

Audio Transcript

Episode 205 of "[E&P Reports](#)" Vodcast Series
with *Mike Blinder*

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The banner features the E&P Reports Vodcast logo on the left, which includes a Wi-Fi symbol and the text 'E&P REPORTS VODCAST'. To the right of the logo is the URL 'EditorandPublisher.com/Vodcasts'. The background of the banner shows a camera lens and a professional microphone. Below the URL, there are two video thumbnails. The left thumbnail shows Cristi Hegranes, a woman with glasses, smiling. The right thumbnail shows Mike Blinder, a man in a suit, speaking into a microphone. Below the thumbnails, their names and titles are listed: 'Cristi Hegranes CEO/ Founder Global Press' and 'Mike Blinder Publisher E&P Magazine'. In the top right corner of the banner, the E&P logo is displayed with the text 'NEWSPAPERS | BROADCAST | DIGITAL'. In the bottom right corner, the BLOX DIGITAL logo is visible.

[**A mission is to transform global news coverage by recruiting, training and then employing women journalists world-wide. 1-on-1 with GPI's Cristi Hegranes on her new book: "Byline."**](#)

In this episode of "E&P Reports" we go one-on-one with award-winning journalist and founder of the [Global Press Institute](#) (GPI) Cristi Hegranes, whose new book: "**Byline**" makes a case that the global news publishing industry can find more sustainability by re-thinking how it provides global news coverage by focusing on local news sourcing as opposed to: "The flawed discipline of parachute journalism." Within the interview with E&P Publisher Mike Blinder, Hegranes sites [recent GPI research](#) establishing that, "there is a deep reservoir of untapped demand from readers in the United States—across a wide range of demographics, including noncitizen, diaspora, and migrant populations—for international journalism that is local, precise, and representative."



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0:00:03.8 Announcer: This is E&P Reports, a podcast from Editor & Publisher Magazine, the authoritative voice of news media since 1884, serving newspapers, broadcast, digital, and all forms of news publishing.

[music]

0:00:20.3 Mike Blinder: Greetings. Once again, I'm Mike Blinder, publisher of E&P Magazine. As always, we bore our audience with housekeeping. If you're listening on a podcast platform of choice, we urge you to follow us. Watching us on our YouTube channel, there is a subscribe button below my face down there. There's a bell to the right of it. If you hit those, click those, smash those, whatever they say today, you'll get an update each and every time we upload a new episode of E&P Reports. I have a new friend who I'm going to try to do my best job in pronouncing her last name, Cristi Hegranes. Did I get that right?

0:00:55.6 Cristi Hegranes: So close, Mike. So much closer than most people. Cristi Hegranes.

0:01:00.6 MB: Okay, good. See, it depends on that accent, right? Where do you put that accent?

0:01:03.7 CH: That accent, yes. No, that was very close.

0:01:05.7 MB: Cristi Hegranes, you are currently and have been since 2006, 17 years, CEO, founder of Global Press, which is what the topic today we're going to explore. But if I may go through your background, you're an adjunct professor at Georgetown. I went to GW. Is that okay? I was in the city.

0:01:23.4 CH: I'll continue.

0:01:25.2 MB: All right, good. If you don't mind. Let's see, you're the lead author of Global Press Style Guide, which I'm very interested in, a separate style guide defined as providing dignity in international journalism. You have a wide range of prestigious social entrepreneurship and journalism accolades. You're the recipient of the Citing of Professional Journalists, Journalism Innovation Prize, the Grinnell College Young Innovator for Social Justice Prize, the Jefferson Award for Public Service, the Ida B. Wells Award for Bravery in Journalism, and you walk on water. Is that correct?

0:02:07.8 CH: Also true.

0:02:09.5 MB: Also, Global Press named you one of Ink Magazine's best places to work, the Global Press, and you received the Stevie Award for Best Women-led Business of 2019. You live in DC. You have a son, Henry. You know, I'm not stalking you. It's all here in your bio. But you recently authored a book, am I correct?



0:02:29.3 CH: Yes, you are correct. Byline. It is out in September.

