

# EMBARK EPISODE #9 COMBATING HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN TRAVEL

#### **AUDIO TRANSCRIPT**

Jonathan Sullivan: Hello everyone and welcome back to the Embark Podcast where we talk about travel, technology and trust. And today we have a pretty special episode about something that I'm willing to bet you don't spend a lot of time thinking about. But it's something the travel industry does spend a lot of time thinking about and it's really, really important. And that's human trafficking.

And with us today, we have two very special guests from outside Accenture. The first is Eliza McCoy, who works with the American Hotel and Lodging Association Foundation, where she's the Vice President of Prevention and Awareness Programs. And then Abbe Horswill, who works with Marriott International, where she's the Director of Human Rights and Social Impact.

The two of them are joined by Emily Weiss, who's Accenture's Travel Lead across the world for everything to do with the travel industry. And me, your host, Jonathan Sullivan.

So, with that, why don't we kick this off with a little bit of an introduction as to why travel companies worry about human trafficking. And Emily, I'd like just to ask you quickly, based on your broad discussions and your experience in the industry, what is it that travel companies are worried about when it comes to human trafficking?

**Emily Weiss:** Jonathan, thanks. And it's great to be here. So, you know, given the industry's involuntary position in the path of human traffickers, the travel industry leaders, they have a role and they have a responsibility to help avoid crime, support potential victims and protect their employees.

And our clients and leaders in the travel industry are in a unique position to make a difference. They want to avoid any risks related to reputational damage. They want to think about loss of workforce and business or even legal actions that can come from this. And when I talk about reputational damage, for example, if a hotel or restaurants is found to have links to human trafficking, it can lead to a significant loss of trust.

It can result in loss of business and damage to its reputation. There can be negative publicity. It can affect the entire industry, as well as just a reputation of the local area. And, you know, loss of business, we talk about loss of business and the workforce. You can lose business due to the negative impact that human trafficking has on the community, and it can lead to really a decrease in tourism.

It can be fewer customers in the hotels and other businesses, and that can result in the

challenge to recruit and retain the best talent. And there can be legal action. So, hotels and other hospitality businesses may also face legal action if they're found knowingly or unknowingly facilitating human trafficking. And, of course, that can lead to things like fines and penalties and even criminal charges against the business and its employees.

Jonathan Sullivan: So, it's more prevalent, in the front of minds of travel companies than it is in the travelers, I think it's safe to say. Eliza, based on your long history and long service towards children, towards the victims and, and with the community trying to stop this, how would you describe the state of the world now, when it comes to dealing with human trafficking and, and how the problem is changing over time?

Eliza McCoy: Thank you, first of all for having me here. I'm really excited to be a part of this conversation. I certainly think that the world has evolved in many, many ways, and especially in the most recent years. But in the space of antihuman trafficking efforts, we're lucky to say that public awareness has grown significantly. So, while it might not be as ever present in the mind of travelers as much as it is for those of us in the industry, it certainly is a term that they've heard and that they have some understanding of. Right. And I think that is a tremendous amount of progress. Because the less we have to educate, the more we have to equip with tools and skills to help combat it.

And likewise, I think the same of our industry. I mean, I say readily that five or more years ago, it was a real struggle for hotels to really take leadership on this issue. And that has changed significantly, to the point where we are leading, and an example for many other private sectors, honestly. So, I think it's been tremendous progress.

Jonathan Sullivan: Yeah. Abby, you wanna say a thing or two about what Marriott's doing to lead? Especially in conjunction with Eliza's organization?

**Abbe Horswill:** Absolutely. So, I think similar to how Emily described it, we often refer to hotels

as unwilling venues for human trafficking. We probably most immediately think about sex trafficking taking place in hotel rooms. But there's also a significant nexus to labor trafficking as well. Whether that be hotel workers that are employed through third-party contractors or trafficking that can take place at any point throughout our supply chain, whether it's the harvesting of raw materials like cocoa or coffee beans to the manufacturing and transport of those materials to the hotels where they're used and consumed.

As Eliza shared, we've really come a long way in acknowledging those vulnerabilities and understanding how they impact our industry. And Marriott, in particular, has really taken a leadership role in combating these issues. In 2020, we donated our human trafficking awareness training to ECPAT USA with support from the American Hotel and Lodging Association Foundation in order to make it available to the entire hotel industry. Similarly, when we developed an enhanced training in 2021, we also made the move to donate that training and make it as widely available as we could. So, Marriott is thrilled to have trained over 1 million of our own associates on human trafficking awareness, but with the broader industry numbers that are nearing 850,000 hotel workers trained as of the end of last year, we're really working together to create a global workforce that stands ready to recognize and respond to all forms of human trafficking.

