Boston, Virginia. We're always totally blown away by the really international and global group that we get in Pitch Clinic. Seems like we're a real resource for people living in foreign countries, and small towns, and everywhere who are looking to earn more from their writing.

Anyway, let's get started and kick this off, because we have so much to do. I am Carol Tice, and welcome to our first session of Pitch Clinic, which is Lets Make Your Query Not Suck, as you can see hopefully from our wonderful slide. I am here with my wonderful longtime co-teaching partner, Linda Formichelli.

Linda Formichelli:

Hello.

Carol Tice:

And we love doing this. This is one of our favorite trainings. It is a fun fascinating session where our Pitch Clinic students hit us with their best story ideas, and we also invite those who are interested in taking Pitch Clinic to join us and listen in. We have a

few slides for you, for the first time. This was always just a podcast, and we just went, “You know, it needs to be a presentation,” and so now it is. Hi, Ayelet from Israel.

And we have a few slides and a few quick tips, and then we will get to your story ideas, and we’ll make the Chat box much bigger. But for now we’ll leave the slides bigger so you can read them. To give you a sense of where we are at today and what’s going on, here is sort of the outline of Pitch Clinic. And we are here at Lets Make Your Story Idea Not Suck. Coming up Friday we’ll release the next module, which is Anatomy of a Killer Query Letter.

And then it will be Writing a Kick-Butt Letter of Introduction or LOI as you’ll hear us say. Then we give students a couple weeks where it’s just writing, writing, writing. You’re writing, and submitting the whole time. But when you get to those two weeks there’s no new trainings, and you’ll just be writing, writing, writing.

And then when we’ve done five weeks of all that we do our four-week pitch challenge where everyone who has done all the class work is invited to try to pitch eight different query letters in the month following class. And everyone who does all that work to our editors’ satisfaction gets your class fee refunded. So if you didn’t know about our...

Linda Formichelli:

Insane.

Carol Tice:

...refund offer, that’s how it works. And if you are someone who has not yet registered, we added another editor so that we could have more space, because we sold out amazingly early, way earlier than we ever have before. And so we added a little bit more space, but not a lot. Seats are really filling up for this class. So if you want to join, there is a link. And actually, I can pop it in the chat also so that it’ll be clickable, not like it is on a slide.

Linda:

Yes. And also, Karen wants to know when the four-week pitch challenge starts and ends, and I can’t remember the exact dates. Do you happen to have that at hand?

Carol Tice:

No, but it’s functionally the month of November, is basically what it goes down. And we give you I think a day or two after Thanksgiving weekend, because you know what that’s like. So just to give you a little background, we created this course because of a big problem in freelance writing. And in fact, it really might be the biggest problem in freelance writing.

What happens is this. You write a query letter or a letter of introduction to a publication or a business that you want to write copy for, and then nothing happens. They never reply. That’s a common thing if they aren’t interested, editors are busy. You don’t hear

back, and that means you have no way to improve. You don't know what you're doing wrong. You don't know how to do it better.

And with Pitch Clinic you get me and Linda with a combined 35 years of pitching publications successfully, and this time our biggest and most diverse, most awesome editor staff ever in Pitch Clinic. We just have to brag on that. Peter Carbonara from Forbes, Zach Petit, formerly of Writer's Digest, and now with the design magazine Print, Sarah Smith from Redbook.

And this time, to help out particularly with letters of introduction to businesses, we have Mark "Monkey" Watson from WONGDOODY, an award-winning Seattle ad agency. They won Agency of the Year recently. So hot stuff. Linda.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. So awesome. We have reviewed hundreds and hundreds of pitches in Carol's Freelance Writers Den community with our own mentoring clients and in our other classes, and over time we realized that most of them had the same basic mistakes. So to get you started with your idea generation we want to tell you what are the five biggest, most common mistakes that we see with article ideas.

Carol has the first mistake.

Carol Tice:

Really take a listen to these, because they're going to save you a lot of time when we start critiquing. Because this is going to cover a lot of what you're going to see in the story ideas, which we also received just a record number of story ideas submitted for this call. And that's why we do it again for our Pitch Clinic students on Thursday, because we know we can't ever do it all here. Anyway.

Tip number one is that your topic is too broad. Like this enormous pumpkin, it is so general and broad-spectrum that it is never going to fit into a 750-word, 1,500-word type of article. It's just not going to happen. And one tip Linda has is, if you look on Amazon and if there's entire books dedicated to your idea, that's a sure sign that your idea is too broad.

You're going to need to pull out sort of a smaller section. So you'll see we have a lot of pitches that are like, "I want to write about thought leadership," or "I want to write about health care." Why is that pumpkin so big? Because it's too big. Anyway, Linda has the next one.

Linda Formichelli:

Yes. Mistake number two is the opposite of that. It's that your idea is too small, so we do not have a big pumpkin any more. Basically, your idea is one tip or one piece of information. For example, you want to do a health article where every malady is corrected by taking magnesium supplements. So your one big tip in this article is, take

magnesium. Or you've narrowed down your audience so much that your idea wouldn't resonate with the magazine's readership.

For example, you want to write about a business problem that happens only to Hispanic female entrepreneurs over the age of 50 who live in the Midwest. I mean, I totally made that up, but you get the idea. You want to work on ideas that are relevant to a high percentage of your target publication's readership. So if you want to write about a disease that affects one percent of the population, that's probably not going to fly, for example. Carol?

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Right on.

So I have mistake number three, which is a big one that we see all the time. I have to say, looking through putting the script together for this, almost every story idea we got had this problem. And that's what we call, no news hook. And that means there is no compelling reason you've presented why people need to read about this idea now, at this particular time. Lots of evergreen topic pitches, how to choose a therapist for your kid, or how to manage your kid's first day of school.

We've all read these stories a million times before, so you have to find something new to say about it. There's a new study, a new book has come out, some celebrity had this happen to them and it's been all over the news, and that makes this topic fresh again. The problem if you don't have a news hook, and yes, sometimes stories will get assigned that don't have a huge news hook to them, but it's a lot harder. And that's why we really hammer on this point, is it's a lot tougher to get a no news hook story assigned.

And often what'll end up happening is, you end up in the editor's maybe pile, where they go... Yeah, we could maybe end up doing that sometime. And it goes in sort of the maybe pile, and it never comes out. Or it comes out and they say, "We're going to assign it," and then it gets pushed to the next issue, it gets pushed to the next issue, and the next issue. And if they pay on publication you're just never getting paid.

Sue Ann says, "News and/or new?" Yeah, everyone should note that the word "news" contains the word "new." That's that thing where the editor goes, "Oh, my readers totally need to hear about this right now, because this happened now in this trend," or this issue, or this idea.

So yeah, there's no new idea under the sun, as Linda said in chat, but there's got to be a new twist, a new development, a new spin, a new idea, a new research study came out, a new celebrity arrest. Something happened, so now we want to revisit it.

Linda Formichelli:

Okay. And I have mistake number four, and this is a big one, is that you didn't study the publication you want to write for. And believe me, we can tell and editors can tell, when

you do not know about the publication you're pitching. We've seen writers pitching shopping ideas to health publications, consumer ideas to trade publications. They come up with an idea with only a vague idea of the markets they want.

Like they say, "I want to pitch women's magazines," or "I'm going to send this to business magazines," and they don't have an exact idea of what publication their idea might be a fit for. For example, there are women's magazines for women with young kids, women with older kids, women over 50, women under 30, women of different ethnicities. So saying, "I want to write this for women's magazines," is pretty vague.

