

## ISOJ 2023: Day 2

### Keynote Session

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Chair: [Evan Smith](#), co-founder and senior advisor, **The Texas Tribune**, and senior advisor, **Emerson Collective**

- Keynote speaker: [Joe Kahn](#), executive editor, **The New York Times**
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**Evan Smith** Thank you. Thank you, Mallary. Thank you, Rosental always for gathering us this time of year. We appreciate you. And good morning to everybody. I am indeed Evan Smith, the co-founder of the *Texas Tribune* and a senior adviser at both the *Texas Tribune* and Emerson Collective. I'm so pleased to be back again at ISOJ, and I am especially pleased to welcome Joe Kahn, the executive editor of *The New York Times*, back to Austin. In that iconic role, which he assumed last June, he oversees all aspects of *The Times's* news reports. Previously, he served as the paper's managing editor since 2016 with a remit that included pushing *The Times*.

Is this not working? Okay, let's try it again. How much of that... Well, that's better. Obviously. That's immediately better. How much of that... Yes, let's give him a hand. Appreciate that. All right.

Previously, Joe served as the paper's managing editor since 2016 with a remit that included pushing *The Times* to become a fully digital first news operation, building a global news operation, transforming the newsrooms culture to be more diverse and inclusive and encouraging new forms of storytelling. I'll ask him shortly how all that's going.

Born and raised in Boston, a graduate of Harvard University, he began his career in 1987 in local news at the *Dallas Morning News*. There is always a Texas connection. Later he worked as a China correspondent for the *Wall Street Journal*. He joined the staff of *The Times* 25 years ago. In that time, he's been a business reporter in New York, an economics correspondent in Washington, a foreign correspondent in China, and an editor on and later the editor of the International Desk, which won six Pulitzer Prizes while his hands touch the wheel. Here's how this morning's session will go. Joe will set the scene for a few minutes, then we'll chat for a while, then we'll go to your questions. Confidential to Jay Rosen, I told him you'd be nice. Joe, thanks for making the trip. The floor is yours.

**Joe Kahn** Thank you so much, Evan. It's a pleasure to be here, to be back in Texas and back in Austin. Was just here just a few months ago for the *Tribune* and really happy to be back. It's a good journalism town and a lot of energy here, so it's nice to get out of New York and come and visit you. I have a very uncharacteristic for people like me thing, which is that I actually have some slides. If I can make it work. It will come.

So actually, let me go back on. There we go. So I'm the executive editor of *The New York Times*, as Evan said, and I've been in the job for about nine months now. This is sort of a snapshot of some of the news that's kept us busy. Obviously, we're in the second year of a war in Ukraine, which has probably been the number one challenge for us as a news

organization — just in terms of the scale of the conflict, a giant land war in Europe; the array of journalism that we're seeking to do in a dangerous war zone, including war correspondents and frontline reporting; the sort of explanatory journalism around the biggest shake-up to the geopolitical order that we've seen, certainly in my time, certainly since the end of the Cold War; but also how to do great video journalism, forensic video investigative work, great frontline photography in a war zone — probably the number one task and also the daily the biggest daily worry that I have.

We have some of that going on at home as well with the sort of proliferation of mass shootings which unfortunately become a running storyline for us and many other media. We've been busy also trying to expand and improve what we're doing in the audio space. There's a slide here where the reference of the introduction of "Hard Fork", which is a tech podcast that's doing nice recently, and we have more to go in that area. Climate change obviously has been a major topic and trying to relate the realities of climate change visually to a much larger audience and bring the news to them in a way that feels urgent and relevant to them has been a major task for that. The economy is relatively strong, but we're going through a sharp inflationary period, which has been a major theme of our coverage. We had a midterm election that turned out to be, surprisingly, sort of interesting and surprising, and it's a result that was a test for a relatively new political team. But I think it was a really interesting one, including some knowledge that we got about polling out of all of this in preparation for next year's election. Of course, we're heavily invested in investigative journalism and deeply revealing work, including there's an example here of some of the work we did around George Santos, whose resumé was largely fictional as you know.

