

Noah Shachtman

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Welcome to Media Masters, a series of one-to-one interviews with people at the top of the media game. Today I'm joined down the line by Noah Shachtman, the award-winning journalist who is the new editor-in-chief of Rolling Stone, the world famous music, politics and culture title. Previously executive editor at The Daily Beast, which he turned into a "scoop factory," Noah takes over the counter-culture bible with a mission for the magazine to make waves. Also a national security expert, Noah has reported from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Kuwait, and he's a fellow of the Brookings Institution. An accomplished bassist, he's also been a touring musician with several bands. Noah, thank you for joining me.

Thanks.

Well, what an incredible achievement, where do we start? I mean, first of all, congratulations on the new gig. Editing Rolling Stone must be the dream job, is it not?

It's crazy, I'm still at the pinch-myself phase and I'm doubly happy too because, having nothing to do with me, a few weeks after I started Rolling Stone launched its UK edition, which I'm incredibly happy about. And I think we're going to make waves on both sides of the pond.

So come on then. I mean, it's not really a job interview because you've got the job, but what are the plans? What are the next steps? You've got this new magazine, the UK edition, you must have a direction of travel where you want to take things. I think people listening to this want to hear about how you got here, but also what are you going to do with it?

Yeah. So, I mean, I think there's a couple of things. First off, I think that Rolling Stone in recent years has been identified a little too much with music's history rather than music's future. And so I'm really gonna work my hardest to make sure the place is as future-oriented as possible and not looked on as some paper or digital rock and roll

hall of fame. So what does that mean? We're going to get newsier on our website, we're going to break more news, get more scoops. We're going to be faster. And then both in digital and in print, we're going to be emphasizing a lot more the big artists of today and tomorrow and not of yesteryear. And I think if we do those two things we should be in pretty good shape.

Do you feel the weight of the responsibility? I mean, 'cause obviously that's a huge task. You've got to take this team with you, evolve and grow the magazine, recapture some of that esteem and that heritage and positivity in which the magazine is held.

I'm not going to lie. I do, a very famous writer who I won't name put her hand on my shoulders after this announcement was made and said, 'You know, it's up to you.' I was like: 'Oh my God.' Yeah, there's definitely some weight on my shoulders, but I knew that going into the job and I wouldn't have taken the job if I didn't want a little weight.

I mean, you've got such great brand recognition and obviously huge esteem. People know what Rolling Stone is, but you're competing against... my Rolling Stone app on my phone is one icon competing against 200 others for my attention, be it Netflix, be it CNN. How do you cut through and capture that? Is it a question of sort of recapturing readers that may have fallen by the wayside? What is the actual sort of strategy to get new eyeballs?

Yeah, the strategy is to be really good.

Nice and simple!

Yeah. That's the strategy. Be really good. Be really original and offer something that other people don't offer on the internet. And when Rolling is at its best, it offers a combination of deep insider access and a deeply skeptical outside perspective. And I think when you combine those two things, it's incredibly powerful. You know, we're going to go behind the velvet rope and then we're going to tell you what the hell is really going on there. And I think if we really deliver on those two things, we're going to be in really good shape.

I mean, you have a world-class team of writers at your disposal. Do you want to revive the spirit of Rolling Stones, Gonzo political journalism?

Yeah. I mean, I think it's always been there. I think I just want to make it more consistent and more consistently delivering stories that sort of normal political reportage doesn't deliver. And so, yeah a little bit more of a wild man spirit is necessary, but at the same time, look, we're in a narrow when you cannot under any circumstances cut corners on the reporting on the basics of journalism. And, you know, the stories have to be 100% buttoned up. We can be wild in spirit, but not wild in how we treat the rules of journalism.

Yeah. Cause I was going to ask about, you know, the title was spawned by a counter-culture and now is there a more corporate culture? How do you sort of please all parties, like I've been reading Rolling Stone for decades, but I'm a 46-year-old white guy and, you know, I've moved slightly to the right-of-centre. Am I the type of reader you want to retain? Do you want to keep me, but also get the younger cooler people? I don't want to go Nightclubbing anymore.