And these days there's just no excuse for not being able to find the exact right markets to pitch. Just about every magazine has at least some of their archives online. They have a mission statement. You can often get the publication's media kit online, which outlines the readers' demographics and upcoming topics they're going to tackle.

So a big note for this class is, when we say study the publication and identify what magazine or website your idea is for, we don't want an answer like business magazines or women's magazines.

We want to hear Inc., or Working Woman, or Redbook, an actual publication name or preferably a handful of them, that you have analyzed, and you could see they're a real fit for your idea. That means the publication is running similar types of stories to yours but they haven't run something right on your exact topic in the past couple of years, and that does take just a little bit of research. Carol?

Carol Tice:

Yeah. And that was super-common in the pitches that we got, where we got a ton of, "This'll be for women's magazines," or something. Or, "I plan to look up the magazine." You should know the publication before refining your story idea, or you're wasting your time. So you want to study publications. It's a big gap that we really push our Pitch Clinic students and get them going on, and it makes a big, big difference.

So I have tip number five. Your idea is all about you, your advice, or your friends. And we totally understand that new writers want to write about their own experiences, because it's easy, and it's not scary, and you feel like you know all about it. But the fact is, almost all good-paying nonfiction is reported. And you and your ideas are not the story. You are just the reporter, you're getting information from experts and the real people affected by the issue.

You are the writer of the story, and you are not in the story, unless it's Vanity Fair and it's all New Journalism you're writing. "I first met the countess on..." But for 99 percent of what you are doing, if you want to get paid well you want to report the story, even if it's something that happened to you. I'll give you an example. At one point, I wrote a profile of a preemie interim care center here in the Seattle area. I was interested to profile what they do, because my daughter spent her first three weeks of her life there.

But that wasn't in the story, that was just what made me interested to do the story. I was not the story. This center and its work, that is mostly unknown by everyone and uncelebrated, of detoxing babies and helping babies that have had a rough start was the story. So if I can give a big tip on sort of how to dig your way out of this trap, is just realize that if something happened to you and you're interested in the topic, that's fine, that's great. But you want to go out and report the story.

And yeah, we can talk a lot about sourcing in Pitch Clinic too, and finding sources, and trust me, you can. And yeah, I mean, the real problem is that editors view you using your own story or your friends as sources as a conflict of interest, because you have a bias. You know these people, you like them, you want to say something nice about them, or really just plain lazy reporting. That's it.

Linda?

Linda Formichelli:

Yes. And I want to mention, can you hear me?

Carol Tice:

Yeah.

Linda Formichelli:

I want to mention that Rae said she thought today was Day one, didn't know about the first assignment, can we still do the first pitch? And I want everyone to know that the first assignment for registered Pitch Clinic students is to come up with an article idea, but it doesn't have to be right now. We're going to be doing this call again on Thursday, you have a week to pitch your idea in the forum, so it does not have to be done on this call. Do not worry about it. Right, Carol?

Carol Tice:

Right on. This is the kickoff. Yeah.

Linda Formichelli:

So if we get to your idea today and you have your idea, great. You can keep working on it. But if you don't, we have all week. We have people standing by in the forum starting tonight. So anyway, that gives you some of the broad strokes of where queries go wrong. And pretty soon we're going to be looking at our students' ideas and help make them better, but first Carol has just a little bit of information for you.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. We want to get to the homework for Pitch Clinic students. And we're going to get into the questions right after that. But first, yeah, for our Pitch Clinic students, here's what's happening. As we were discussing, pitch your idea in the form of a headline. We did get many submissions that had no headline, and that makes it really hard to get your head around what the nut is of what your story is going to be about. Editors really want to see a proposed headline.

And tell us why it needs to be written now, what's your news hook. Tell us what publication it's for, as Linda covered. We want an exact publication name, not "This is for business magazines." We want you taking out publications, looking online, going to the library, doing whatever you need to do to look at your publications and see whether this idea is really something that would be appropriate.

And then you can bring it live to Thursday's call. And I think we'll be able to set up the same sort of question box where people can send messages and submit their ideas ahead right on the call forum. And you can also post it in the forums, and our editors will be taking a look there starting today. So do you want to just go ahead and just take this essay question before we dive in or...

Linda Formichelli:

So which question is it? Can you tell me which one, because now it's gone off the screen, Carol?

Carol Tice:

Oh, just people were asking about doing personal essays, and "The articles I like are personal essays. Is a personal touch in an article okay?" Why don't you just sort of go over that?

Linda Formichelli:

Yes. And we're actually going to be talking about this a lot when we critique ideas, because we did get a lot of ideas for essays. And the thing about essays is, yes, you can always write an essay, but you do not typically pitch an essay. The editor wants to see the entire story arc, so they normally ask you to submit the entire thing.

However, there is this one form called a reported essay which brings in your first person anecdotes and your experiences, but then it also brings in experts to offer advice for how people who are dealing with the same thing you are can handle it. And later on I'm going to put in the chat a link to a reported essay I did for Women's Health.

But I've done a couple for Women's Health, and one for Fitness. They're much more saleable, and you do pitch them like a regular reported article. So we'll be talking more about that as we go along. Carol?

Carol Tice:

Yeah. I see a lot of people saying they want to write essays. The reason that we don't focus on essays in Pitch Clinic is, they're not pitched. You just write them and send them in. So they're just sort of outside of the purview of Pitch Clinic. And yeah, as Linda said, if you do not end up getting your idea reviewed here, no worries. We are going to be doing this all again on Thursday and in the forums on Pitch Clinic for our Pitch Clinic students. So I think it's time to get to the questions.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. Although there is something I did want to add. Let's see, so you talked about all this stuff up here as I was in the chat.

Carol Tice:

We're going to hit the rest of that when we get done with some questions, unless we want to do it right now.

Linda Formichelli:

Okay. All right. No, but I did want to talk about, before we get to the ideas, just one more thing. I want to mention that, especially for registered Pitch Clinic students, most article ideas writers come up with at first are what I call seeds of ideas. They're not quite saleable yet. Maybe they have no news hook, or they've been done a lot before, or they're too broad, or they're too narrow. But in most cases those are fixable problems.

So as we go through these if we give a critique, that doesn't mean your idea is terrible and you should give up. And a lot of writers in Pitch Clinic want to toss up an idea onto the forums and then have everybody say, "Oh, you're a genius." And then if an editor has a suggestion for making the idea better the writer immediately thinks their idea stinks, and then they throw up another idea, and it just goes on and on.

And this is a certain recipe for not getting out of that first assignment, which you want to do so you can start working on your pitch. So a very important tip for making it through that first assignment so you could start working on your query in assignment two is, when an editor has suggestions for how to make your idea better, work with your idea some more.

Unless an editor completely pans your idea and explicitly says, "This will not work in any way, shape, or form," then there's hope for your idea. And the idea is not that you just keep tossing up ideas until one hits, it's that you work with an idea and revise it with the instructors, post it in the forum, until they agree that this is now saleable, and then you can start working on your pitch. Carol?

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Right on. So I think we're ready to take some questions, yes? And while we're taking...

Linda Formichelli:

Yes.

Carol Tice:

...questions I'll leave up the Pitch Clinic URL so people can see that, in case they're looking around for that. And yeah, one thing to note, we are taking one idea per person on this call. We did get some people who sent many, and because we have so many submissions we are going to do one apiece. If you are a Pitch Clinic student you can definitely post multiple ideas for review, and end up sort of picking one to write your query on out of them with help from the editors.