None of these will be surprising to any of you, but these are some of the things that we talk about regularly as my priorities and the priorities for my new leadership team. The first one is probably the most obvious, which is that we wake up every day and we worry about how we're doing on the most important storylines of the day and we always put it first. I always put it first because we forget that at our peril... My title is executive editor, but if the executive part of it takes me out of the daily mix — beginning much earlier in the day these days than it did when I first started in journalism... Starting from when you roll out of bed in the morning to when you go to sleep at night, if we're not staying on all the biggest storylines, we're going to fall behind and we won't serve our readers well.

Independence is something everyone in this room has heard a lot about and we're thinking about. It includes but is not limited to that sort of dreaded word objectivity and what that means in today's media environment. But it really means holding ourselves to account, challenging ourselves to make sure that we're understanding the changing perspectives in a 360 way on every big story that we're covering. What are we missing? What are our assumptions? Can we test those assumptions? Can we challenge ourselves? And often can we challenge our readers to think in new, open-minded and curious ways about all the events of the world?

Digital Excellence. I talked a little bit about that, but basically, it is the never-ending and will never end task of continuing to think about journalism, journalistic forms, the way we tell stories and the media that we use to tell them. The internet has unlocked for us essentially unlimited potential to tell stories in any media available. How best to use those tools? How to invest in each one of them? How to integrate them for the best storytelling experience that we can? Is something that basically changes every day. It's certainly changed in my time as an editor and will continue to evolve very quickly. So those are a few of the things we're working on.

**Evan Smith** Okay, that's great. We'll touch on some of those as we go over the next 25 minutes or so before we go to questions with the audience. So, Joe, it occurs to me that literally one year ago this week — this Wednesday, April 19<sup>th</sup> — it was announced that Dean Baquet would step away as executive editor and that you would succeed him. Go back in time. Why was the job right for you and why were you right for it?

**Joe Kahn** Yeah. I mean, next time you should have my boss here, and you can ask him that. He's the publisher of *The Times*, and obviously...

**Evan Smith** But you have an opinion about that, surely.

**Joe Kahn** I have an opinion. I mean, I think... So one of the key reasons is *The New York Times* wasn't broken. Dean and I worked together for five years and Dean was executive editor during a period of rapid change. I think we felt and the publisher felt that we had the right combination of deep commitment to what makes a news organization special and how we can continue to distinguish ourselves in terms of our reporting, the quality of the reporting, the accuracy of it, but also continuously evolve. We didn't have our feet stuck in the mud. We were not trying to defend an old way of doing things against the winds of change. We were pretty continuously investing in trying new things, developing new media, changing the way we tell stories, trying to grow our readership. We had the right combination of commitment to quality that the best traditional news organizations had. I think we had also learned, and this was not always the case... But we had also learned that we stand still at our peril. We had shown that as a team, as a leadership team in the newsroom, were willing to experiment, to embrace change, to try new things, not to be afraid to fail at some of them, and then to invest heavily, remake kind of the workflow of the newsroom in the way we do our jobs based on what is working.

**Evan Smith** I would agree with you that running in place is not a strategy stipulated. We agree on that, but presumably when you went in for whatever kind of interview with AG or with the board or with the search committee of the paper, you presumably said these are the things specifically as I sketch out my vision for *The Times* going forward that I think we need to do. You were not coming in to be a caretaker. I mean, I appreciate the idea that they thought everything was working and that you were a logical choice because you had been part of the team that had made sure it was working. But presumably, there were things you wanted to quote-unquote fix, or at least in your phrase, evolve. So specifically, what were those things? What did you say in the interview?

**Joe Kahn** There are a lot of different areas where I think we still have a lot of work to do. I mean, we're a global news organization. We want to be a global news organization. We're not really global in our organization in terms of the way we manage the report, in terms of the distribution of our staff, and in terms of the diversity and expertise of our journalism. We have a long way to go to develop that. We have a long way to go to develop that as a national news organization. We have too many people on the coasts. We have too many people still in New York and DC, in L.A. and San Francisco. We want to invest more in understanding what's happening around the country with people who are living among the people they're reporting on. So we have a long way to go in terms of realizing our ambitions to be a truly national and truly global news organization. That was certainly one of the things that we discussed.