0:02:35.0 MB: And that's what we're here to talk about. I'm not just Byline, but correct me if I'm wrong, Byline is almost like, it encompasses a lot of your experiences with Global Press and the people you work with and how it's impacted journalism worldwide, correct?

0:02:51.3 CH: That's right. It's about how the future of journalism needs to be led by local journalists, the people with the most proximity to the story.

0:03:00.1 MB: We're going to get to that and dissect all of this on the backside of this message.

0:03:05.1 Announcer: This episode of E&P Reports is exclusively sponsored by BLOX Digital, formerly TownNews. Even though the name has changed, their commitment to the media industry is as strong as ever. BLOX Digital is now even better positioned to deliver integrated solutions like content management, audience development, advertising revenue, video management, and more. Join the over 2000 news publishers worldwide that power their ongoing digital transformation with BLOX Digital, serving over 141 million monthly users who view over 6.5 billion pages of content each year. You can trust BLOX Digital to empower you, to connect you at scale with the community you need to reach. BLOX Digital, formerly TownNews, now reimagined to help meet the news publishing challenges of tomorrow and beyond. Learn more at bloxdigital.com.

0:04:08.7 MB: All right, Cristi, 17 years, and you don't look it. You started when you were four. No, I'm kidding. 17 years developing a groundbreaking nonprofit journalism model. You got 37 offices in 11 countries. Some of people have never heard of Global Press. Would you give us the first, what inspired you to start this? And give us the elevator pitch and what Global Press is and what its mission is.

0:04:36.5 CH: Absolutely. So when I was growing up, all I ever wanted to be was a foreign correspondent, traveling the world, telling its stories, single aim throughout my entire high school, college, graduate school trajectory. When I was finishing my master's at NYU, I managed to turn a classroom assignment into the opportunity to go to Nepal to cover women's rights during the Civil War, as my first opportunity to report overseas. And I was in country for about nine days when I began to realize just how flawed the discipline of parachute journalism was. I lacked social, historical, political context. Because of the Civil War, I was only allowed to work through government employed translators.

0:05:27.9 CH: And so my ability to tell real, true stories was fundamentally flawed based on who I was as a person. And I think I begin to really come to terms with the fact that as a person from the United States, I felt very entitled to go to a place I had never been to get those stories. I felt that they were mine to get. And through a series of a very, at the time, traumatic events, I really came to realize that I was the wrong person to be telling those stories. And instead, local people, local women in particular, had the proximity and the access to tell the kind of stories that could both provide much needed access to accurate information locally, but could also deeply transform international news and the way that we understand places like Nepal, which are typically only covered in terms of war, poverty, disaster, disease, repeat, which is how most global communities

are still covered today.

0:06:36.9 CH: So from that experience, Global Press was born. I left Nepal and I moved to San Francisco, got a job as a feature writer. And after about a year in that job, I just couldn't get this idea out of my head. So I was 25, I quit my job, walked across the street to a Barnes and Noble bookstore and bought a Nolo guide on how to start a nonprofit. And here we are 17 years later, having produced 1000s and 1000s of transformational stories serving audiences of millions and really helping people to better understand the world and their places in it.

0:07:11.3 MB: Your goal essentially is to help facilitate the growth of a local journalist within the world so those stories are told locally and heard globally. Did I sum that up pretty well?

0:07:24.8 CH: That's right. The way that it works is we choose a global community to go into and we recruit local women journalists to join our team. They go through an intensive 12-week training program and anyone who finishes the training program is guaranteed full-time employment working for our publication, Global Press Journal. English is not a requirement to work for Global Press, so we're able to produce stories both in the reporter's local language to distribute it locally and then we also produce an English language version which you can read anywhere from Quartz to NPR to PBS NewsHour on television in the US.

0:08:05.2 MB: All right. I'm going to go off the list of questions now, which I do all the time.

[overlapping conversation]

0:08:08.2 CH: I'm ready. I'm ready.

0:08:09.0 Announcer: Obviously, we submit some questions to them. This is fascinating because you believe in your heart of hearts and you've proved through this hard work and this getting philanthropic donations and training people into a career that there's an audience for this content and let me just go on and we're in a world now where let me tell you what's hitting you and you know this and I see the data and we at E&P report on it. The new audience of today, not me, the old guy, but the new audience has a detention span of maybe two to three minutes. You know what I mean? It's all quick, short-form video. You've got cable news dominating at least this society, taking the air out of every story, leading with nothing more than political, whatever you want to call it. Why do this? Is there an audience for this? Does anyone really give a rat's patootie? I'm not putting you down. I'm saying you're clean and honest.