So I'm going to take the first idea here, which was from Stephanie. "When Your Child Needs Professional Counseling, 10 Questions to Ask the Counselor Before the First Visit." She says, "If a child needs help, choosing the right therapist is essential. I recommend a telephone interview before the first visit. Here are 10 questions to ask."

And then under markets she said, "I haven't explored this much yet, but I'm sure they're out there." So I highly recommend looking at the markets and then developing the idea. It'll save a lot of time-wasting. I'm wondering if people want to post in chat about what they see wrong here, what might be problematic here.

Yeah, this is a topic we've seen before, how to choose a counselor for your child who needs a therapist. So the question is, what's new? Why do I need to read this again now, because I've seen this already? And the other big problem is, "I recommend." That sounds like this person is planning to put themselves up as the expert.

And here's what happens if you do that, you're not going to get paid anything. If you are the expert and at the bottom of this it's going to write, "Stephanie is a therapist who practices in Seattle," they're going to assume that you're writing that article to promote your therapy business, and that you do not need to be paid as a writer. So that's the issue there. And that's why you go report it even if you know all about it.

Linda and I know all about writing, and when we write for Writers' Digest or The Writers Market we go interview other writing coaches and quote them. So that's just something everybody needs to know. And maybe there's some famous child who's been seeing a therapist, and now they've gone on a rampage. And I'd love to develop a fun news angle for that story, and there could well be one out there. So just think about how to make it fresh. Linda.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. And also, Stephanie, I think there are a lot of different ways you could go with this to make it more creative and something an editor hasn't seen before. For example, one of my favorite tips is to add the word "surprising" to your idea. It could just be for your working title, or you could put it right in the title. But in this case it would be, 10 Surprising Questions to Ask Your Child's Counselor, would be your subhead. And then your task is to interview experts and get their most surprising little-known tips.

That is a really good way of making something fresh. Because it's like, "Oh, we've seen this before." "Oh, but you haven't seen these tips." You could also change up the angle by, for example, interviewing real-life moms about the top questions they ask their child's counselor to help them get results. There are a lot of different ways you can package, it's called packaging, the way you format an article, a charticle, a Q&A, a quiz, that can make this different. Carol?

Carol Tice:

Right on. I think you have the next one too. Or did you do the self-employment one?

Linda Formichelli:

I do have the next one.

Carol Tice:

Sorry.

Linda Formichelli:

No, I do. Lauren has “The Five Biggest Myths About Self-Employment and How I Tackled Them, that will allow readers to consider the reality of self-employment before taking the plunge themselves, given through examples from my own experiences, results from pertinent studies, and quotes from expert sources in each truth. I pitched this to Self, I’d like to pitch it to Glamor.” So this sounds like a really fun idea for a reported essay, since you’ve obviously been through this.

And again, a reported essay is an article that includes your first person experiences but also interviews and quotes from experts that will help the reader put what you learned into action. And I actually am going to pop into chat a reported essay I did for Woman’s Health so you can see how it’s structured. And those you do pitch, and a lot of magazines run them, and they pay.

So if you go that route, the reported essay, you need to change up your title, because it won’t be all about you, which is what the title makes it seem. And also, I’m not quite sure your markets are quite right unless, number one, they run work topics, which I’m pretty sure Glamor does.

But also, they need to run reported essays on those topics in those departments that you’re aiming for. I personally think you would do better with magazines into entrepreneurs and freelancers, but if you can find a women’s magazine that does reported essays on work topics, then that could work really well too. Carol?

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Heidi says, “I can’t see the pitches.” There’s nothing to see. We’re just on one slide, and we’re reading the story ideas that people submitted to us, Heidi. So I have one from Susan. “When Shedding Pounds Isn’t All That It’s Cracked Up to Be, a personal essay about how hyperthyroidism changed the way I obsessed over my weight.”

So once again, personal essays not pitched. There might be a way to make that into a reported essay if you just sort of started with a little anecdote of yourself and then we moved into experts on hyperthyroidism or something. So that’d be something to think about. Linda?

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah, I was definitely going to say it could make a good reported essay for one of the women’s health magazines. Like Carol was saying, you take your personal experiences,

but then you do research and interview experts for what editors call service. And service is how-to advice that the reader can use to improve their lives.

And a lot of these magazines people are wanting to pitch are service magazines, the women's magazines, the health magazines, the cooking magazines, the business magazines. They all have service to the reader, and that's very important in every article and pitch.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. So Robin's headline is, "How I Learned to Love My Body," and the description is, "A personal narrative describing how participating in a boudoir photo session caused the participant to see her body as full." You already know the problem there. So then she adds, "This could also be said as a general top 10 reasons to schedule a boudoir photo session."

Now, this second angle, if you interviewed other people, I thought could be working. I mean, I think the whole boudoir photo thing has been written about. If it was 10 unusual or secret reasons, or just between girls reasons, or you know what I mean, it could work. So something to think about, how to angle it. Linda.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah, I really like that, actually. I think that could be cool. And also, we have a second idea from Robin. And we're normally only taking one from each person, but this has something in it that I want to bring up that I think is really important. "The headline is, Frozen Hot Chocolate Recipe, and it's a kid-friendly recipe that is enjoyable to create, fun to eat, and beautiful to look at, for magazines like Family Fun and Parents."

So this is a really good start to an idea, but it's also an example of an idea being too narrow if you wanted to pitch this as an article. It would really be a recipe and maybe a photo caption, which is fine if that's what you want to pitch. Some magazines do run pieces like this. But because this is not a reported style of article it's not the kind that you would pitch in the way that we're going to be teaching here in Pitch Clinic. So that's something you might want to pitch at another time on your own.

But I do want to say that there are lots and lots of freelance recipe developers, I know some of them, and that's a whole different thing. And I suggest you look up Monica Bhide, and I'm going to pop her name into the chat. She's a recipe developer, a cookbook author. She writes on food and recipes for various magazines. Her food essays have won prizes.

She teaches classes for food writers. So if you want to get into recipe development definitely look her up. A lot of people do it, they really enjoy it. But if you want to sell a whole article on your idea listen to the next one I'm going to critique for information about how you could turn this into a reported story. Because the idea of frozen hot chocolate really does sound kind of cool.

So the next one is actually Caitlyn's idea, and it's "The Anatomy of a Perfect Butter Tart. What goes into making the ultimate butter tart. Raisins versus nuts. Exploration of the history, evolution, and making of butter tarts over the years." And she wants to pitch it to one of the Canadian lifestyle magazines like Chatelaine, Canadian Living, and Ricardo, and it would be a good tie-in to Canada Day. So I had to look this up. I never heard of a butter tart, and I realized, yes, it is a Canadian dish.

And Robin, I hope you're listening to this, because this is one good way to take your love of food and turn it into a saleable article. There are food and regional magazines that run in-depth articles on different dishes that are of interest to their audience. For example, CooksIllustrated does this in every single issue, although they don't take freelance.

So it would be like, how to make the perfect pizza crust, and how to make a succulent roast, and it just goes into great detail. But Caitlyn, as for your idea, don't forget that you would need to interview experts on this Canadian dish to get all the details and advice, and have them weigh in on the raisins versus nuts and so on. But I think that could be a very cool idea, and I totally want a butter tart. Carol.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. I totally want a butter tart. So I have an interesting one from Heidi. "Modern-Day Outlaws. The rise of cattle rustling in the West." She was thinking of Atlantic, American Cowboy, or Christian Science Monitor for this, and she has a source, a real-life cowboy investigator, Jerry Flowers.