I felt that we were coming out of an era. It was the tail end of COVID and coming off of the Trump era where we needed to reinvest in some of the traditional values of journalistic

messaging and independence. We talked about independence. It was at a time when the country was very polarized and when not enough news organizations, I think, were truly committed to providing journalism that's value to a wide range of people with different social, cultural and political perspectives. So that was a big challenge. Then the third one we also talked about a bit, which is our digital transition as a newsroom is just not finished and it won't be finished. The leadership itself needs to embrace the benefits, the dynamism of trying new things, trying new forms, breaking free of sort of the purely newspaper approach or newspaper workflow or even the newspaper way of writing to try to reach a larger audience than we've ever reached historically. So those are those were the big ones.

**Evan Smith** So my math is ten months. You said nine months. I'll go with your number, nine months in. How much of that, if any of it have you been able to accomplish? Is *The Times* different in ways that you can see or that we can see after nine or ten months? Is it better as a result of those nine months? If so, how? If not, why not? And when will it be better?

**Joe Khan** I hope some of that commitment shows up in a variety of ways. I worked so closely with Dean for many years that there was nothing that was on my mind that we weren't sharing and trying together. So you're not going to... you would not have noticed a sharp break overnight where, "Oh, *The New York Times* is doing this now. They never would have done that before."

**Evan Smith** Well, much of what you described is also accomplished incrementally, one imagines.

**Joe Khan** Is it is accomplished incrementally, but I think you will start to see some of that effort show up. We certainly made an effort during last year's political cycle to do our best of going really hard at the threats to democracy that were showing up in the aftermath of the 2020 election and the election denialism, but also really trying to understand the political motivations of a rising class of Republicans in those elections, really investing heavily in looking at the motivations for voters as well. It was an interesting tightrope to walk because we didn't want to preach to people about threats to democracy per se, but we really wanted to cover the heck out of the people who are campaigning to roll back the democratic system. I think we probably contributed, it's hard to take credit... But I think we probably contributed to the results that we saw in the midterm election where the people who were campaigning most actively for rolling back democratic protections or voting rights or election denialism very often lost. It didn't mean the Republicans as a whole or the GOP did badly in the election, but the people who were the most virulent election deniers tended to lose, particularly when they were running for office where they would have had control over the voter...

**Evan Smith** From inside the newsroom, is that a goal or a consequence? Did you set out to change the course of this or was it a result of your doing your job?

**Joe Khan** I think it was a result of us doing our job and focusing very intently on the most acute threats to the democratic system. We're not nonpartisan on that by the way. *The New York Times* doesn't exist in a non-democratic system. *The New York Times* can't exist in Turkey. It can't exist in Russia.

**Evan Smith** So you're team democracy?

**Joe Khan** We are on the side of democracy.

**Evan Smith** Right. So it's interesting that in an audience full of whatever the number of people is, there were like five hands in favor of democracy just now. I think it probably tells you the challenge that you've got, right?

**Joe Khan** Yeah, it's absolutely true. But it is one of those issues that I think there's no such thing as a free press in a non-democratic system. How you define what's good for a healthy democracy is a matter of debate, and we have to be open minded about that debate. But rolling back voting rights, prohibiting people from voting, election manipulation, disinformation, false information are anti-democratic, and we are against them.

**Evan Smith** Okay. So I want to ask you about a couple of questions that are internal to *The Times* and its operations before we go broad and talk about journalism. Then we're going to use the time we have with the audience, I hope wisely. You had a note on the slide that advanced more quickly, I think, than you wanted. You talked about journalistic excellence, you talked about independence, you talked about digital excellence, something that was called out on the slide, but you didn't actually address was diversity and culture at *The Times*. In fact, if you go back to look at your bio on *The Times's* website, you specifically call out transforming the newsroom's diversity and culture as something that as managing editor was a priority for you. Say a word about that and then I have a question.