0:09:04.0 CH: No, I get it.

0:09:06.9 MB: I mean, there's a world of the news you need to know and the news you want to know and this has been a battle since the first, I guess caveman came up with the first idea to tell a story, but it's always been that way. Art and commerce, right? Back and forth, back and forth. Why the heck are you doing this or how do you plan to make sure people care about the stories you're generating?

0:09:29.3 CH: No, Mike, I love the question because I think the answer is twofold, right? In the

local communities where we work, there is a dramatic market for high quality access to information and the types of stories that we cover, right? Global Press is not a breaking news organization. We tell long term feature and investigative stories, the likes that are not being covered by any other publication in places like Mongolia or Uganda, Zimbabwe, Democratic Republic of Congo, Southern Mexico. So locally, there's a huge market for our stories and we distribute our stories widely in each of those countries.

0:10:08.3 CH: Now, globally, I think you've hit on something really important and that is that there is the historic perception that people don't care about the rest of the world, right? We actually just ran a 10 month US audience research survey and study on how US news consumers actually want to consume international news. And we found a couple of things that were so, so fascinating. First, it's not so much that people, particularly in the US, don't care about the rest of the world, it's that they don't particularly care for the way the world's stories are being told.

0:10:44.5 CH: People are so disaster fatigued. People are so just like poverty chaos fatigued, right? Plus, we have to take into consideration that here in the US, we have a lot of our own chaos, right? So when we're constantly feeding people only these disaster narratives from... A volcano goes off in Congo, there's a hurricane in Haiti, people are really fatigued with that kind of news. Here's the amazing thing that we learned though. Almost two thirds of US based readers say that they prefer to receive news from local journalists rather than parachute journalists.

0:11:21.9 MB: And this is global. This is this... You're talking to anybody, red, blue, rich, poor, small town, big town, two thirds of the two thirds of the news consumers, this is big, prefer local over the cable news, whatever you'll call it, echo chamber type environment we live in today.

0:11:42.6 CH: That's right. In a focus group that we ran before the nationwide survey, we showed focus group participants stories written by a foreign correspondent from the same country as a local journalist. And we asked people to choose which one would you let most likely read? On first impulse, most people went with the brand name, right? Like, oh, yeah, I recognize that guy from CNN or whatever, like I do that.

0:12:07.9 MB: Exactly. They're stars. Go ahead.

0:12:08.6 CH: Yeah. Then the moderator begin to probe and ask participants, well, what would you get from one that you wouldn't get from the other? And slowly, the majority of participants were like, oh, actually, she looks like the people in the photographs. Oh, judging by her name, I bet she's local. She would give me different sourcing. She would give me a different perspective. Actually, what I would get from this guy would be the same as what I would get from any other broadcaster mainstream network. I could get what he's selling anywhere. This seems more valuable to me. This could enrich the way I understand the world. This research is also backed by other larger studies than our own, which say that the number one thing that audiences in the US, particularly in like the Gen Z millennial category want is news coverage that allows them to better understand communities outside of their own.

0:13:08.4 CH: So potentially what we're dealing with in the industry is a really outdated assumption that people don't care about international news. In fact, what we see is that solutions



driven stories in particular about innovations happening in other parts of the world are dramatically popular with US readers. We have so much to learn from other parts of the world. And there's a really strong core segment of news readers in the US who see that, know that and want it badly. Absolutely.

0:13:37.7 MB: We are short on time. So I've got to get into the book. Okay. Because you're a publicist or they're the ones that reached out to us, the book people. Talk about your book. And your book is interesting, but I don't understand it. Okay. Treat me like I'm a three year old, because I'm going to put you on the spot here. It's called *Byline*. How local journalists can improve the global news industry and change the world. But when you sit... Not you, when they pitch it to our industry, the news publishing industry of the world, they pitch it. It's you're showing a path to sustainability.