We'll go Nightclubbing for you. I've never been one to focus on demographics too much. I'd rather focus on making great journalism and, you know, Rolling Stone has always been at its best as a Bible of youth culture and we're going to continue to be that. We're totally not corporate — he says on the second floor of the Manhattan skyscraper. No, but you're never going to sort of turn back time to the origins of the magazine, but what you can do is kind of re-imagine it and stay focused on the new rather than, kind of like, resting on the place's history. And that's what I want to do.

Do you think podcasts, documentaries, or video websites? Will it be a kind of a broadening of the brand?

You know, something there already is, we've already got a number of great podcasts. We're already doing a number of really cool documentaries, with Showtime and other partners. But I think you'll start to see an increase in both of those. We also do this really cool, weird, live TV show every day on Twitch, the gaming and live-streaming network that has like a lot of big name artists that go on there and we deliver the news there too. So yeah, I mean, I know there's like some bullshit that every editor-in-chief and every publisher says, but it's true, which is: we've gotta be everywhere our audience is. Whether it's the platforms I mentioned, doing original stuff for YouTube, then Insta and TikTok, we're everywhere.

I mean, Rolling Stone is held in such warmth by its readers. I think all of your readers past and present and indeed new readers are wishing you well and maybe whoever didn't get the job that you beat to the job, they might have two or three people that maybe think that if you balls it up they might have another shot at it. But everyone else who calls wants you to succeed. I'm very interested in terms of what that success looks like. I mean, you've got a 60-million monthly global audience online, but, of course, as you were just saying there, print is in long-term decline. Is Rolling Stone going to become a kind of brand across multiple platforms largely led by digital? Or is there going to be a renaissance of the magazine? You talked earlier about launching a magazine in the UK that's bold. That's genuine courage, because it might fail. I hope it doesn't. But it could.

Yeah it might, but, you know, f*** it! If it fails then let it fail gloriously! And yeah, look both in the UK and in the US we're going to be digital first and I mean, it's 2021 about to be 2022. We're not going to pretend like print is leading the way. But print can be an enormously powerful tool to get access to top talent and to showcase great photography and to bring in top writers and then we'll want to spread that across

every platform. So, yeah, I mean, obviously digital is first and last and I'm in here every morning saying, okay, what are we putting on the site today? What have we got coming tomorrow? And I spent a lot less time on who's going to be on the cover of the March issue or what have you.

I mean this as a compliment, but you strike me as an editor of the old school, you know, the field of dreams, things, you know, build it they will come, have something of quality that draws people in rather than doing the other way about segmenting demographics and having certain things appeal to certain things and chasing clicks. It seems to me like it's quality first, good writing will attract an audience.

Yeah, that's true. Although, I've certainly been accused a number of times of also being a scandal monger and a tabloidist.

Well we'll get to that!

So I mean the work has got to be compelling and you know, part of what I need to do here is take a little bit of a magazine culture, which relied more on the print model, which is a more elliptical headline and slowly walking your way into the great reporting. And instead, really getting the great reporting and getting the really newsy nuggets way up to the top. And so that people can grab them because you are in a doggy dog contest for attention. And you gotta grab people. You can't just sit back and hope that your awesome journalism finds an audience eventually.

What type of an editor are you then coming into this post? 'Cause I can tell that you're, if I can call it, product-centric, you're clearly about the quality of the magazine, but I run a business with 20 people. And my first thought now listening to is how do you bring that about organisationally and culturally? You're going to have to bring on certain writers, promote others, fire other people. You're the leader of a new team, how do you bring them into this and get them to buy into your mission?

Yeah, I think some of it is just to me, it's like a thousand little decisions and, you know, it's a thousand little decisions about what kind of stories get promoted, what kind of headlines go on a story, what we devote resources to, what we stay away from. I think sometimes there's, especially in management circles, an overweighting of lofty vision statements and an underweighting of actually getting in the muck and just making good, hard choices every day.

Well, I suppose the first choice that you'd have to make as the editor is who do you put on the cover? Who would be a dream cover interview? How would you go about doing that? Are readers going to see an actual change on the cover that they can sort of demonstrably say is evidence of your editorship?

I would say the cover is one of the things that, look, I haven't really done a glossy magazine before, I'm more of a digital guy. And so I want to learn a little bit more about how the process works. If I'm being candid before I start making radical changes to the covers. But I think what you will see, even on the website now. And I think you'll certainly see that the issues to come are really hard investigative pieces about people who would be considered Rolling Stone cover-worthy personalities and people of influence.