**Joe Khan** Yeah, thanks for pointing that out and thanks for asking, because it is absolutely one of our top priorities. It's a top priority for a variety of reasons. We are committed to diversifying the newsroom for all the reasons that the people in this room will be familiar with. We want to have a newsroom that looks like the country and increasingly like the world that we're covering. Historically, we've been overrepresented by men. We've been overrepresented by white people and developing journalism from different backgrounds, different races, ethnicities, and geographies is a huge commitment. We're making progress. We're not there yet, but we want to create a news culture and a place to work that's aspirational and fulfilling to a variety of people who come from very different backgrounds than the one that I came from or many traditional newspaper journalists. So doing that means investing in the capacity to bring people on often at an earlier stage in their career and offering them the opportunities to grow and to learn and to try different things. They might come in with one particular narrow expertise to fill a slot that we need or role that we need, but they want to grow as journalists. They want to try things over the course of their career. We have to provide those opportunities for them or they're going to leave. So it's not only bringing people in, it's creating a culture that incentivizes them to stay. That gets that we learn from them, but they also learn from us about our values as journalists and what we're trying to achieve as a news organization. Hopefully, so they buy into the mission. That's a huge task.

**Evan Smith** Over the years that I ran the *Texas Tribune*, Joe, I came to believe that diversity was not an HR issue as much as that's a journalism issue; that your journalism is better if you have a staff and leadership that is reflective of the material you're covering and the audience that you serve. So it's not just about the internal workings in the sense of providing a path forward for people from marginalized backgrounds or making sure that the staff looks like the material or the audience, but also the journalism itself needs to be inclusive. That's got to be part of the conversation.

**Joe Khan** I think that's right. I think that's right. I think we need to debate the stories that we tell and how we're doing on those stories. We have to be open to internal criticism as

well as external criticism. It's not an easy thing, and we don't know exactly where the lines are. The lines are shifting a little bit. We want our staff to have a voice in our journalism, but we don't do journalism by vote either. Getting that line in the right place, having enough openness, having a thick skin and being willing to listen to tough criticism internally, as well as externally, is part of developing that inclusive culture.

**Evan Smith** Well, let's talk about that. On this question of transforming the newsroom culture to be more diverse and your journalism as well as the culture to be more inclusive, I've got to ask you about the first big family fight. The controversy in your tenure. This was the fight over the paper's coverage of transgender issues. We're all surely aware of the February 15th letter from what ended up being more than 1,200 current and former contributors accusing the *Times* of anti-trans bias and the subsequent strong response from you and the opinion editor Katie Kingsbury, who's somewhere in the room.

I'll stipulate with several people inside the newsroom have described to me with admiration as an expression of your leadership. Like I've heard from people inside the paper that they viewed your response as leaderly, right? I at least was not aware that the issue two months later is still live. Just last week, on April 6th, a subset of the group that sent the first letter, sent another letter to A.G. Sulzberger accusing the paper of, in your response, intimidating staffers and of ongoing editorial bias on this set of issues. Just yesterday, there was quite a bit of chatter on Twitter about the Missouri attorney general, citing Emily Bazelon, a *New York Times Magazine* story in his directive banning gender-affirming care not just for minors, but for adults — in a footnote in his directive. What do you say about all this?

**Joe Kahn** Now you're really getting into it.

**Evan Smith** Well, yes.

**Joe Kahn** That's good. That's good. This has been a difficult issue for us. The trans issue in general is one of the most important and delicate issues that we're covering. I'm immensely proud of the coverage that we're doing. We have a wide number of journalists — science journalists, national reporters, journalists covering politics, magazine writers and others — who have taken on, I think, in great detail and under difficult circumstances, because there is a lot of blowback and really went deep on some of the issues around trans identity and medical care for youth who are experiencing gender dysphoria. We've had scores of articles about this. The vast majority of them are important articles that I think are embracing of this struggle of people who identify as trans and are going through difficult transitions within their family, seeking the right medical care, experiencing discrimination in their schools or in their workplaces. Also looking for examples of trans people who have broken through barriers, achieved something that's notable or kind of novel for people who identify that way. So that's been a hugely important and by far the overwhelming quantity wise of our coverage has been in that nature. We've also had several kind of tough looks at some of the issues; I think empathetic, but tough looks at some of the uncertainties in medical diagnosis and care, the struggles that individuals have had trying to find the right level of care, trying to find the right diagnosis, and then, of course, the spate of anti-trans legislation that is spreading around the country. There's a story prominently on the website this morning about how really just in the space of six months, we've gone from two states with legislation putting restrictions on trans care to 12 states.

