

Ketchum and the *Rescue & Restore Victims of Human Trafficking* Program

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PUBLIC RELATIONS INDUSTRY

Corporate and organizational communications: A subset of public relations. The centralized management of communication on behalf of the organization; the function is a critical contributor to an organization's reputation – and thereby its competitiveness, productivity, and financial success.

(John Doorley and Helio Fred Garcia)

Professional communicators in public relations agencies and other organizations have greater power today than ever before.¹ Communicators are thus in a unique position to use their power to meet new standards of corporate responsibility and human rights. Through forming standards and guidelines to determine which individuals, organizations, governments, as well as which issues they are willing to represent, public relations firms have the unique opportunity to enhance their contribution to society. When evaluating potential clients, financial considerations should only form part of the calculations, the client company's business area and standard practices should also be taken into consideration.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs and initiatives should be viewed as opportunities for public relations firms, along with their clients, to influence and contribute to an open global discussion on corporate responsibility and human rights. By partnering with individuals, organizations and communities around the world, public

¹ Doorley, J. and Garcia, H.F *Reputation Management, The Key To Successful Public Relations and Corporate Communication*, (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2007)

relations organizations can play an active role in promoting positive human rights policies and facilitating the development of effective human rights programs. Individual agencies can support positive human rights practices and programs through drawing attention to key issues and helping to form a consensus of best human rights practices for corporations, governments and the general public.

CASE ABSTRACT

In October 2003 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) hired Ketchum to develop a public awareness campaign on human trafficking to support the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000. Human trafficking is defined in legal terms as the recruitment, transport, or sale of people for the purpose of exploiting their labor. TVPA makes human trafficking a Federal crime with stiff penalties. It is the first Federal law recognizing psychological coercion, a tool commonly used by traffickers to exploit their victims. Convicted traffickers are now sentenced to a minimum of 20 years and up to life imprisonment where the violation involves the death, kidnapping, or sexual abuse of the victim. In some cases, traffickers may also be required to pay substantial fines as well as full restitution to victims. Under the law, HHS is designated as the Federal agency responsible for helping victims of human trafficking become eligible to receive benefits and services.

Ketchum was charged with helping HHS achieve its goals of focusing the media on the grave human rights violation of human trafficking, developing resource materials and building community awareness and support for victims. HHS' overall goal was to increase the number of identified trafficking victims and provide the support required to help them regain their freedom and dignity, and live productive lives.

In developing the public awareness campaign, Ketchum was charged with:

1. Generating an open, honest and credible educational program about the problems of human trafficking;
2. Increasing the number of identified and assisted trafficking victims; and
3. Helping citizens understand how they can assist victims in their communities.

Ketchum's approach focused on building:

1. A consistent, compelling campaign identity;
2. Open channels of communication with target markets and national media to educate intermediaries and the public about the scope of the U.S. human trafficking problem and services available to the victims; and
3. National and local partnerships to help reach intermediaries.²

Ketchum achieved its goals, as well as its client's goals, through following the Ketchum ethical training program, revising the Ketchum Disclosure Guidelines, and developing the Ketchum reporter guidelines -enhancing communicators' abilities to responsibly address human rights issues around the world. Furthermore, on May 22, 2006 HHS announced that 1,000 victims of human trafficking had been certified since the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA)³ was signed into U.S. law in October 2000 and the number continues to increase each year.

This case study focuses on Ketchum's support of the *Rescue & Restore Victims of Human Trafficking* campaign, and how the firm's internal ethics training program and disclosure guidelines played a crucial role in the process of learning how to manage ethical and

² Intermediaries are defined by Ketchum as groups on the frontlines of reaching victims, e.g., faith-based organizations, health care providers, social services organizations, ethnic communities, and law enforcement.

³ The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 ("TVPA"), passed on October 28, 2000, marks the most comprehensive U.S. law to address the various aspects of trafficking in persons both internationally and domestically. The TVPA aims to combat trafficking by establishing measures to prevent trafficking, protect its victims, and prosecute those accountable for trafficking.

http://www.theirc.org/media/www/trafficking_victims_protection_act_of_2000.html

human rights issues⁴. The case study also illustrates one role the public relations industry can play in the promotion of human rights. The study is relevant to Global Compact principles one, two, four, five and ten.