And it would be about how meth use and poverty in the Midwest has spurred a major increase in cattle rustling, and what's being done to curb that. I just thought that was pretty fresh. I love it. I mean, we all love hearing about how drug epidemics are devastating communities. It's got that whole schadenfreude thing going on where we enjoy that. And that sounds like a really unusual twist on a way that's playing out. I love it.

So I also have Vickie's "Portrait of a Man as a Guinea Pig," and she wanted to write about a man who was born in 1970, and he has type 1, so he's a juvenile diabetic. And he just took various types of insulin over the years, some of which were better and worse. She was thinking of sending it to Latterly magazine, which I looked up, and they're into long-form narrative nonfiction.

The question I come back to on this one is that, I don't know why this guy is the one diabetic whose story is so interesting that we want to follow it. I'm just not sure this is the right angle. Lots and lots of people have been diabetic since 1970. We need to know what's special about this one story. And this is similar to a thing you get in business profile pitches where people will be like, "I want to write about this business. They're really neat."

And I actually used to call that pitch, “Look at This Business, Aren’t They Neat?” when I used to get 100s of those as a business reporter from PR people. And there really needs to be something extraordinary about the person, truly extraordinary. And unfortunately, having juvenile diabetes, all too common in our society.

So I’d like to hear more. I mean, maybe there is something really fascinatingly unusual. But when I heard this Man as a Guinea Pig headline what I thought I was going to learn was that this guy did some early experimental medicine trials or something. But that doesn’t seem like his story, so I’m confused. If that is a person who’s in Pitch Clinic, I would love to get a few more details on it. Linda?

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. And again, a lot of these ideas are workable, we just need to think, and dig, and do a little more research, and figure out, what is the angle here that’s going to work? And as I was saying, often the first thing that we come up with or the first idea that we come up with is not the one we end up going with, and that happens to new writers and pro writers, so don’t worry about it.

So we have another idea from somebody who doesn’t have a name. “Five Families Who Left a Foundation for the Open Road. Meet five families who gave up a traditional home and moved their families into RVs. Find out what drove them to make the decision as well as some of the challenges they’ve had to overcome, and surprising blessings they discovered. Potential targets are travel magazines, RV magazines, parenting and family magazines, homeschool magazines, and religious magazines.”

And it looks like this writer is a full time RVing family. So I actually really love this idea. Don’t ask Carol what she thinks, because we have total opposite views on this. If I could be homeschooling while traveling overseas, at least for one year, we’d be like the happiest people ever. But anyway, I think it’s a very cool idea.

But you would need to focus, at least if you’re working on one pitch, you need to focus on one type of magazine, because you would write something very different for a religious magazine than you would for an RV magazine than you would for a family magazine. So choose a focus and work on that first. And you can always work on the other angles later. I mean, the smart writer takes an idea and angles it for all different types of markets.

But in terms of Pitch Clinic or working on one pitch at a time, then you want to pick one focus. And then you want to make sure the magazines you want to target haven’t done this before, because the idea seems so perfect for homeschooling and RV magazines that I’d be surprised if they haven’t done it before at least once. And if they have, you’ll just need to come up with a better news hook or a more surprising angle that they haven’t done, so it’s still doable. Carol?

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Okay. I remember I promised everyone I was going to make chat bigger and easier to look at. Why don't I go ahead and do that? Let's have a bigger chat box these days. That'll make things easier. Yeah. So I have another headline, which is, "The Rebirth of 'Science'," and the word "science" is in quotes. "How to harness local knowledge for better climate planning." This is from Laura.

She says, "Formal science is no longer the most important authority in evaluating and addressing climate change impact," and she has a couple examples about people who spoke at a climate change symposium, and a Sacramento area case study where a transit agency included community expertise in their planning process. And she would like to target something like Earth Island magazine. I have a couple concerns about this. The first is that it's just a little deep in the weeds.

It might be kind of more of a book topic. How to Harness Local Knowledge for Better Climate Planning. That almost sounds like a book that urban planners have to read with their jobs. But I thought if you could find a particular example, that would make a good article, of a community where community wisdom helps them save carbon emissions. But the other problem I want to raise here is the quotes around the word "science" and the sort of condescension that I get in the tone to traditional science.

That reveals you have an agenda, you have a bias here, that you think science sucks, and people know better, regular people. And as soon as the editor senses that bias they're going to pass on this story. So you would need to sort of think about whether this is something you could do in an impartial way, and about a way to slice this down so that it would be executable in article length. Linda.

Linda Formichelli:

Okay. Yes. And also, I actually wanted to take something that Annalie said in the chat. She said, "Families in RVs article, what is the news hook there please?" And a couple things. One is that sometimes an idea is so cool that an editor wants to run it even if there is no news hook. Like, oh my God, we've never seen this before, it's really interesting.

So I think it would be very, very easy to find a news hook for this, because I know, because we did homeschooling for a little while, that a lot of families are doing this kind of thing. And I think it would be pretty easy for her to find a stat of how many families are taking to the road and homeschooling or whatever. So I'm not concerned about the news hook with that one. That's a great question, thank you.

So we have a bunch of ideas from somebody called BI, and I'm going to take the one that I personally think is the most saleable, although they were all pretty good. This was called, "Are Chores Worth It? This will be pitched to parenting magazines. Maybe a roundup of how different families have their kids do or don't do chores.

“Some expert interviews as to what’s developmentally appropriate and how to deal with the kids pushing back against what you ask them to do. It might be interesting to have the parents profiled. Compare what they make their kids do to what they were made to do as kids.” Okay, so we have to focus, because you have at least three ideas here. One is, is it worth it to give your kid chores? Two is, what’s developmentally appropriate. Three is how to deal when kids push back against chores.

And actually there’s the four, comparing what kids do now versus what you did when you were a kid. So if you were doing a book on chores that would be cool, but for an article you want a really tight focus. And I think out of all these the idea of whether chores are worth it is a nice, what I call an opposite idea.

Everybody automatically assumes that kids should be doing chores, but actually not everybody agrees. I remember one blogger, I think she’s in Norway, who talked about how she never made her son do chores because once he’s an adult he has his whole life to clean and cook. It doesn’t take that long to learn it that you need to spend your whole childhood doing it.

So when he was young she just wanted him to have fun and learn. So it could be really cool to see if you could find some of those outlier voices and talk to experts about the pros and cons and some reasons why you may not want to give your kids chores, and what the upshot of that is. I like it. Carol?

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Yeah. And I was just looking up a quick thing for someone. So I have a headline from Judy that I thought has some real nice potential but needs a little tweaking. “No Country for Old Men” was she was thinking like a top head, and then “Public Defender Age 70 Considers Retiring.” So my first reaction to that is that he either needs to be refusing to retire at 70 and he’s just going to keep going, or he is announcing his retirement.

I think it’s very hard to write articles that are compelling about people who are thinking about maybe doing something. It’s kind of squishy and vague for us. But I love the idea of 70-year-old public defender. He must know so much about crime in his town, and has obviously kept at it well past normal retirement age. He might make a good personal profile either way. Yeah.

Good headlines are sort of decision- and action-oriented and good story ideas, not this might maybe happen or not happen. It’s problematic for us to get our heads around it. But it sounds like there’s a good personal profile of an interesting person there. She was thinking of it for Nashville Scene. It sounded like a great city magazine choice. Linda?