I mean, rightly you've slammed what you call the access journalism of rivals, how will it work at Rolling Stone? Because this is the fine line you have to tread, isn't it that you have to call these people to account. You have to be dispassionate, you have to be objective, but on the other hand, you also want Cardi B or whoever it might be on the cover. And if you're going to sort of piss off their PR people, are they just going to turn the tap off, how do you balance that? I'm not sure there's an answer.

Well, I think it's like celebrating great art when it's great and calling out bad behavior when it's bad. And kind of 'let the chips fall where they may.' There's just going to be a lot of surprised publicists out there. Let's put it that way.

But obviously a lot of these cover stars and the people that you're covering have publicists and so on. Do you pay any particular attention to how you manage their relationship because you don't want to needlessly antagonise them but also presumably you have to at least be professional keeping their good graces. Are they big enough to know that you're just going to cover the music and if there's criticism due then you'll make it?

Yeah. Look, come back to me in a year when I know more about these relationships, but I'd say going in, we're not going to piss people off just for the sake of pissing people off, but we're definitely not going to pull our punches just because some PR person might have been sad about it.

I mean, you've broken some absolutely massive scoops in your career. I mean, just at the Daily Beast the Jeffrey Epstein's arrest, the campaign violations cited in the Trump impeachment, is that one of the best bits about what you do, the breaking of stories?

That's the ultimate high for me. That is 100% the ultimate high for me. And we've already had a couple of good moments at Rolling Stone, with this already. There's a country star here named Morgan Wallen who's like pretty much the biggest star in country right now. He got caught a while back saying racial slurs and he promised to give a half million dollars to Black-led charities as sort of an atonement for making these slurs. So, Rolling Stone called dozens and dozens of charities, local, state and national to find out if he had actually done so. It turns out he hadn't, he'd given some money to one local charity, and actually believe it or not, this is such a crazy story.

Actually, he didn't give the money, his label did and they laundered it through, I'm not kidding, Humphrey Bogart's charity in Los Angeles.

That seems legit. I don't know why you'd look into that, I can't see any problem with that whatsoever.

Yeah. And they seem to have taken half of the money before giving it to the local one. And then their label also gave a hundred thousand dollars to, again, I'm not kidding, Slipknot's manager.

Well, we've all done that.

Yeah. Because Slipknot's manager wants to take the old rock against racism banner and maybe someday build a tour around it, maybe possibly. So that was the other money. And then the last \$100,000 label claimed was for a quote: organisations to be named later. So we busted this guy pretty good. I was pretty happy about that. And then, more recently we had a really massive exposé on anti-vaxxers in the national basketball association, including one on my beloved Brooklyn Nets. And that made huge waves in the sports media and national and even political press here, still reverberating. So I'm happy about that. And we've got a couple other real haymakers coming in the next week or two.

Well, I mean, I was going to ask you about that. I mean, how concerning is the post-Trump divisive nature of the American political debate? We've had Fox News celebrating 25 years on air this week. What role can Rolling Stone play in that atmosphere? Is it a reconciliation thing? It's the whole Taylor Swift problem, isn't it? That people asked her to talk about politics for years and she didn't. And then the minute she did and came down on the side of women's rights and so on, she then alienated half of her audience that said "just shut up talking about politics bitch and keep singing."

I would bet that Taylor Swift is actually more popular and has a larger fan base once she started expressing her views. That's my guess. And I don't think we're necessarily on the partisan spectrum, but we believe that climate change is real. And that there's a lot of villains out there that are helping to accelerate it. We believe in people's right to privacy. We believe that people should be able to take the drugs they want and be left the hell alone. So I mean, there's going to be causes we champion, and we're not going to be meek about that.

And also hold wrongdoers to account as you were just talking about, I mean, sunlight is the best disinfectant.

F*** yeah. We're going to do that. And then in terms of the media landscape, sort of, in the Trump and post-Trump era, you've essentially got a neo-fascist party now in America. And I would say not just in America.

We've had Brexit here in the UK.

Yeah, and obviously it's not quite the same, there's some overlap, it's not quite the same.