COMPANY PROFILE

Ketchum was founded in 1923 by George Ketchum in Pittsburgh, Pa., USA. In 1934 the company integrated public relations into its advertising business. Today it is headquartered in New York City with 23 offices and more than 45 affiliates around the world. Ketchum was acquired by Omnicom Group (NYSE: OMC) in 1996, enabling the company to grow geographically as well as to expand its services and expertise.

Ketchum has a strong, collaborative culture and takes pride in the longevity of its client relationships as well as the tenure of its own employees. With its five global practice areas, Brand Marketing, Corporate Communication, Healthcare, Food & Nutrition and Technology, Ketchum offers clients a tremendous breadth and depth of marketing and corporate communication expertise. Opportunities for learning and professional development have always been at the core of Ketchum's work. Continuing education and professional studies are conducted through Ketchum College, its corporate university, Camp Ketchum, the Road Scholar program and the Ethics Training Program.

Ketchum has won more Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) Silver Anvil Awards than any other agency. In 2002 it was also recognized by *PRWeek* as the Agency of the Year. Ketchum was the first public relations firm to join the United Nations Global Compact and has been a member since 2001. The agency has embraced the principles of the Compact through the company's own active participation as well as through the promotion of the international initiatives to its clients and other prospective members.

⁴ See Appendix 1: Ketchum Disclosure Guidelines

As a global communication counseling organization, Ketchum's corporate citizenship profile is quite different from those of other companies. In addition to standard labor rights and human rights such as anti-harassment and anti-discrimination policies, an equal employment opportunity policy, and a workplace violence policy, Ketchum has adopted two additional policies, both mentioned below:

- Non-Disclosure, Non-Solicitation and Code of Business Ethics Agreement – At the direction of Ketchum Chief Executive Officer Raymond Kotcher, this policy document is formally acknowledged by each employee. It provides standards for virtually all operations of the company, including truth and accuracy in communication; record-keeping; gifts and entertainment; union agreements; conflicts of interest; and privacy.
- Anti-Corruption/Transparency – Ketchum is acutely aware of its responsibility as an active participant in the free flow of information and ideas. The integrity of independent media is a cornerstone of this vital process. A national debate on the public relations-media interface convinced Ketchum to restudy its policies in this area. As a result, Ketchum issued an updated policy document, “Ketchum Disclosure Guidelines,” to better ensure that all information it distributes will identify the client or other entities as sources of the information.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN THE UNITED STATES

Human trafficking can be characterized as modern-day slavery. HHS estimates that 14,500 – 17,500 people are trafficked into the United States annually.⁵ Today, the United States government does not know how many human trafficking victims are within its borders. However, it does know that victims can be found in nearly all parts of the country. Worldwide, human trafficking is tied with the illegal arms trade as the second largest growing criminal industry behind drug dealing. Traffickers beat, emotionally torture and blackmail victims to entrap them into prostitution, pornography, migrant farm labor, domestic servitude as nannies and maids, hotel and restaurant work, factory

⁵ This estimate does not include U.S. citizens who are trafficked within the United States or exported.

sweatshop work, and other types of forced labor. More than half of trafficking victims are children, and approximately 80 percent of victims trafficked across international borders are female. The majority of victims are exploited for the sex industry.

In 2004 HHS launched the *Rescue & Restore Victims of Human Trafficking* campaign to combat this crippling human rights violation. In the fight against human trafficking, HHS works closely with other Federal, State and local Government agencies, including the U.S. Department of Justice, Homeland Security, the State Department and the Department of Labor to specifically address the gap in public awareness and strengthen media attention.

Ketchum's extensive literature reviews and interviews with experts in the fields of health care, social services and law enforcement helped identify the core of the problem as well as develop an understanding of the circumstances under which victims are exploited while detailing the benefits and services available to them. A media analysis established that coverage on trafficking was focused on the international and prosecutorial sides of situations, and not domestic and victim-focused. Additionally, interviews with former victims revealed that direct outreach would be difficult because victims have limited access to the outside world.

The *Rescue & Restore Victims of Human Trafficking* campaign takes a victim-centered approach to human trafficking. Through a nationwide network of volunteer and funded social service providers, HHS focuses on rescuing victims with the help of law enforcement agencies, and then helping them recover and rebuild their lives. Trafficking victims are eligible for benefits and services including shelter, food, medical care, counseling, job training and education. The campaign theme, "Look Beneath the Surface," reinforces the message that to recognize potential victims, intermediaries must pay careful attention when interacting with people in their communities.