Linda Formichelli:

Okay. Sorry, I was in the chat talking about the news hook for the chores idea. And I have to say, if you come up with an idea and it’s really cool, and then you’re like, okay,

now I need a news hook. And you can come up with a news hook, you can then develop the news hook later. So that's what I think was happening in this case.

But I think that the fact that our blogger has come out saying she doesn't believe in chores could work, or if you could find a statistic saying a lot of people are buying into this no-chores thing, or a book came out, or you have a really cool expert, I mean, anything.

So I wouldn't worry about it at this point. But I think you could definitely find a news hook. There are some stories where we're going to say, "Where's the news hook?" and it's like we just don't see a news hook happening, and we want to know what it is before you go on with this idea. So we have, let's see, am I on Karen, Carol?

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Yeah. Go.

Linda Formichelli:

Okay. So Karen says, "The Forgotten Sexual Identity. I would like to write a feature about the one percent of the population who identify as asexual, lacking a sexual desire. I plan on describing asexuality as a forgotten identity rather than a disorder. It is specifically excluded in the DSM of definitions of sexual disorders. I would like to feature a few asexuals and describe how they relate to people on an intimate level.

"I would also like to examine whether or not they feel left out, since they are not currently part of the LGTB community, and find out how they would like the rest of the sexual world to relate to them." And there's more here. And I got to say, I love this idea. But when I did some Googling I found out that it was recently covered in Time and Wired, lots of websites and blogs, including websites for the LGBT community. But to many people in the mainstream this is still kind of a mystery.

So I'd love to see if you could find a way to make the idea fresher and something an editor hasn't seen. So for example, maybe for a women's magazine you could do a roundup where you interview five asexual women. Your lead and sidebar could offer some quick stats and info on the topic. And then the real story would be many profiles of the women and how they make it work, especially if they're married.

And this could be a really interesting opposite idea for the women's magazines that are always discussing how to please your man, how to have better sex, have more sex. We did a survey on how much people are having sex every week. But it might be too out there for these traditional women's markets, so it could be a risk. But I really like the idea. So maybe think about it and do a little more digging, and see if you can find a way to make it work for a market for which this still news. Carol?

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Cool. So I have one from Kevin. "HIV Funding Gap Leaves Vietnam at Risk. I am passionate about HIV/AIDS work and living in Vietnam, as well as the precariousness of

the funding situation. Most international funding for medicine is drying up in the next few years.” That’s a great thing, where you can get ahead of a news trend and say, this train is coming down the track and is going to run us over soon.

So that’s a great angle. There are a few HIV/AIDS magazines which he suggested. They don’t pay super-great, I don’t think. But he was going to interview doctors in the field and NGOs, to explore the problem. I’m just not sure. The problem is that you have what I call an all-in headline, HIV Funding Gap Leaves Vietnam at Risk. Okay, I learned that now. There’s a funding gap, and Vietnam isn’t going to have enough HIV medicine or...

Linda Formichelli:

It’s really kind of more of a newspaper story idea.

Carol Tice:

Yeah, I felt it’s almost like a newspaper story idea. I think you’re going to need to think about how to make it something I need to read through, and yeah, how it could be sort of magazine feature-ish. Because it is something that’s sort of coming down the pike in a year or two, that’s good for magazines. But you’re going to have to find another angle, probably the human story, which I have to say was missing from quite a lot of these pitches in general, is in sort of thinking of the general thing.

Like, maybe there is a clinic you could profile that would exemplify, would emblemize, the problem, and we would talk to actual people with HIV and the people who work with them about what is happening and what’s going to happen when this funding goes away, giving it a little bit narrower focus than a whole country. Country stories are a nightmare.

I’ve written them, and so many interviews if you’re going to talk about the whole country of Vietnam and how this will play out. So I would be thinking about maybe a city, a slice, a clinic, and it would be something great there, that you’re seeing a trend before your average American knows about it. And maybe it’s not for an HIV/AIDS magazine but for like a public health magazine or something like that. Linda.

Linda Formichelli:

Cool. Yeah. So I have one from Doreen. The headline is, “How To Research Medical Romances When You Don’t Have a Medical Background.” She said, “It’s aimed at Romance Writers Report, the member magazine for Romance Writers of America. It could be brought in for other writing magazines like Writers’ Digest, which had a post on medical thrillers in 2014. And the idea is that when you’re writing a medical romance you need to get medical matters correct.

“If you get the details wrong you wrench them right out of the story, but if you’re not a health professional, how do you do the research? And if you actually do know all this stuff and you throw in all the medical jargon then you’re going to confuse the reader.” So I thought that was a very cool idea. I like the way you mentioned in your idea you

already have ideas for experts lined up. My only concern is that there is only really one good market for this, which is the Romance Writers one you mentioned.

But you also mentioned Writers' Digest so I spoke with Zach, who is one of our instructors in Pitch Clinic who used to be an editor at Writers' Digest, and I'm going to read you what he said. He said, "For Writers' Digest there could be an article about the medical romance market, which a lot of writers probably don't know about, what it is, examples of books, agents, sales figures, how to pull it off accurately.

"Or, and perhaps better, and definitely a much smaller FOB piece," for everybody who doesn't know, that's a small front of the book piece, "there's a section I created in Writers' Digest called Good to Know. If she wanted to broaden the topic it could be about how to get medical details right in your fiction. The column features common misconceptions and how to correct them.

"For instance, I wrote in installments on the difference between a psychologist and a psychiatrist, the difference between semiautomatic pistols and revolvers, et cetera. Depending on how much she knows it could expand into a larger feature too, about how to get medical details right in your fiction. All in all, probably best to pitch it as an inkwell piece."

So Doreen, if you are here listening to this, I suggest that you post this idea in the forum and work on it with Zach, who is one of our instructors who used to work for Writers' Digest, and pitch this to Writers' Digest. What do you think, Carol?

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Absolutely. So I have a headline from someone who did not leave their name, as many people did not. And if your name wasn't in your e-mail then we don't know your name. This one is, "Making Whisky the Hard Way, A Day In the Life of George Dickel's Alyssa Henley. These days most liquor is made by combining personal knowledge with computerization that, you know, controls the process, but at the George Dickel Distillery in Tullahoma, Tennessee few aspects of production have changed in 100 years, and the distiller's job is about as traditional as it gets." She did not identify the market for this. But she says, "Most distilleries don't allow access to their master distillers," so I'm assuming that we know something about this sector and that that would be an unusual interview. I think people love stories about things being done in old school way.

And this is really just a question of figuring out the market you would aim it at, and that would kind of determine the angle you would take. It might be a local newspaper's business page or a city magazine in a nearby city. I'm not sure where that city is. But she's also a woman distiller, so there might be a Working Woman or an Oprah Women Who Make Beautiful Things kind of front of the book thing.

And I'll run on the assumption that you already know you have access to this woman, and that you know you'd also need to interview experts for this kind of profile in this whisky distilling world who could talk about how rare and unique and unusual what she

is doing really is, that would give it sort of the credibility. It looks like I also have the next one, which is “The Psychology...”

Linda Formichelli:

Oh, can I mention something, though?

Carol Tice:

Go.

Linda Formichelli:

I’m sorry, Stephanie. So I actually saw a link to a publication specifically about liquor. And I want you all to be not surprised at what you will find out there. I actually recently wrote a post about if you were a sheep farmer. I found at least a dozen magazines for sheep farmers. My husband has written for one of them.