It's the same people that think the state's against them, there's a conspiracy, it's everyone else's fault, things were great 20 years ago in some generic, non-specified way.

Yeah and obviously it's all interesting, how much help they seem to get from other overseas fascists. And so I just try to call it like it is, and I'm not like the Democrat Republican thing over here. I don't care that much about it, but I do care a lot about basic fascism versus basic democracy and wrong and freedom and people being able to live their lives how they want and not under some neo-fascist routine.

Well, I've got plenty of questions left to talk about in terms of Rolling Stone, but I think we'll just take a segue if we can to talk about your career, because you've had a fascinating life. You started as a touring musician as an accomplished bassist, touring with bands, a national security expert, you reported from Afghanistan, Iraq, Kuwait. You've done a lot of things. What did you want to be when you were young and what were the first steps that you took along the way? 'Cause it's an incredible sort of line isn't it from when you started work to being editor-in-chief for Rolling Stone now, you've done a lot of stuff.

Yeah. It all now makes sense in retrospect. But along the way, it all seemed like twists and turns and hard 90-degree angles.

Did you always want to be a journalist?

No. My old man is a documentary and a book author. And I definitely distinctly remember looking at him and being, like, 'This miserable guy, typing alone in his room. I don't want to be like him.' And then of course I became exactly like him. I do remember being very jazzed by the news and talking to adults about politics or what have you even when I was a little kid, and my mom claimed that I learned to read from the newspaper. I'm not sure that's true but it's a good story. I mean, I've always been fascinated by the news, fascinated by journalism and kind of grew up around it and adjacent to it, but I didn't think that's what I was going to be. When I was a teenager, did I dream of being a rocker? Definitely 100%. And one of the nice things about growing up in New York city is if you have a dream of being a rocker and you can put a band together and the band isn't completely terrible, you can play in these legendary rock clubs. And so my high school band, we snuck into CBGBs, which is this legendary home to Blondie and The Talking Heads and the Ramones. And so many other bands, we snuck in there so we could play our audition gig because we were too young to actually enter the club. And as a teenager to be able to play these like, kind of really epic, legendary places, and then do some of that in college too.

And, you know, a lot of the people that I grew up with went on to have really big careers in music, and I was able to tag along with them, which was great. But the honest answer is there's been no grand plan, I've kind of just taken it one step at a time.

So what was the first step then? Did he go into music? I mean, if we could sort of take five minutes or so to actually go through what you did. Did you start in music? And then the circuitous route that you've taken, you worked on Bill Clinton's election coming in '92 as his foreign policy experts. There's tons of questions there.

No, I wasn't a foreign policy expert for Bill Clinton, but I was a kid propagandist in his machine. So basically, I was in band in high school and college. I dropped out of college to go work for Bill Clinton for a little bit and worked for him after college for a little while. Then one of the things I did was, we started putting like Al Gore and his wife on CompuServe and prodigy in America online. And I thought that was really cool. And so I got a job kind of in the very nascent internet industry, did that for a couple of years. And then briefly had a job as a book editor of books about the internet, lost my job when the entire company got bought and everybody got fired. And I was like okay, what do I really know how to do? I know how to play the bass. And I can write a little bit. And so I sort of started dual tracking, freelance writing and playing music, and I'd go on a road for a while and then I'd come home and write a little bit. And I kind of maintained that two track approach for a number of years and then 9/11 happened. And I so desperately wanted to tell stories of 9/11, but honestly, I was self-taught and didn't really know what the next steps were. And I fumbled around for a couple of days. My freelance gigs were mostly about technology and so I wrote a story about how these robotic planes were going to go kill uh Al-Qaida. And everybody was like, whoa, what the hell is this? I was like, yeah, these things called drones and they were like "drones, oh my God, this is so weird, you should write more about this." And so I started and this was like a couple of days after 9/11. So I started kind of writing more and more about that and getting more and more schooled up on the defense world and how it intersected with technology. And after a couple of years by about 2003, I kind of decided I'm not going to dual track anymore. I'm really going to make journalism my main job. And any music I play will be on the side. And so I thought I was sort of saying goodbye to music and hello to journalism. And it's now only 18 years later that I'm able to, kind of, have a job where I confuse the two of them. And it's a pretty amazing feeling.