**Evan Smith** You're in one.

**Joe Kahn** Yes. It's happening very quickly. A lot of it is extremely disruptive and disheartening to people who identify as trans and are not only not getting help from their states or from their elected representatives in big parts of the country, but are being actively interfered with in a way that I worry and I think journalistically is quite sort of soundly of concern that it's going to lead to greater psychological problems and medical emergencies and even suicide. So this is a huge issue for us. Obviously, you're referring to the trans community has been very concerned with a couple of pieces in particular, if you've read them and if you're interested in the issue, I urge you to read them because they're deeply reported, really carefully written pieces of journalism that do raise questions or at least look deeply at some of the dilemmas around trans care for youth in particular.

It's true that in the case of Missouri and some other cases in footnotes and whatever those articles are cited. If every journalist held back from doing stories that are important because of the potential for someone in the political system to misuse that information in pursuit of a political agenda or a piece of legislation, we would have to remain mum on all the issues of the day. So it really... We can do good journalism. We can present it fairly in a nuanced way. We can't prevent people from weaponizing the information that we use. And by the way, they don't need even to have that as a tool. They can go ahead and invent things on their own anyway.

**Evan Smith** Indeed. Okay. Speaking of Twitter, referenced it in the last thing, *NPR* exited this week. Will you? Should you?

**Joe Kahn** Yeah, I watched *NPR's* deliberations over that carefully. I don't think it's a secret that we're very interested and worried about what's happening on social media platforms in general and Twitter in particular. Eighteen months ago now or two years ago, Dean, when Dean was still my boss, we joined in an effort to — that was before Elon Musk was the owner of Twitter... But we did urge our people to take a step back from Twitter and try to keep that platform in particular in perspective. I do think even before Elon Musk became engaged with it, that journalists spend too much time on Twitter. I think they're too attuned to what the Twitter audience thinks about them and their journalism. They're too attuned to trying to build a big following on Twitter. It's not we didn't tell people, "Get off, get out." We did tell people to cut down and do less, and pay attention to readers, viewers, and the audience that is way beyond media, Twitter. I think we just all became too attuned to the media side of Twitter, which really isn't representative of the broad American public which has the tendency to pull journalists down a rabbit hole.

**Evan Smith** Yet, you're still on.

**Joe Kahn** We're still on there because I don't know how much benefit there would be in trying to kind of get into a frontal battle with Elon Musk. It's sort of... We're not doing a huge amount on Twitter. We're hoping journalists spend a little less time on it. We're also not looking to kind of lead a media boycott of Twitter or something like that. I don't know what's going to happen to the platform. I hope Musk can manage to improve it at some time. It doesn't look like that at the moment, but I hope that he can. It would be nice to have high-quality social media platforms and a place for people to talk about and share their work and comment on it. What I'd like to do is not worry that much about Elon Musk and Twitter, but actually bring some of that energy back onto our own platform. I'd like to get people talking about the topics that we're covering, the stories that we're writing, contributing to that on *The New York Times*, including our own journalists, engaging with readers in a quality way on our platform, as opposed to running somewhere else to do it.

**Evan Smith** Couple more. The business of the business of *The Times* is good, right? Last year, 2022, 2.3 billion in revenue, which was an 11% increase over the previous year. You are at nearly 10 million subscribers as of this February; an announcement by *The Times* that you were ahead of schedule in terms of accomplishing that goal, and you're expecting to be or at least predicting to be at 15 million by 2027. Why is *The Times* an outlier in this and how will you get to 15 million? What's it going to take? Is it going to be through news or is it going to be through the spelling bee or is it going to be through cooking? It's going to be through stuff that is adjacent but is not actually reporting the news every day?