I mean, the fact that there’s a liquor magazine should not surprise you once you get out and start looking at markets that are online and on the newsstands. I actually read one yesterday called Pen World that was at Barnes & Noble that was for pen collectors. So just a little aside there.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. There are 1,000,000 magazines in the naked city, and people do keep launching new ones, too. Don’t think that hasn’t stopped. So I have one, “The Psychology of Leadership,” once again no name. “The Psychology of Leadership, Five Concepts to Make You More Effective.” I think that’s a book topic. And it says, “I plan on discussing how motivations, emotions, charisma, self-esteem, and career goals can help leaders become more effective, and I would be pitching this in the business category.”

Yeah, we need to know where exactly you think they haven’t talked about the psychology of leadership. This is a topic that’s been covered a lot, a lot of times, so the question is, what have you got that’s new for us here? Is there a new philosophy of the psychology of leadership?

We’d have to hear new things that we haven’t heard before that would make this surprising. Maybe choose one of those to expand on, and find some way to give it a new kind of surprise factor. Charisma, that could be cool to focus on. How do you be charismatic as a leader without being sleazy? Anyway, Linda?

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. And charisma is something we don’t really hear about a lot these days, so I think it would be really kind of cool to bring it back and be like, “You know, you need charisma to be a leader. It wasn’t just something from, you know, from a certain time period. You need it now, and here’s how to get it.” So anyway, here’s one that has no name. And it’s called “From Palapa to Penthouse,” and Palapa is a Mexican thatched-roof hut. And the subhead is, “Tequila’s Upward Trajectory.” My God, I can’t talk today.

It says, “Tequila has long been seen in the Western markets as a second-rate spirit most suitable as a cheap passport to rapid intoxication or as the tragic enabler of Jimmy Buffet’s career, but this perception is shifting quickly as super-premium brands surge in market share and small artisanal producers sprout like agave leaves in the Jalisco sun.” I have no idea if I said that right.

“I visit a handful of new distilleries in the Guadalajara to sip the finest tequila and learn how these entrepreneurs carve a niche in an increasingly crowded field, and talk to expert mixologists in Toronto about how they’re putting this windfall of quality spirits to good use. Magazine, either En Route, Air Canada’s in-flight mag, or West Jet Magazine, an in-flight magazine for a Western Canadian airline. Both fly to Mexico and Toronto, so there’s a double connection.”

So I have to say first of all, kudos of finding magazines that travel to Mexico and to Canada. Good research, perfect fit. Your writing style is spectacular. That is something we’ll be looking for in Pitch Clinic, which you’ll learn about in a later lesson. You want your pitches and articles to sound not like business letters, which I think is a lot of people’s first thing they want to do, is like, oh, it’s a business letter, so I need to make it sound all formal and stiff.

No, you want the pitch to sound just like an article you would find in your target magazine. And a sense of fun and edginess is often appropriate, depending on what you’re writing about in the market. So good on that. And about the idea, it does sound great for in-flight magazines, so that’s a good choice again.

I saw Esquire did a slide show on tequila, and Entrepreneur did a profile of a tequila producer. So you know at least it’s starting to be seen as a fine drink, as you mentioned. You just need to make sure that this isn’t something that’s been overdone. Because like you said, it is kind of hitting the big-time, so you want to be on that trend before it gets too big or starts expiring. Carol?

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Yeah, that was a super example of market match. I’d like to see lots more of that, of people figuring out, ah, this is exactly the magazine that would want this idea. I think you have the next one too, Linda.

Linda Formichelli:

Oh, yeah. I have one from Janice. “It’s a multi-person profile, 1,000-word max of volunteer trail maintainers in the Shenandoah National Park, selecting three to four volunteers responsible for trails spread throughout the park, two to three paragraphs on each person detailing an inspirational snippet from their past, why they got involved, and what motivates them to continue. Plus I propose a sidebar of where to get involved for readers, organization names, where, and contact information.

“Query targets will be regional, outdoor, hiking trail, and general interest publications like AT Journeys, AMC Outdoor, Blue Ridge Outdoors, Virginia Living, and et cetera.

And this would be a great article for spring editions as people emerge from winter.” So first of all we need a headline for this. I’m not sure we were super-clear on that. So when you do post in the forums we’re going to need a headline.

And it’s super-important for idea generation that you be able to come up with a short descriptive intriguing headline for an idea. But it’s a sign that your idea needs more refining if you can’t get it across really quickly. So about the idea itself, I think this could really work. It’s a cool idea, especially if you found volunteers with really interesting stories. If you just rounded up a bunch of volunteers, and they have lukewarm quotes, and they’re like, “Oh, I really like nature, and volunteering is good for you,” it’s really not going to work.

So you would need to do some digging, and maybe call up the park program, and find for example a volunteer whose life was saved by volunteering there, someone who’s inspired by a really interesting and important cause, someone who has a story about a surprising experience they had that motivates them to continue. Like you want people with really, really good stories. And if you do that I think this could really work. Carol?

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Hang on. People are asking. If you sent in your idea yesterday we’re hoping to get through it. We’re chugging through as fast as we can. Yeah, we are nearing the top of the hour. We still have many ideas ahead of us. What we are going to do at some point is call it, and we will bring the rest to a thread inside the Pitch Clinic forum and...

Linda Formichelli:

Well, if we don’t get to your idea, I think people should just start a thread on the forum with their idea, and then us and our editors will critique it there.

Carol Tice:

Okay. Yeah, that’ll work too. Good idea. Yeah, just if you didn’t hear it in this one either bring it to Thursday’s event or post it on the Pitch Clinic forum. So I have one from Bill that is, “The Cost of Insulin in 10 Countries. This would be a chart that reveals the cost of medication in countries around the world.” I think it’s really tough to get these as a freelance assignment.

These are just the kind of things that editors get a piece of research, and they just throw a chart together themselves. Yeah, Linda calls it the seed of an idea. I thought you might spin it into something like Eight Ways to Fight High Insulin Costs that talk about maybe creative ways to spend less on it. Yeah, remember, this call is the beginning of our idea-refining process, not the end, Linda is nagging me to say again.

Linda Formichelli:

Well, I just want to say that even if we critique your ideas here, even if you get our critique on the call, you need to bring them into the form, because me, or Carol, or one of our four editors needs to either work with you on it until it’s perfect and then give you

the final okay, or they really love it right away give you the okay right then to move on to the next lesson.

Because again, you need to get one of the six of our's permission to move on to each new assignment, just so that people don't think, okay, I'm done. All right, so is it me?

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Yeah, this is a starting point. Please post and continue refining your story idea in the forums. Yeah.

Linda Formichelli:

Cool. So all right. So we have another person with no name, but the title is "How To Transition from the Treadmill to the Road." It says, "We're in the midst of a second running boom, yet many new runners feel intimidated when it comes to taking their show out on the road and off the treadmill. This how-to article would guide new runners on getting started on road and trails, leading to a new level of enjoyment. I'd pitch to Runner's World, Women's Health & Fitness, Men's Health, and Self, among others."

So this is a really interesting idea. It has a good news hook providing you have a statistic, I can't even talk, a stat, or some other proof that there is a second running boom, and that there are a lot of people who are afraid to leave the treadmill behind. My only qual about this is that it might be a little too elementary for magazines that cater to runners like Runner's World.