What's it like to be an editor in terms of the difference between that and being a journalist cause I've had a few people on here that say, well it's the same thing. You're just editing the articles and giving direction. And then other people say, no, it's more about HR and personnel management. And it's a different job entirely. Do you enjoy the job of being editor? I mean, I mentioned you get good tickets to the opera, but is it more stressful because some editors say I wish I was actually at the coalface and doing the writing? I enjoyed that more than giving feedback on other people's writing.

First of all, I don't think I'll be taking too many tickets to the opera, thank you very much. However, I did catch the secret opening show of the Fuji's reunion, which was great and saw Kalani and Billie Eilish the other day. And they were both great. And then we had this fabulous, listen, if you take nothing else away from this podcast, check out this guy Mdou Moctar. He's a touring guitarist, he's like the Jimmy Hendrix of the Sahara. He's amazing. Anyway, I caught my first club's show with him and that was so much fun. And then, lo and behold, I'm in the office yesterday and he just kind of showed up because somebody else was doing something with them. And that was like, I was pretty thrilled.

Do you fanboy at that moment?

So inside I'm fanboying and outside. I'm just like, okay, cool.

Cool as a cucumber, I'm the editor of Rolling Stone for goodness sake!

Yeah!

I'd love to be editor of Rolling Stone.

I'd love to run a podcast.

I would gladly do that. Could you sort of sooth my jealousy and tell me if there's any mundane elements of what you do so I can just focus on those.

Just to get back to the earlier part, look, these jobs are equal in equal measure journalism and management. I've spent a lot of my week dealing with budgets and HR and stuff like that.

They're a means to an end aren't they, I'm sure you can do them well, but I would find that tedious. Just because you can do it doesn't mean you want to do it, but of course you have to don't you? It's a necessary job of being the editor.

Yeah, I find it tedious too but I know it's in service of trying to unlock a lot more great journalism. And so as long as I sort of keep that mission in mind, I'm good. And yeah, look being editor-in-chief is really complicated and it involves, in equal measure, journalism and management and money and HR and those small decisions I made, I talked to you about before and sort of like trying to drive towards a larger goal and, you know, it's complicated, but I love learning and I love trying to do new things and I love challenges. And, and so for me, it's great. I think if all you want to do is write your own stuff, then being an editor is not your gig. You should go be a writer and

that is a great job, there's some editors that should be writers and some writers that should be editors, for sure. But me, I like this gig.

I mean, you were executive editor of Daily Beast and turned it into and I quote, 'scoop factory.' How sort of deliberate was that way you sort of wake up in your bed day one, and you're going to head into work and you think, right, this is where I'm going to take the title. Do you have a big picture direction of travel that under your watch whatever it is that you're looking after, or editing that is going to happen here. Or does it manifest itself say you think right, three years from now, we'll be here. Do you sort of start with goals and then work backwards? Or is it more about we're going to do less of this, more of that. I'm interested in terms of the big picture, direction of travel, how you personally go about doing that.

You've got to take it from both directions. So with the Beast, you know, I got there and it was like the Daily Beast was not sure what it wanted to be. It didn't know if it wanted to do original reporting or pickup reporting. Didn't know if it wanted to do commentary or the scoop driven journalism, didn't know whether it wanted to be more of an arts place or a more of a politics place. And so it took some time to take a look at what advantages it had, what was in its DNA and sort of over time, it became clear that the Daily Beast really at its best was this like high and glossy global tabloid, that could care in equal measure about hHarry and Meghan, and then turn around and also care about what was going on in the US Congress. So we really started honing that and then it's like, okay, great. If that's what we do then like any good tabloid, you've got a dish. And so we were just really lucky in that we had a couple of reporters that were scoop minded and then we sort of took things from there.

Do you still get jazzed when you watch NBC nightly news with Lester Holt and you're seeing all these, what's going on at Congress? I mean, obviously I'm completely glad that Biden is president and it's not Trump, but I felt nothing but shame for what Britain and America did in Afghanistan that jazz to me, and the way that we treated our interpreters, how can any of our countries now sort of credibly intervene into the countries now and expect loyalty from the people we need there on the ground, like interpreters, and because they're going to think you're going to shaft us a couple of years from now. It just seems so ridiculously counter to all of our interest and moral decency. I'm getting jazzed now telling you about it.

