



## Hotels Against Trafficking: Hospitality's Role in Fighting Slavery

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Young People Against Prostitution and Human Trafficking:

The Greatest Violence Against Human Beings

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“Whatever you do,  
do with Integrity.  
Wherever you go,  
go as a Leader.  
Whomever you serve,  
serve with Caring.  
Whenever you dream,  
dream with your All.  
And never, ever give up.”

My story begins in 1938, with Hitler's shadow engulfing Europe and the United States mired in depression. Curt Carlson, my great-grandfather, had an idea: trading stamps in grocery stores. With a \$55 loan, the Gold Bond Stamp Company was born.

76 years have passed since 'Boppa' made his dream a reality. Gold Bond looks quite a bit different now: 1,300 hotels (Quorvus Collection, Radisson Blu, Radisson, Radisson Red, Park Plaza, Park Inn by Radisson, and Country Inns and Suites By Carlson), the world's leading business-travel management brand (Carlson Wagonlit Travel), and a new name – Carlson – will do that. But one thing has never changed: we are not defined by the bottom line. Profit serves only to fuel our mission: making the world a better place. That vocation, embodied in the *Carlson Credo* (above) and instilled in my family from day one, informs everything we do, and it is the reason we fight slavery.

Curt died in 1999; born four years prior, I barely knew him. By that time, the torch had already been passed: my great-aunt, Marilyn, became Carlson's third chief executive officer in 1998, and my grandmother, Barbara, was leading the family foundation. It is only fitting, then, that in a year of incredible flux we made what would prove to be a life-changing decision.

At the turn of the 21st century, slavery had been abolished, or so it seemed. Americans assumed the Thirteenth Amendment had done its job. My family was not so naïve. We knew Lincoln's fight was not over; Her Majesty Queen Silvia of Sweden, a longtime family friend, made sure of it. A lifelong advocate for children, she was well aware that slavery lived on, hidden, but deadly as ever. Following a shocking visit to Russia, she decided to do something about it.

Queen Silvia launched the World Childhood Foundation in Stockholm in 1999; my family joined her as one of a handful of cofounders. It was our first explicit foray into the anti-trafficking world, and in a society that largely ignored the continued existence of slavery, an unheard of step. My great-grandfather's words rang true: “Wherever you go, go as a leader.”

Concerned by the hospitality industry's inaction on slavery, my great-aunt, Marilyn, took Curt's credo to heart. In 2004, five years after Childhood's launch, Carlson became the first major North American travel and hospitality company to sign the ECPAT Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children in Travel and Tourism. Six years later, we signed the United Nations Global Compact, a “strategic policy initiative for businesses that are committed to aligning their operations and strategies with ten universally accepted principles in the areas of human rights, labour, environment, and anti-corruption.”[1] And in 2013, Carlson became the first company to receive the Presidential Award for Extraordinary Efforts to Combat Trafficking in Persons.

My family's work has paved the way for the hospitality industry. Now it's time for others to follow suit and all of us to go even further. What do I mean? I mean every hotel in the world, including ours, can do more. My proposals span two categories: first, Carlson policies every hotel company should adopt, and second, new ideas that will embolden the entire sector. I begin with Carlson.

### **Carlson's Policies**

Carlson fights slavery in many ways, but in terms of hotels, two policies stand out: the anti-trafficking language in supplier contracts and Code of Business Ethics and Conduct, and hotel employee training program.

Supplier Contracts and Code of Business Ethics and Conduct:

Over the past couple years, as the corporate abolitionist movement has grown, every Carlson business unit – hotels, travel offices, and corporate headquarters – has updated its supplier contracts with anti-trafficking language. These additions outline the company's commitment to fighting slavery and what it minimally expects of suppliers. The Code of Business Ethics and Conduct has also been modified to include similar language. Together, these changes highlight and reinforce Carlson's willingness to fight slavery on a global scale.

Hotel Employee Training Program:

Carlson's hotel employee training program is just as important, if not more important, than its contract and code changes.

The idea first came to the fore in 2005, a year after the company signed ECPAT's Code, and was fully implemented by late 2011. All 80,000 hotel employees are now required to participate in a comprehensive Responsible Business training program, which includes a 10-minute film clip from *Not My Life*, a documentary about child trafficking and exploitation partially funded by my family foundation; a conversation about the film and child trafficking as a whole; a video showing potential scenarios that could arise in a hotel; a discussion about how employees can identify and properly report suspicious activity; and a video of my great-aunt talking about why this training is important to Carlson. Back-of-the-house posters also raise awareness and help employees identify trafficking.