Jonathan Sullivan: Wow. That's amazing. So, you all can create content for this, share it through the association, and 850,000 other people can learn from what you've done without you having to do all the training individually?

**Abbe Horswill:** That's correct. And this is really an area where we see such an advantage to working collaboratively as opposed to competitively, because ultimately we can make much more of an impact working together.

Jonathan Sullivan: Wow. And, and Emily, when you're thinking about kind of the big broad problem for the industry, and what the industry could be doing with technology and could be

doing around these training programs, what's forefront in your mind, as an outsider in the industry?

**Emily Weiss:** Abbe, those numbers are pretty staggering in a good way, and really powerful. When I think about kind of the role that can be played. I look at it in sort of three buckets and you really hit on it. There's awareness and identification, as you said. I'm sure that's deeply embedded into the training. There's then the disruption and, and there's restoration, I guess I would phrase it. But you know, from an awareness and identification, there's the element around training and protocols, and again, you talked about what Marriott has done and it's really about working with the government agencies, working with nonprofit organizations, making sure these protocols for reporting, and responding to suspected cases are in place.

There's also implementing policies and going beyond just the training to recognize and report the potential situations. And I think there's a whole other element around a company's code of conduct. So again, you can train, but it's really around a company's code of conduct, which is really including commitment to combating human trafficking and any form of forced labor. And that really establishes a foundation for the organization. When I think about also everything you just described Abby, and I know Eliza, AHLA is really focused on, but even no matter how well trained the staff members are, it's still hard. I mean, there are warning signs that can surface in nuanced ways. So, you can be as trained as possible, but it has to be around this whole element of awareness and making sure that any kind of suspicious behavior is escalated.

**Jonathan Sullivan:** Eliza, can you tell us a little bit about how technology might help with some of that awareness and how that could come together for the whole association, the whole industry?

Eliza McCoy: Yeah, absolutely. And to your point Emily, it is about the human factor of an individual having to spot something that they're concerned about or think could potentially be human trafficking, and then reporting it and kind

of making that calculation and feeling comfortable within the culture of safety of their property to do so.

But we can add technology to that conversation and that sort of path to help with the fact that it doesn't have to only be the human factor, right? There are elements of the technology that have increased in its usage in our industry for a number of different reasons, right? User experience - such as the mobile key card checkin and other things - that there's less human interaction. And therefore, we might wanna look at pathways through data that we can find similar anomalies or patterns that might indicate things that should be escalated within the property or safety and security protocols. And I think it just serves to amplify how we find these potential identifiers. Because everything that we do through technology and industry and others is identify patterns and anomalies. And any way we can use that to deter and respond to criminal activity of any kind is to an advantage of our industry being safe and trusted.

Emily Weiss: I think one thing I would also add to your point about data and technology is if we think about the sort of advancement of data, data's been an issue or not even an issue, it's actually been a factor in a benefit for the industry for so long, but with the advancement of data and all of the Al and all of the machine learning and, and the technology, the platforms that provide it, that it's the insights. So, you can have insights for all elements of running your business. And this is just another part of the business, that you can develop insights and, and really capture it, or spot it earlier in the process, or actually also then start with reporting and, and dashboards, which then gets embedded into the training and then, it really just becomes cyclical as you said. And knowing that you have that technology and data element to complement the human factor and the activities, right. It's a combination. Yeah, absolutely.

**Jonathan Sullivan:** And Abby, I would imagine it's a very delicate connection between the two because while as important it is to stop and the impact of a false positive is also really bad as

well.

And, and I'll share a little story, where nothing bad happened, but we were, we were at the US Embassy in London trying to, or the consulate trying to get a new passport for one of my younger sons. And of course, the, the consular officers have to make sure that he's actually related to us for, for these very reasons. And the consular officer asks my son: 'Well, do you know these two people? And, and who are they?' And he said: 'I don't know them.' Which, you know...after a little bit, we got him to finally say who we actually were. But it's one of those instances where it could well have gone the wrong direction relatively quickly, had human judgment not come into play in a tough situation and where you would hope it would go and be caught if it was the other way around. How do you as an organization try to manage through some of these challenges?