Yeah. There you go. So do I get jazzed watching the nightly news? I must confess, I don't think I've seen the nightly news in 10 years or more. So no, I don't get jazzed watching the nightly news, in terms of issues around Afghanistan, I definitely do. And you know, the whole US conduct, the war could have been over in December of 2001. The Taliban had sued for peace and the US would've gotten a better deal than it did at the end. In 2011 and before there were multiple opportunities to strike a peace deal then and the US chose not to take them. And, so I think to kind of reject peace deals, eventually allow the Taliban to take over and then not do right by the people that helped us and UK and Canadian forces out there, I think is completely

f***ing shameful. And while obviously I prefer Biden over the alternative, I think the manner of the withdrawal has been a complete disaster, and I'll never look at them the same way again

I mean, so-called appointment to news bulletins are in long-term decline as well. Like, as you said, you don't watch them. So let me ask you as a consumer of media, where do you get your news? What do you read? What do you listen to? What do you watch?

There's news sites I obviously check all the time. Obviously I'm a social media guy and get a lot of news from Twitter. And then I'm also kind of since a bit of my journalism was born a little bit out of the blogging era so I still use an RSS reader to get through headlines as quickly as possible.

Wow, that's old school!

Yeah, it is old school, but it's actually a great way to see who's beating who on which stories. So I do all that. Which podcasts do I listen to? I tend to go through runs of podcasts. Like you become completely addicted to a podcast for a couple months and then discard it. So let's see my current addictions are something called The Underworld Podcast by a pair of kind of like hard bitten crime and kind of foreign corruption reporters. 'Behind the Bastards,' which is an explanation of the worst humans in history, which is really fun. And then of course, Rolling Stone has some really fun podcasts right now. One is called, 'Don't Let This Flop,' which is about TikTok and TikTok culture, which is incredibly entertaining and incredibly educational. And then there's one called 'Music now,' which interviews the biggest of the bigs. And it's incredibly fun too. So that's a little bit of my diet. I don't watch a lot of cable news or anything like that anymore. I'll catch clips online from some of the shows but I'm not really watching it for news. I really only watch TV news for if there's a major breaking event, some kind of mass shooting or something that I need to capture in real time. Otherwise it's the methods I mentioned.

I'd like to ask you about lifestyle, the methodology of being an editor. You're in another senior role now, so you must have an idea of how to go about being an editor. Like, do you have a morning routine? Do you read things at home and then go to work? Do you have a specific order of the way that you go about doing things? Or is it just a free for all?

First of all I'd just say, these jobs are 24/7 jobs and you don't take being the editor-in-chief of Rolling Stone, you don't take the job unless you're 100000% committed to it. My mornings are a little hectic because I got two children and we've got to get them to school and.

Could you not put them in an orphanage? That would show Penske that you really committed to the job, surely.

That's a good one. Yeah, I'm not putting my kids in an orphanage.

Well you've heard it here first, ladies and gentlemen.

My older boy is really interested in journalism and started a school newspaper in his third grade class. And actually it was at the start of Covid in which he interviewed a bunch of emergency room doctors for his third grade newspaper. It was pretty awesome.

Wow, that's proper journalism, good on him.

Yeah, no, he's the real deal. And then in terms of routine once I drop them off, I'm trying to forge a new routine now. And so, I'm hopping on a bike and I'm taking a quick bike ride to kind of clear my head as best I can clear it. And then I get in the office and work on my to-do list. And then by ten o'clock, we've got our morning meeting to figure out what's going to be on the website later on that day.

Since you are getting cooler, then, I mean, now that you're editor of Rolling Stone, you are cycling to work. Would you consider wearing leather jackets?

Nothing but leather, top to toe.

Here's an interesting question. I mean, obviously you've picked up a lot of skills and a lot of insights along the way, but how has the journey changed you? In what way are you a different guy and a different editor now than you would be say, 20 years ago?

I know a few more tricks and a few more shortcuts. And so that's helpful. And hopefully I'm a little more patient. I was a bit of an asshole when I first started editing. And so I hope I'm slightly less of an asshole now.