**Joe Kahn** Well, it's definitely going to be all of those things. We've made a very intentional decision to kind of create a journalistic bundle — led by news, because news is the leading driver of engagement with new audiences when we're covering issues that are urgent and relevant to a larger and larger audience nationally and globally. We will bring readers in. We hope to habituate them. We hope to expose them to the breadth and depth of the journalistic mission that we have across breaking news and great enterprise and culture and lifestyle reporting and opinion and interpretive journalism. News helps us bring in those first-time readers as we cover events and issues that are relevant to them. The rest of the report exposes them to the commitment to depth and quality that we have. So news is still number one, but some of those other journalistically adjacent services that you've described — cooking, which grew out of the newsroom; *Wirecutter*, which is a product recommendation service; the games team, which also grew out of the newsroom and is expanding the number of games that we offer; the latest acquisition is *The Athletic*, which is a sports site really dedicated with really in-depth journalism for sports fans who follow particular teams and leagues. That's also part of our bundle now, too. So news is going to be the number one source for bringing new people in. Those other journalistic services or the things that we hope will keep them there.

**Evan Smith** So it's an any and all strategy really.

**Joe Kahn** I think it's any and all it's not either-or. I think the bundle strategy is what has helped us get to around 10 million, and we're going to continue to invest and build that out to get to some of those next hurdles.

**Evan Smith** Last question before we go to the audience. There are 70 million people in the country right now — one-fifth of the country's population — living in a community with no source of news or one seriously at risk. Since 2005, a quarter of the nation's papers have shut down. By 2025, it'll be a third of the nation's newspapers that will have shut down. As you well know, a quarter of the U.S. newsroom employment has disappeared since 2008. Like we're in a really bad place. The consequence of this is that we have two Americas. We have one informed and we have one not. We're in a situation in which Pat Moynihan is turning over in his grave. It turns out we are entitled to both our own opinions and our own facts these days, in a lot of places. Back to your earlier comment about threats to democracy, to me seems to be the most pernicious threat to our democracy. We've created a generation of low information and no information. Citizens who either don't participate in election time or, God forbid, do anyway. What do we and what do you do about that?

**Joe Kahn** These are the questions that I should be throwing back at you, Evan, because you've done more about that than I'd say really anybody else that I know actually. In the combination of building the *Texas Tribune* here and then in the work that you're doing to expand the Emerson collective support for local journalism, I think you're going to continue



to produce innovative solutions. We were talking beforehand a little bit. There isn't going to be a one size fits all solution. There have to be unique variations on this everywhere.

I absolutely agree about the urgency of that struggle. It's remarkable to me the hole that is left in the news deserts, particularly in smaller communities. It's remarkable how quickly abuses of power will fill that vacuum really quickly. Just before I came here yesterday, we had the Polk Awards, which are a great award for real reporting. They made a point this year of singling out some really good local reporting that's being done, including a couple of different efforts that took place in Alabama, some efforts by the much-diminished team at *The Miami Herald*. We're seeing great examples of investigative journalism that have such rich pickings around the country, in part because there are so many news deserts around.

We're doing what we can to help figure out how *The New York Times* can be part of that solution. My predecessor, Dean Baquet, is personally developing an initiative, local investigative journalism fellows around the country to help build up some of that muscle. I hope we're not done with the way that we can try to scale that. Ultimately, Evan, this is the kind of thing that's going to take hundreds of people thinking creatively about their own communities and ways of raising money and support for what is clearly just an obvious journalistic opportunity, which is just doing good journalism in communities and holding people to account.

**Evan Smith** Good. Rosental, will you let me take these questions, please? Okay, we'll go over here first, then we'll go over here then we'll go over here. Sir?

**Faheem** Hi, my name is Faheem. I am an Afghan journalist. My question is, what's *The Times* policy regarding their local reporters in war zones?

**Joe Kahn** Local reporters in? I didn't hear the last part.

**Faheem** In war zones.

**Joe Kahn** Oh, that's a good question. I think about it so often with respect to the huge dependence that we have on many, many colleagues in Ukraine who make it possible to do our reporting there safely. We have an unlimited commitment to the safety of our own journalists in a place like Ukraine, but also to the safety of everyone who helps us do our journalism there, including the translators and the drivers and the fixers. Afghanistan was one of the places where I think we made good on that commitment. We had a big role in evacuating more than 200 people who had worked for *The New York Times* over the 20 years of the Afghan conflict, and resettled many of them in the United States. Some went to other places around the world. Actually, many of them became resettled here in Texas, our Afghan staff. So we went kind of to the ends of the earth to help get our staff out, and we will do for anyone who works for us locally in a war zone.