**Abbe Horswill:** That's right. It is incredibly challenging. I think you hit the nail on the head there. So, one of the issues that we really tried to resolve for in developing the newer version of our training almost two years ago now, was providing some nuance on how to navigate those types of complex situations. We've historically trained on these sort of lists of potential indicators of human trafficking, but the flip side of the technological innovations that Emily and Eliza were sharing is that some of them also make it more challenging to spot some of these flags for human trafficking. For example, if a guest is using a mobile check-in option or requesting less frequent housekeeping amid cleanliness concerns with the pandemic, it becomes harder to spot some of the suspicious behaviors we know might take place in check-in. Or find some of those items that are potentially indicative of human trafficking in a guest room.

So, we try to think thoughtfully about how we can still recognize some of those indicators amid this, what we call a, a higher tech, lower touch operating environment. At the same time, we also try to put some new procedures in place, really thinking about those issues of context and proximity. One indicator isn't necessarily indicative of a human trafficking situation and not

all trafficking situations exhibit these indicators. So, thinking about how associates can put together the pieces of the puzzle and really understand the situation in context, was really critical to the next evolution of our training efforts.

Eliza McCoy: And I would just add that I think all of us in this industry really rely on our relationships with professionals in this industry. So. in law enforcement and victim services and support. And so, we're not expecting that our employees and need to be experts in the full picture of what happens next. It's simply seeing something and saying something and then turning it over to professionals who can really go deeper and further with a level of expertise and training and knowledge that we would expect these situations to be handled with, with delicacy.

Emily Weiss: I think it's interesting too, Eliza, what you said is it, this is a daunting topic, right. And, and as you said, this is not something, if you're an associate on a property that you wanna say: I'm, I'm going to be responsible for identifying. Or, I'm gonna be responsible for stopping it. Because you don't feel, no matter how much training you go through, right, that's not something you're necessarily skilled in. But I think that is where the role of technology becomes even more important. Because although this is very personal and this is very individual and nuanced, there are sort of some general trends that can be seen and that can be combated. And I'm thinking about some of the stuff that you were talking about kind of the law enforcement agencies or the different consortiums. So it's, as we said it's that combination of all the different factors coming together because this is such a daunting and such a massive issue that needs to be address addressed from each and any opportunity or angle I should say, that can be addressed.

Jonathan Sullivan: And is the association, or all the, the hotel companies as big as you are, able to share data in certain ways so that you get smarter as a group? Or is it pretty much you, it's so delicate - you trust yourselves with it, but not necessarily the whole group.

Eliza McCoy: No, I certainly think our industry is very much in the collaborative space and looking at how can we all be at this table and talk about what systems we're using, what data we have, what trainings we're offering, what awareness raising events we're doing, and how can we do it better and be unified for maximum impact. And I think that is also an evolution in this space. As Abby pointed to earlier, this is not a competitive issue. This is a collaborative one, where the only way we're really going to stop human trafficking in its tracks is if we're all operating with consistency and a unified voice and to move it out of the industry. And also to support the communities that we live and work in doing the same because we ultimately don't want it anywhere, right? Not just out of the hotel.

Abbe Horswill: I'd add too that. I think we're also seeing some of these efforts not only through the hospitality industry, but from the larger business community as well. Marriott participates on a number of task forces and working groups that are either focused narrowly on human trafficking or other sort of related human rights issues. And all of those groups are really creative in thinking how each company can leverage its individual contributions to really make an exponential collective impact.

**Emily Weiss:** And, you know, I love that you said that, Abby. Because I was also thinking when we think in business terms, so, different topic, but anything about generating more revenue, cutting costs, whatever it may be. there's often that industry say, let me look outside my industry. And let me look and see what I can learn from other industries that maybe are going through similar, similar challenges that we aren't thinking about. It's the same topic, right? And it is about the collective, which says I may be able to leverage the training that Marriott International developed, but I've created a platform that's enabling some sort of solution. And that can be leveraged within the hospitality industry or the airline industry or, or banking for that matters, right? But they're conducting, a violation and the industry at large or candidly in society at large, and all the players coming to address it. Right. It's really, it's an important topic to acknowledge that this is not about

competition. This is about addressing a major violation in our society.

Jonathan Sullivan: Yeah. It's nice to see everything coming together. Can, can we talk for a minute about the third thing you mentioned, Emily, the restoration. And maybe I'll start with you, Abbe.