Do you have any big unticked editorial boxes on life's to do list? I mean, let's say you do a great job here for a few years, and you can quite rightly come back and say this is none of my business, but are there any other titles that you would consider editing in the future?

I can't believe I'm doing this job, so I'm going to stick to this one, thank you very much.

Also, you've only been in post for a few weeks and here I'm gonna say what's next for you. I agree it was a bold ask to try and comment on that. If we pick up a copy of the magazine or go on the website three to four years from now, what will change for me as the reader? What will I see?

Yeah, I think I'd hope on the website, not three or four years from now, but I mean soon that you'll be able to go on the website every day and be like, holy shit, that's a good story. And every day there'll be something like, wow to it. And then hopefully you'll also be able to go on the site every day and learn something new about the future of pop culture. And I think if we can do those two things, we're going to be in great shape

Are you optimistic for the next few years, both as the editor, but also as a citizen, because it seems way more divided than ever that people are angrier than ever. There's the whole cliché of the two Facebook news feeds, depending on which party you're in, no one seems to be talking to each other, we're in this post-truth age, whatever you want to call it. Do you think that's going to get worse or do you think ultimately we've hit rock bottom now and it's going to get better.

I'm optimistic about this title. I am pessimistic. I think it may still get worse in the sort of partisan divide and post-truth era. There's just some fundamentally powerful and evil corporate actors at work that would rather profit off of misinformation than information. And it's going to take a major change to get them to change course. And ultimately the market's going to have to just de value those places and just stop doing business with them. And when that starts happening then I think we'll see some real meaningful change in that area.

When you picture a reader of Rolling Stone in your mind, do you have an image there? Because I mean I'm a big fan, have been for a long time, but you go on the website and there's a mixture of light and shade, really strong political and societal analysis, there's lots there, but it's not like say Good Housekeeping for example or a cookery magazine where you can sort of switch your brain off and just relax. You are going to be challenged and buzzed and jazz as well. Is there a kind of emotional journey that you want to take your readers on and do you have a typical reader in mind?

I don't have a typical reader in mind. Like I said before I'm going to start with what's cool to me. And hopefully a couple of people will come along the journey. And yeah, I want people to be both entertained and engaged and learn something cool and learn something important. And if we can do all those things, I'll be really happy.

I'm old. So I can remember when editors used to have a single metric, which was the new standard, maybe two, if that a subscriber number and you tinker with the magazine or the newspaper, and you'd hope that the circulation would either go up or down, at least you'd be able to know what it is. I mean, now you must know through your digital metrics the dwell time of every single person on every page, what's popular, what headlines work, where they're coming from, all of that kind of stuff. How sort of audience centric are you in terms of metrics? I know you've mentioned at the beginning, you feel the dreams, you

build it and they will come, but do you look at that kind of stuff? How do you get feedback from the readers in terms of whether you're delivering what they want and what they don't want?

Yeah. I'm looking at metrics all day long and I'm a very data focused guy, that doesn't necessarily mean that I'm gonna publish whatever a particular algorithm is pushing out. But I definitely want to know how the stories hit, and I'm very interested in the stories hitting and I'm not just trying to piss in the wind here, I'm trying to do stories that people really want to read. And part of my job as editor is to take this great journalism and package it in a way that makes it interesting to the maximum number of people. And so, yeah, I'm looking at data, but I'm not going to be trapped by it.

Last question, because I know you've got to go and I'm very grateful for your time. Noah. We have a lot of younger listeners that are aspiring to careers in the media and in journalism and so on. And there'll be several people listening to this that want to be the editor of Rolling stone themselves 20, 30 years from now, what advice would you give them?

The advice I'd give is to be a reporter first, and that means first and foremost, like picking up the phone and calling sources and really trying as hard as you can to learn information that no one else has. That's gotta be a foundational part of being an editor. And you can't skip that step. Too many people in the modern landscape, I think, have tried to skip that step. And it's not skippable. You absolutely have to do the reporting, do the work. And then if it suits you then get it into editing.

Well, Noah, that was a hugely interesting conversation. I know you're a very busy guy and you have to go, I will certainly be cheering you on and watching with interest where you're going to take the magazine. I wish you the very best of luck with it. Thank you ever so much for your time.

Thank you.