**Evan Smith** Rosental, I'm just telling you, wherever you are, pull me off the stage forcibly, okay? But I'm going to ask questions as long as you don't pull me off the stage. Sir.

**Kelly Koppel** Hi, Joe. Welcome back to Texas. I'm Kelly Koppel and I research and teach in the Media Innovation Lab at Texas State University. I'm from Ohio originally, which for 100 years was the most predictive swing state in presidential elections in the U.S. Last two cycles went eight points for Donald Trump, the same margin as Texas. How important is ideological diversity to the staff in *The New York Times*?

**Joe Kahn** It's very important. I wouldn't say ideological per se, from the perspective of that we're asking people their political opinions before we hire them. But I do think coming from a variety of geographies where people are infused and exposed to a wider range of political perspectives than what they might get if they came purely in a kind of East Coast community or major city is important. So I never asked people, what's your political view? Are you a Republican or Democrat? I do ask people where they come from, what the experience in their lives have been, what's happening in their community, how they've come to understand that. If they can bring that kind of perspective to us, including from places like Ohio, it's going to strengthen our report and help us understand what's going on there.

**Evan Smith** But the default setting is people assume *The New York Times* is liberal. *The New York Times* newsroom is liberal. *The New York Times* reporters are liberal. And you get asked, as we probably all get asked in this business, who are your conservative voices in the newsroom? And when you say I have no idea, the response is snickering. What do you do about that?

**Joe Kahn** Well, I ask Katie what she's doing in opinion and she's...

**Evan Smith** Katie, fix it for us. Haha.

**Joe Kahn** Yeah, she's actually done a lot. I think the diversity of voices that we have on our staff is showing up in really intelligent ways, actually, and thought-provoking ways in our opinion pages. We don't encourage... In fact, we don't allow reporters to express their political opinions in our report, but I think you have seen and will continue to see diversity of perspectives raised in our news report frequently as well. We've hired people... For example, we've hired a couple of people who really come from evangelical backgrounds. I don't ask them if they're Republican or Democrat. I'm very interested if they were raised in an evangelical community. If they talk regularly with people from those communities. They come with story ideas in the moments where those issues are in the news and they diversify the perspectives that we have in our report.

**Evan Smith** You've hired veterans. I mean, that's the other thing. I think that's been a hugely additive thing, too.

**Joe Kahn** Absolutely additive, and pays dividends for us every day.

**David Clinch** Hi, Joe. David Clinch. In my third act, I now help news companies make the money they need to pay for the journalism that they do. My question for you is, how do you get my adult 24-year-old son to stop hacking into my *New York Times* login and convert him to a paying customer going forward? Obviously, euphemistically, I'm talking about how do you convert young people who consume *The New York Times* but don't pay for it because their parents do or their school does or somebody else does, at that key moment of becoming your future audience.

**Evan Smith** End the family account. That's what you have to do.

**David Clinch** Which they have, but explain why the family account works versus him being forced to pay for himself.

**Joe Kahn** Yeah. Evan asked me a business question, and that's kind of a business question, too. Fortunately, I'm not necessarily paid to solve those problems. We do have a big team... One of the things that's made us so strong as a news organization, as a subscription-first digital news organization, is that we have a subscription team that is experimenting and grappling with exactly those questions: how to develop the most robust subscription culture, how to enhance the experience of subscribers, how to personalize the experience to a degree that I hope in the not terribly distant future you're going to want to have your own account on *The New York Times*. It's going to want to show your statistics, your interests, what you've read, how you've done on spelling bee versus... I do think things like spelling bee and Wordle start to penalize people who have a family account. You know what I mean? It's kind of like you go to do Wordle and someone already did it.

**David Clinch** Oh yeah. My son is pissed off if I get to Pangram. He's on the warpath if that actually happens.

**Joe Kahn** Exactly. You take everyone's Pangram away from them, that kind of thing. So those are what we're building toward. In the same way that it probably took Netflix quite a few years to begin to crack down on password sharing and account sharing and that sort of thing. We're not looking to penalize anybody. We want the subscriber experience to be positive, but we will edge our way into getting readers to be more habituated and want to have their own accounts.