Today, every Carlson hotel must have a certified Responsible Business trainer and at least 75 percent of the staff must be trained at all times. An outside vendor audits this program to ensure compliance.

Conclusion:

The reason I highlighted these initiatives – contract/code changes and the training program – is simple: they are relatively easy to implement (key word: relatively) and raise awareness on a massive scale (Carlson brands employ 100,000 people in more than 150 countries and territories). Every single hotel in the world – every Hilton, every Hyatt, and every Holiday Inn – should train its employees to identify human trafficking and make sure its suppliers know bonded labor is unacceptable. It's the least they can do.

### **New Policies**

If it is easier to talk about past initiatives, it is more exciting to think about the future. Carlson laid the foundation and now the entire industry must build the house.

I will limit my proposals to three. In doing so, it will become clear that cooperation is essential; the hospitality industry must work together. Thus, my third idea is the biggest: the formation of an anti-trafficking coalition including, at the very least, the world's ten largest hotel groups – InterContinental Hotels Group, Hilton Hotels, Marriott International, Wyndham Hotel Group, Choice, Accor, Starwood Hotels and Resorts, Best Western, Home Inns, and Carlson Rezidor.

Proposal #1: Marketing Human Trafficking Hotlines

Human trafficking hotlines are a blessing for victims of the slave trade, giving them direct lines of communication to the outside world. If the situation demands it, the NGOs that operate these numbers, like Polaris in the United States, can coordinate with law enforcement and local organizations in real-time to extract individuals who want 'out' and protect them from further abuse. Unfortunately, most people do not know these hotlines exist. That's where hotels come in.

Trafficking hotlines operate in multiple countries around the world. *I propose, as a means of raising awareness and assisting potential victims, that major hotel groups require their properties to advertise these numbers in relevant areas.* Ideally, 'advertisement' would take two forms: a sticker on every bathroom mirror and smaller stickers on shampoo, conditioner, and lotion bottles.

The obvious question is whether this approach would be effective. I say we answer it with a test: choose a city plagued by trafficking (Los Angeles or Dallas, for example) and implement the above policy in every major hotel, non-Carlson brands included. Then track the calls/messages coming into Polaris' National Human Trafficking Resource Center from that area: were there more or less than usual? Replicate this test in several locations and examine the results. If there is no notable increase in calls or messages, one can conclude that advertising these numbers in hotels, at least in the United States, is a waste of money. If, however, there is a significant increase, we have the impetus to spread the program nationwide, and perhaps globally.

Before the businessperson in you blasts my lack of financial foresight, let me say this: I understand the incredible complexity and potential drawbacks of such a program. The last thing I want is for someone to read one sign and assume a hotel is overrun with illegal sex. That is why the cooperative body I mentioned earlier is so important: a united front is much more appealing than a one-man charge. I also know putting stickers on tens of thousands of mirrors and hundreds of thousands of shampoo, conditioner, and lotion bottles is far easier said than done. Assuming the aforementioned research is positive, however, I think it's a worthwhile investment.

Hotlines don't work unless victims know they exist. As unwitting linchpins in the vicious cycle of commercial sexual exploitation, hotels worldwide have a responsibility to do their part. Assuming the NGOs that operate these numbers are onboard, I think it's time for the 'Big 10' to market the world's human trafficking hotlines.

#### Proposal #2: Auditing Your Supply Chain

Every company, no matter how big, is responsible for ensuring the fair treatment of those in its supply chain. Bonded labor is an unacceptable side effect of corporate negligence and hospitality companies are just as bad as everyone else. Each year, hotels use millions of bed sheets, pillowcases, towels, and employee uniforms, products of a textile industry rife with slavery. Food, furniture, carpet, and myriad other products also pose potential problems. In short, the service sector may not sell products, but it certainly buys them.

So what can be done? The solution is incredibly complicated; tracking a transnational corporation's purchases is not easy, especially in a highly globalized world. Nevertheless, 'cleaning' one's supply chain is absolutely necessary. If we only address sex trafficking, we will, quite literally, miss 80 percent of the problem. Though not comprehensive, my four-step plan can get us on the right track.