0:14:09.6 MB: See, that's where I want you to square my circle or circle my square, whatever they say it is today. Because new sustainability is everything today. Getting. And that's why we interview in this platform. So many people... We talk to lobbyists trying to find ways to get big tech to compensate. We're trying to get tax credits. We have this battle. What is journalism? And how do you stay in a free and feathered press in our Madisonian Republic? All that and more boils down to the fact that we all know local journalism must survive. You agree?

0:14:38.1 CH: Of course.

0:14:38.5 MB: Or we don't have a society. I'm getting way back. I will wrestle anyone to the ground that does not agree with me on that. Wherever you are, you got to put a spotlight on truth. How the heck does your foundation get us there? Because that's what your book... Unless you want to tell me I'm full of hooey.

0:14:53.6 CH: No, not all.

0:14:54.1 MB: That's what you're saying. You wrote this thing in hopes to help us find a new solution to sustainability. What say you?

0:15:05.1 CH: So here's what we know. Trust in journalism is deeply broken. There is no future unless we can reclaim the trust of our readers and our audiences. People are more likely to trust stories when they can recognize themselves in the stories that are being told. I'll give you a personal example. My dad, he's a 2016 Trump voter. Over the course of the first Trump administration, hopefully there won't be a second, but during the course of the administration, I saw my dad get more and more disillusioned and angry with the news. Why? Because he's not like a MAGA hat rally guy. He's a traditional conservative and he couldn't find himself in the coverage. He couldn't recognize himself in the stories that were being told on either side of the networks, right? As a result, it's really easy to convince him that something is fake news or that something is a lie because he's like, yeah, I don't recognize myself in that.

0:16:13.1 CH: The same thing is true across the world, right? When local people can recognize themselves in stories, they are more likely to trust that journalism. It is fundamentally impossible for parachute journalists to provide that kind of coverage on a global scale. If we can shift our reliance to local journalists, training and employing local journalists to be the storytellers of record

from literally every community, we begin to pave the path of trust back because there's opportunities for accountability.

0:16:45.1 CH: There's opportunities to change the kinds of sources in the stories. And so shifting to local, whether your local is Arkangai province, Mongolia, or Arkansas in the United States, shifting to local is absolutely the first step to the path back to rebuilding trust and therefore a sustainable audience and a sustainable industry.

0:17:08.6 MB: So if we read your book, we the news publishing executives of the world, we're not just going to hear why I should be consuming more global local news 'cause that's pretty much what your organization has been about. It's not about training journalists in Arkansas as much as training them in Mongolia. We're going to hear the rationale on why good... I'm trying to paraphrase what you just said, good local storytelling.

0:17:37.5 CH: That's right.

0:17:37.9 MB: That focuses on the reader. God forbid, he said sarcastically is the future of journalism. If we provide that content, we're going to get that sustainability. Did I sum it up?

0:17:50.8 CH: Yeah, absolutely. Also, that content is less expensive.

[music]

0:17:51.7 MB: I got an advance copy and I ain't going to share it because I think you guys got to sell some books, right? I could just put it up there.

0:17:58.6 CH: That's right.

[overlapping conversation]

0:18:01.2 MB: But it's authored by an amazing person that we're honored to have on the show. Cristi, I'm going to try your last name and get it right now. Hegranes. Did I get it?

0:18:10.2 CH: Perfect.

0:18:11.1 MB: There you go. Cristi Hegranes, CEO founder of Global Press. How does someone find Global Press online, Cristi?

0:18:18.2 CH: So all of our news is published at globalpressjournal.com, our publication. And if you're interested in learning more about the organization, how it works, how it's structured, you can find us at globalpress.co.

0:18:30.4 MB: How about the book? Is press on it? Is there a preview of it up somewhere?

0:18:34.3 CH: Yeah, press. The pre-order link is available now and you can read a little bit of it at cristihegranes.com.



0:18:44.1 MB: Cristi, what a guess. This is great. Thanks so much for your valuable time. And please keep in touch with us. Let us know how things are going, not only with the book, but with Global Press and your initiative.

0:18:54.3 CH: Mike, thank you so much. I absolutely will. I appreciate it.

[music]