**Dagmar Thiel** Good morning. I'm Dagmar Thiel, an Ecuadorian freedom of expression activist with Fundamedios. Since I came to the U.S., *The New York Times* is for me one of my first news sources. I love the journalism you do. But yesterday we had an appalling panel about what's happening in many countries with journalists that are being harassed, detained, and killed. They were journalists from Turkey, Nigeria, Ukraine, Cambodia, Afghanistan, and Guatemala. I seldom see those stories in *The New York Times*. We have here a huge group of Guatemalans. We have a huge group of Nicaraguan journalists. They're all in exile. What can *The New York Times* do, as one of the most important voices of the Occidental Hemisphere to raise their voice for freedom of expression around the world and to support journalists who are being harassed all over the world?

**Joe Kahn** Yeah. Thank you for that question. I heard about that panel and it sounded really important and moving, and we need to do more. We need to be continuously investigating abuses against journalists around the world. Obviously, it's just one example, but it's an important one, the heavy coverage of the arrest of a *Wall Street Journal* reporter.

**Evan Smith** The most important, Evan.

**Joe Kahn** The most important, Evan G. The huge struggle that we will face to work against the criminalization of foreign correspondents around the world. But you're absolutely right. It's happening in many, many countries, including some countries that we once considered to be on the pathway to or to have been democracies. The deterioration is really sharp. It's really sharp in the place where I spent a lot of time in China. It's happening in Turkey. It's happening in many places in Africa. It's happening all over Central and South America. We need to continue to shine a light on it, and I accept your warning, we need to do more.

**Evan Smith** Yes. Okay, good. We're going to keep going.

**Sara Fischer** All right. Hi. Sara Fischer with Axios. I wanted to know how you feel about the stalled union contract. Are you worried that is impacting the morale of your newsroom?

**Evan Smith** Great question.

**Joe Kahn** Thanks, Sarah, and thanks for what you do, I am a reader. Yes, I'm worried, but I'm also hopeful. We've had two years without a contract for our guild-represented staff at *The New York Times*. That's way too long.

**Evan Smith** What's the holdup, Joe?

**Joe Kahn** The negotiations are tough. I'm not a labor lawyer. I'm not in the negotiating room, but it's been very, very slow to get to agreement on a wide range of issues. It's a very, very active guild leadership, which has taken an aggressive posture toward these negotiations. It's been slow. But the truth is, we're almost there. We're almost there. We're going to get there. We've had good and productive conversations. There's been some progress lately. I want my staff to get a good package of salary and benefits. The company has put a lot of good offers on the table. The negotiations are really getting down to brass tacks at the moment. We're going to get an agreement.

**Evan Smith** If we were sitting here in three months, would this be resolved?

**Joe Kahn** Boy. I hope so, and I do think so.

**Evan Smith** Rosenthal, keep going or not? Rosenthal, keep going or not? Last question right here. Yes, hi.

**Translator** I'm a journalist from Venezuela. You said you wanted *The New York Times* to be truly a global organization and that you wanted your coverage to also reflect that. That diversity was one of your priorities. But a few years ago, you closed *The New York Times* Spanish edition. Isn't that a contradiction?

**Joe Kahn** Possibly. Yes. I do think that ultimately to be a truly global news organization, we're going to need to be providing at scale the best of our journalism in other languages. Languages other than English. We need to figure out the proper business model for that, a sustainable business model. We are a digital subscription news organization. So developing a paying audience in English has taken us some time. Developing a paying audience in other languages is probably going to take significantly more time than that. We do need to figure out a way to provide the best of our journalism.

So we are doing a fair amount of translation, in Spanish and not only in Spanish, for impactful pieces of reporting that we think are relevant to particular audiences that would benefit from seeing that in their own language. We are still spending significant money on translation. We haven't yet figured out the formula to develop a full newsroom or a full news report entirely in another language that actually is paid for, at least in part by people in that language who become subscribers to *The Times*. So we did pull back to some extent in order to continue to improve what we're doing in English for more and more people around the world. But I don't think that our transition to a more global news organization will be complete until we figure out how to provide more of that to people in their own language.

**Evan Smith** Okay. We blew through our time with permission because there was so much interest in Joe Kahn. Please give Joe Khan a big hand. Thank him very much for being here. Thank you, Rosental.