How does Marriott International get involved in restoration efforts to help...I'm not sure that the right word is heal, but at least help those who've gone through human trafficking.

**Abbe Horswill:** Yeah, so I think probably about five years ago or so, Marriott really started thinking creatively about what more could we contribute.

We know that we're doing an excellent job with training and awareness and partnering with some leading anti-trafficking organizations, but we wanted to think about what else we could contribute. So, in 2019, we launched a partnership with the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery to co-develop a hospitality training curriculum for survivors of human trafficking. We convened a number of working sessions with experts from the field, from the government, from anti-trafficking organizations, from service providers to survivors most importantly, and developed this curriculum that we were able to pilot over the last year with four different organizations in the US.

Ultimately, we were able to train 64 survivors across 11 peer learning cohorts, and we're so proud of those efforts, and thrilled to hear that some of those participants are now pursuing not only jobs, but careers in the hospitality industry. So, we're looking forward to continuing to scale and grow that program and hopefully using the market-based need of the available job opportunities in our industry to help support survivors on their path towards recovery.

**Jonathan Sullivan:** That's wonderful. That's really amazing. And does the AHLA Foundation also promote and help with these kinds of restoration efforts?

Eliza McCoy: Absolutely. I mean, I think it's an excellent example of leadership in this space that we are mirroring and modeling and supporting in its next phases launching the industry's first survivor fund. So, this is a collective effort to combine financial resources across the industry in supporting community-based organizations that provide services to survivors and increase their economic empowerment and self-sufficiency. So, we'll be making our first awards from this survivor fund this year in 2023, which is really exciting. We can't wait to see the impact that that has again, exponentially because we've come together and we're making a shared investment in what we feel like is a critical and really one of the most important ways to stop human trafficking, which is to address these root causes and vulnerabilities. So, we're excited to be a part of this movement and alongside Marriott these efforts.

Jonathan Sullivan: That's really amazing.

**Emily Weiss:** Can I just share, similarly, we're super proud of, we have a partnership with, Wellspring Living. And it allows us to onboard survivors as apprentices. And so similar to what both of you just said, these survivors go through a Skills to Succeed program. And it really enables them, or the vast majority of them, to become Accenture employees and ultimately gain financial independence. So, it's just kind of back to the point we were talking about before, right? That it's multiple industries, multiple businesses with different, maybe business objectives, but coming together for the greater good, trying to address, you know, the same goal. And I think it's really nice to have three different people talk about how proud they are of the efforts and imagine what that would be as it just continues to expand and others are learning and, and, you know, growing from these examples.

Jonathan Sullivan: And I guess there's one final question I'd like to ask, but I may ask it in a way that elicits a different response. This is a podcast about travel, technology and trust. And for some very good reasons, we've avoided spending any specific time talking about what we

do with technology in this space. But we do share that amongst the providers in the industry. Eliza, why is it that we're not directly talking about the cool stuff we're doing with technology in the space here?

Eliza McCoy: Well, I'll speak from my previous experience as a law enforcement officer, right? I mean, part of what we're doing is using this technology to detect criminal behavior, and so the ways in which we do that is really important to ensure there's some confidentiality and stay ahead of those who are trying to find those opportunities and those vulnerabilities in our data systems.

I think it's critical that we share amongst ourselves to decrease opportunity, but we're certainly not gonna share with those who are looking to use it for that purpose. So that's one reason. And again, coming from that lens of prior law enforcement that I know we keep it close to the vest in the industry.

**Jonathan Sullivan:** That that's what I was hoping to hear.

**Eliza McCoy:** And you asked the right person, the former cop here.

Jonathan Sullivan: Well, it, it really has been great talking to the three of you about what collectively we're trying to do with human trafficking - to limit it, to disrupt it, to make our well over 2 million people aware of it on a day-to-day basis, keeping their eyes out for it, in the industry and how we're helping the victims as well.

It's, it's a different podcast. It's a different way of looking at the world, but it's something that I hope, my fellow travelers and workers, when they're out there, they look around the corner in the break rooms and they see the posters that are up, in almost every break room in almost every hotel, in almost every airport that try to remind the employees, keep an eye out for this. And so, thank you and, and thanks to your organizations as well for, for really making the world a better place.



Eliza McCoy: Thank you for highlighting.

**Emily Weiss:** Thanks for the discussion and the commitment.

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