I would guess their readers are already all out on the road, and that people who are running on treadmills are probably not reading Runner's World. I could be wrong about that though. Also, you have a mix of men's mags, women's mags, running magazines, and the way you write this query would be very different for each type, so you would need to pick one and then develop your angle based on that.

I love to play with ideas, and another idea I came up with that could make this more relevant to a general women's health magazine would be to offer a roundup of how to take it to the next level in all kinds of exercise and sport. So for example, there are a lot of women who do yoga videos, or CrossFit videos, or other kind of videos, and they're like, "Boy, I'd really like to go to a CrossFit box or a yoga studio, but I'm scared."

So how do you move beyond the "I'm going to exercise at home all by myself" to, "I'm exercising with a crowd in a public space" of all different types of exercise? That could be really interesting. And then running could just be one of them.

One idea to make things broad enough for an article, a feature article, is to provide a roundup. So instead of just only running it would be running, and CrossFit, and yoga, and Pilates, and whatever, and you would do a roundup. So that's just another idea. But I think this is really cool.

I have another idea, it's from Louisa and it's "The DDIY Wedding," and DDIY is Don't Do It Yourself. "Many brides have been scouting out wedding inspiration since their engagement, and likely before. These sources feature gorgeous handcrafted items, Mason jars, bunting, spray-painted wine bottles, photo booth props. While DIY weddings could be beautiful, they're also often labor intensive, stressful, and not nearly as budget-conscious as a bride may initially assume.

"Many modern brides are also juggling full time work and too many other commitments to realistically pull off a DIY wedding. I'd like to propose an article weighing the pros and cons of doing it yourself versus hiring professional help for various aspects of the wedding including decorations, catering, invitations, et cetera."

I have to say I really feel you there, because last year I thought I would save money on my six-year-old son's birthday party by doing it at home, and I think I spent like \$250, where it would have cost me \$200 to do it at the community center. So anyway, I love this idea.

It's a really great opposite idea, because everybody's always like, "Oh yes, I'm going to make my own decorations," and you're like, "No." And I think the wedding magazines would really love it, because their advertisers probably hate the movement of doing it all yourself. So I think you should definitely try that one out. Carol?

Carol Tice:

Yeah. So I have one. I think we're going to take a few more before we wrap this. Lorette said, "Are You My Mother? A cautionary tale. People like to, you know, do adoption searches for their birth parents on Facebook, and everyone's rooting for the adoptee's success and a heartwarming reunion, and I don't. In fact, it takes restraint for me not to comment, 'Caution, you're opening a Pandora's box.'"

So this makes it kind of smell like a personal essay about her own unhappy adoption reunion. But she follows up with some statistics about adult adoptees and their negative reactions to when they do a reunion. So yeah, I think if you take yourself out of this, this could be a good idea maybe for, there are I think a couple, three adoption magazines. We're both adoptive parents, so yeah, it could be an interesting reported essay, or a straight story, or a full personal...

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah, although I have to say, you would have to get...

Carol Tice:

...not part of Pitch Clinic.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. I think depending on how you do it you would need to get rid of the bias, because it's pretty clear that you are kind of down on it. But you would need actual statistics,

quotes from experts weighing in on both sides, real people sources that reflect the actual distribution of happy versus unhappy adoptees.

If you can't get rid of the negative bias you might have to turn this from a reported essay into a regular reported piece where you're not in it at all, and your opinion's not in it. Or step down from the idea, which sometimes we have to do. But yeah, I mean, Carol and I are both adoptive parents, and I could totally see something like this being in maybe Adoptive Families magazine or one of the other adoptive magazines. Carol?

Oh, I have the next one, actually. I have one from Desiree. The headline is, "K is for Kindness. Tips for teaching your child compassion. When to start, age-appropriate strategies, online and print resources for parents. Target publication is Family Circle." So this is a very evergreen idea that's been done in various permutations in all the women's and parenting magazines, but that doesn't mean it's a bad idea. It means it's a good idea, because they keep running it over and over.

But you'll notice that every time they run it there's something different about it, whether it's the way they package it, or the angle they take, or the types of people they interview, or a different news hook. So it means you have a good seed of a saleable idea, and you need to play with it until you develop an angle that hasn't been done before. And I actually have a good blog post on how to take a problematic idea and turn it into a saleable idea, which I am going to put in the chat right now. Bing. There you go.

But for example, you could select one tiny aspect of kindness and blow that up into a full article, you could find surprising tips that haven't been heard before, as I mentioned earlier in the call. And also keep in mind, really research your markets, because last I heard Family Circle targets parents of tweens and teens, so they might be out of the age range that you're thinking, and you might want to look at something like Parents, or Kiwi, or something like that. Carol?

Carol Tice:

Yeah. I wanted to welcome Ava and Sarah to Pitch Clinic, I can't talk, all the ones that are coming in. Hey, welcome aboard, along with everyone who's already signed up. So I have one, no name on it. "Lifetime Global Headline." I don't know what that means. "Does more transit help our roads?" And the magazine she was thinking of it for was Equipment World.

And it's all about how major cities are under pressure to promote more transit projects to get commuters on mass transit, but how does the cost of that compare with the cost of road work to drive up more space? What happens to road taxes? There are a lot, a lot of questions here. It could almost be a book topic.

I think I've read a book on this topic, about how the more we build roads the more we pile on, so we don't relieve the traffic jams, kind of the opposite idea. And I've also read big pieces on how public transit initiatives failed or had huge cost overruns that erased

kind of the value of doing them. So you're going to need to find a thinner slice of this to execute. Maybe, did X big transit project help X city?

But I'm having trouble seeing Equipment World as the audience for this. I think this is like a city magazine or... I think of an equipment operator trade as, they just want to know how to be better equipment operators. I think this might be sort of beyond what it is they're looking to know. I'm not sure. Linda?

Linda Formichell:

Awesome. And I was just talking in the chat about Family Circle. I think we only have a few minutes, and I was wondering if I could go down to Tana's idea.

Carol Tice:

Yeah, go ahead.

Linda Formichelli:

I know it's like down at the bottom, because I know she's on the call, and I think she had an idea that I wanted to talk about because of personal interest. Let me find it. Yeah, we actually have two from Tana, but the one I wanted to talk about right now was, "Turn Screen Time into Family Time. Create a family game night with these TK games that capture everyone's interest."

And it's an article about alternative board games, Euro games, that are often more interesting and challenging to older children than the traditional ones. "I have a family I could interview for this to get their perspective. They play lots of Euro games, and I know many board gaming people who could suggest a number of games to get started. I could do a bit on each game, explaining the theme and possibly connecting it to video games as an alternative. If your kid loves X video game then try this board game.

"Potential market, Family Circle." So I have to say, my husband is the News Editor of boardgamegeek.com, which is all about Euro games. He travels the world and does all the conferences and everything. He's been interviewed in board game documentaries, and we're really deep into this culture. Tana says her husband is, what is your husband's name, Tana? I'll be Eric knows him.

Well, Eric Martin is the News Editor, and yeah, we're actually traveling all over Europe and Japan at some board game conventions this fall, so I'm pretty psyched. Anyway, off topic. Years ago he tried pitching articles on Euro games to various publications, including Family Circle, and they were not interested. The editor of USA Weekend, who I used to write for and was friends with, he said, and I quote, "Why would someone want to read about games no one has ever heard of?"

However, these games have finally been reaching a broader marketplace, and you're finding them at Barnes & Noble and Target, so it may be time to try it again. However, your title does not indicate that you're going to be talking about a different kind of game, and I guarantee that the editor of Family Circle gets lots and lots of pitches on starting a

family game night. So be sure if you pitch this to tweak the title to show that your idea is going to be different.