##### *Step One: Identifying Your Suppliers*

Many corporations don't know whose making what they buy. Thus, identifying your suppliers should be priority number one. That means sitting down with sourcing and procurement directors, pouring through financials, and identifying every factory that supplies your hotels. Don't stop until you find the Uzbek field that produces your cotton: only then can you claim to 'know' your supply chain.

##### *Step Two: Assessing Risk*

The second step follows directly from the first: once you've identified your suppliers, assess risk. Organizations like Made in A Free World and Verité can be incredibly helpful during this process. The goal is simple: figure out which parts of your supply chain – countries, industries, or specific firms – are most likely to be tainted by slavery. Doing so allows you to prioritize the auditing process instead of choosing producers at random. Though difficult, assessing risk gives buyers sight where they may otherwise be blind.

##### *Step Three: Auditing*

Auditing is the most important part of the process. In a traditional sense, that means sending inspectors on announced factory visits to ensure compliance. This simply doesn't work in the modern age. Instead, auditing has to be comprehensive – it must include unannounced visits, off-site worker interviews in native tongues, and more. Companies like Bureau Veritas and UL excel when it comes to long-term monitoring.

##### *Step Four: Transforming Your Partners*

The fourth and final step relies on information gathered from the third. Identifying which suppliers have issues allows you to take action. My preference, without a doubt, is helping, rather than abandoning, partners. 'Dropping' a supplier can kill thousands of jobs, making already desperate workers destitute. Their chances of being trafficked skyrocket, and in exchange for a 'better' corporate image, you sell off the very people you swore to protect. That said, getting age-old firms to change isn't easy; most aren't keen on shrinking their bottom lines. Fortunately, they don't have to.

TAU Investments, co-founded by leading abolitionist E. Ben Skinner, sees in corporate supply chains an opportunity to free millions from slavery and create a more productive international economy. All they ask is information: Who are your best suppliers? Who do you think has a lot of potential but is falling short? TAU uses that knowledge to target and invest in firms, make them slave-free, and increase profits. Everyone wins:

the buyer gets a better product, the firms' owners get higher returns, the laborers get livable wages and fair working conditions, and the investors make money.

### *Conclusion*

Despite good intentions, the side effects of globalization have been nothing short of tragic. As 17 million people suffer the horrors of bonded labor, transnational supply chains run amok, too large and unwieldy for corporations to handle. It's time we take responsibility for the system we built, the system we demanded. My 'Four Points' are just another step in that process.

### Proposal #3: Hotels Against Trafficking

I can't say it enough: cooperation is key. All of my ideas, including the ones I haven't discussed (yes, there are more), demand collaboration. It cannot be one group leading the others; it has to be everyone moving forward together. My solution is an industry-wide coalition against slavery, which I'm calling "Hotels Against Trafficking."

"Hotels Against Trafficking" does not have to be big; in fact, it doesn't even need to be an official organization. Rather, the coalition only needs to act as a convening agent, a reason for hospitality executives and their assorted directors to come together, share information, and discuss new policies. As long as hotel companies are talking to each other, working side-by-side, and setting high standards for everyone, small businesses included, I'll be happy.

### Conclusion:

The hospitality industry has a unique role to play in abolishing slavery. Affected by sex trafficking and bonded labor, hotel companies cannot afford to ignore this problem. For better or for worse, my proposals only scratch the surface of what we can do (technology, in particular, is worth watching). Regardless, hotels aren't doing enough, and that has to change.

### **Moving Forward**

If I've learned anything, it's that slavery is alive and well. 21-30 million people provide \$32-\$150 billion worth of profit to their exploiters every year, a disgusting level of human abuse that doesn't belong in a just world. It can be, no, it *must* be stopped.

The hospitality industry has to change. We cannot draw a line at the surface or pat ourselves on the back for doing the easy stuff. We need to make the hard decisions, to fight back rather than defend.

The world's largest hotel companies – InterContinental, Hilton, Marriott, Wyndham, Choice, Accor, Starwood, Best Western, Home Inns, and Carlson Rezidor – must work together and use their incredible resources to make slavery a distant memory. Until that happens, and such action is replicated throughout the corporate world, millions will remain in chains, forced to live on nothing and work for even less.

[1] "Overview of the UN Global Compact." United Nations Global Compact. <https://www.unglobalcompact.org/aboutthegc/>