Like you see a lot of them called Beyond Monopoly and things like that. So you really want to get that in there where, I'm going to be talking about something that your readers have not seen before, and it's really interesting and good for their kids. But yeah, I really like this idea, and I wanted to get to it because of my personal connection.

Carol Tice:

Okay. Well yeah, let me take a quick look here, see if there's something I'm dying to do. Because I think at this point hopefully people are seeing lack of news hook, lack of we understand what the market is, evergreen topic with no new twist to it, it's a big book topic. Oh, we had one that, I wanted you to get to this one from Kathy about tongue-tied.

Linda Formichelli:

Oh yes, I wanted to do that one too. I'm texting Eric, "Do you know this guy on BGG?" So I was only multitasking. Kathy's idea is "Tongue-tied, To Snip or Not to Snip? Discuss issues facing parents of newborns with a short frenulum, which is the piece that attaches the tongue to the bottom of the mouth. Short term issues include difficulty or inability to nurse, which could lead to complications with incoming milk." Oh, I'm sorry, yeah. "...lead to complications with incoming milk, decisions to supplement.

"Long term potential effects include speech and subsequent developmental delays. Interview doctors and lactation staff. Discuss pros, cons of immediate treatment and of delayed treatment. Intended platform, Pregnancy & Newborn." So I have to say again, a good evergreen idea. But I'm not sure it's fresh enough for a pregnancy magazine, because since that's what they focus on they probably would have covered all aspects of this problem.

However, yesterday I had my six-year-old son at the dentist, and he checked Trevor for this problem. And I said, "Wouldn't we have known by now if this six-year-old were tongue-tied?" and he said, "You would be surprised by how many 15-year-olds come in here who are tongue-tied, and no one knew that was the reason for their speech problems." So that could be a really interesting angle to take, if it's truly a common problem in older kids.

And I wanted to give one really important tip for making an evergreen idea fresh, is to pitch it to markets that haven't heard of it before. So yes, the Pregnancy & Newborn magazine probably would have heard of this issue and been writing about it before, but ones for older kids, they probably haven't seen it.

We have an idea in here for AARP if we have a chance to get to it that I think you could actually spin it better for a younger women's magazine, because AARP would have covered it a lot. So just wanted to talk about that.

Carol Tice:

I'm scanning. I don't know. I think we've done it here mostly. I'd actually really like you to take this one about illegal sugar substitutes that are sold in Canada.

Linda Formichelli:

Sure. Let me see if I can find it. Let me do a search. Yes. I don't have a name...

Carol Tice:

This is kind of in the category of, I call sort of, that's interesting but what about it?

Linda Formichelli:

So yeah. So it's "Illegal Sugar Substitutes Sold in Canada. The FDA and Canadian counterpart reached identical conclusions about artificial sweetener aspartame. Both declared this substance is not fit for human consumption even in small quantities. It's illegal. But it's one of the most widely used illegal substances up here. Someone forgot to make it illegal to add to foods and pops sold for public consumption.

"All we proud Canadians do is import the hazardous stuff we never break the law by making ourselves. We sell it to dieters and diabetics. I want to sell it to Abilities magazine, Canadian Cancer Society Newsletter, Diabetes magazine." So this is again, like Carol was saying, this is some super-interesting news, but the question is, what about it? What about this do you want to write?

For the magazines you want to pitch it sounds like you need to explain how this affects the magazine's readership and what they can do about it. But then if you research this it could be as simple as, well, you read labels and you avoid products with aspartame. And if you find out that's the case, that's not enough to support an article. So I would do more digging into the topic, and see if you can find an angle that hasn't been done that will work for some of your target markets. Carol?

Carol Tice:

Yeah. I mean, are there some products that the public is truly unaware that it is in it? Are they maybe calling it some other fancy name and we don't get that that's what it is? Oh, you know what? I want to get to Kristie's question about how you write for magazines when it takes four to six months for the idea to come out. And that's how you spin news ahead to what will happen.

And we had one story idea that we went over that had a great example of that, oh, the HIV in Vietnam funding where he said over the next two years the funding is sunsetting for prevention and treatment. So that's a great example of something that's a great magazine article pitch, where you can say, "You know, six months from now we'll be writing that in the following six months this will happen," so you're ahead of the news.

The other thing to do is to ask yourself what's going to happen next with any current piece of news, and write about that. Talk to people. What's the next thing that will happen? What hasn't yet been said about this? Is there a study going to come out? Is

an election will happen? I mean, I'll give you an example. I wrote about drunk driving laws in Washington State and about the impact of drunk driving deaths on the families.

And the way it was spun was that in the upcoming legislative session a bill was going to be discussed to tighten the laws, so we were able to write it ahead of that, and it would drop about the time that that session opened where that would be discussed, so if people were interested they could get involved. So that's the kind of timing. I used to have a great big futures file when I was a beat reporter with all the days of the month in it, that I'd physically drop little scraps of news into. But everyone does this electronically now.

But you start creating a calendar of things that are going to happen in the future, and looking at how you could write about them. How do you know what will be newsworthy in the future? By what's newsworthy now and what the next thing is that's going to happen as a result of that news that just happened now. You start thinking about, what will be the next domino to fall here?

And a lot of times an election will come in November, or you know that the Chinese ambassador will be visiting in six months, that kind of thing. You start getting an eye for future news pegs. Someone is starting a study, and it's going to be completed a year from now, that kind of thing. So this is awesome. Let's take more of it over to the Pitch Clinic forum. There is the link.

If you have not yet joined us for Pitch Clinic we would love to have you. We have roughly 20 or so seats left. And yeah, be sure to take these to the forum. Hopefully we gave you some feedback, and you can post a little bit of an iteration. And you can start getting feedback from our fabulous editor staff. The link is on the screen. Oh, let me put it back into chat as well. Here you go.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. Thank you, everybody, for coming. That was a really fun call.

Carol Tice:

That was a fun call.

Linda Formichelli:

I love critiquing ideas.

Carol Tice:

Yeah, we love doing this call. It's always really fun, and it's always a fresh set of ideas. And Tammy, yeah, on the forums you are free to offer up more than one pitch.

Linda Formichelli:

Or you mean, more than one idea.

Carol Tice:

Yeah, more than one story idea, that is fine. But yeah, hopefully this gives you an introduction to sort of how to start with your seed of your idea of what you're interested in, and start refining it, and looking at markets, and seeing where you could bring something fresh and interesting where an editor is like, "Dang, we need that article." Yeah, resubmit in the forum.

Linda Formichelli:

And I was just trying to say, you can put up as many ideas as you want, hopefully one at a time. So if for some reason one gets panned then you could move on to the next one, although that doesn't usually happen. But eventually you're going to be picking the one idea that you got permission on to move forward, and you're going to be doing your query on that idea, one query.

Carol Tice:

All right. Kristie says, "I'm leaving empowered." Awesome. Yeah, we hope so. That is really the point of this event, and we will see folks over in the forums and on the call on Thursday.

Linda Formichelli:

Yes. And one more thing, Deborah. Everybody will get feedback, whether it's on the next call or in the forum. Everybody in Pitch Clinic is definitely going to get their ideas critiqued, every single person.

Carol Tice:

Right on.

Linda Formichelli:

Thank you, everyone.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. And we do save our chat logs, too, so this whole conversation will also be available to Pitch Clinic members.