As a result of its findings, the team at Ketchum designed a campaign that would bring media attention to the human trafficking crisis within the United States and establish a

program that assisted in reaching out to intermediaries who may otherwise unknowingly encounter victims.

ETHICAL DECISION MAKING:

Disclosure Guidelines and Ethics Training Program

In a continually changing communication environment, the behaviors that communication firms engage in affect the credibility of their clients as well as their own reputation. With a skeptical public – which often views press releases and video news releases as misleading at best– credibility is essential. Thus, it is crucial for a public relations firm to accurately depict its clients to the public, disclosing all conflicts of interest and providing truthful and open communication in a fashion that satisfies vital ethical obligations.

Ketchum realized the negative implications for clients, practitioners and the public of an unethical or laissez-faire approach to business ethics early in its operations. In 2005, the agency offered to share its formal ethics training program and implemented revised disclosure guidelines with the Council on Public Relations Firms, which represents more than 100 public relations firms in the United States, to educate agencies throughout the industry. Ketchum's revised disclosure guidelines require agencies to be fully transparent about whom they represent. The reason this is so important is that, by providing a context and framing the conversations, it is much less likely that a conflict of interest will arise. Additionally, it ensures the public and media understand the context of the conversation⁶.

⁶ One current example of the failure to fully disclose the underlying client is Ask.com – where the campaign did not disclose that the guerilla campaign to promote the site was actually hired by the public relations firm to advertise the search engine.

Together, the Council of Public Relations Firms and Ketchum designed workshops for PR professionals, holding sessions in New York, Chicago and Washington, D.C. The course was entitled “Ethical Decision-Making: How to Help Your Firm Navigate the Changing Landscape.” More than 35 public relations agencies from around the country participated, in addition to Ketchum employees.

For the *Rescue & Restore* program, the Ketchum team also created reporter guidelines for its employees and the media to use when working with and interviewing human trafficking victims. Ketchum’s Vice President, Fran Bernhards stresses a caveat reminiscent of the physician’s oath to “first do no harm.” She says: “We developed the *Rescue & Restore* campaign to identify, rescue and restore human trafficking victims. We certainly do not want to do anything that could harm victims or exploit them. We only set up an interview with a victim after we have vetted the interview with the victim and their caseworker (if a caseworker is still involved with the victim) and make sure that the victim is comfortable doing the interview.”

So far, the firm has not encountered any problems with reporters, editors, or producers regarding the guidelines. This is particularly vital in cases where the media need to keep identities of victims hidden because the victim is a minor or because the victim could be in danger should his or her identity be revealed. Ketchum continues to use the ethics and reporters’ guidelines along with the training program as tools to manage clients’ ethical and human rights issues, leading to actions that help promote open, accessible and honest communication.

Ketchum revised its disclosure guidelines and an ethics training program in 2005, to help not only the company and its clients, but other public relations organizations as well.⁷ The guidelines and program help employees and clients understand the parameters of ethical behavior and how to act ethically while supporting underlying government, business, or operational goals. The development of the program reflects the industry’s

⁵ The Public Relations Council, which represents 100 firms in the United States alone, contributed to the writing of the Guidelines.

responsibility to provide strategic and ethical counsel to clients. The Ketchum training program is considered to be a minimum standard for ethical behavior for the public relations industry and was used by the Council of Public Relations Firms to educate other agencies.

The disclosure guidelines, necessary to meet the ever-increasing demands on publicly traded companies for greater transparency and financial responsibility, can also help achieve greater transparency in the business of communicating social responsibility, as this case demonstrates. In recent years, Ketchum has also demonstrated its commitment to global and local *pro bono* assignments consistent with Global Compact objectives.

Project Objectives

Prior to its involvement with the human trafficking project, Ketchum had already worked for HHS on a number of Medicare-related programs. The opportunity to help raise awareness of human trafficking in the United States was a unique opportunity for the firm as well as for the individuals on the team. Ketchum approached the development process with three objectives:

1. Increase the number of trafficking victims identified and assisted.
2. Bring media attention to the problem of trafficking in the U.S.; focus attention on the victims of trafficking.
3. Raise awareness among intermediaries who can identify trafficking victims.

The *Rescue & Restore Victims of Human Trafficking* campaign takes a victim-centered approach to human trafficking. Through a nationwide network of volunteer and funded social service providers, HHS focuses on rescuing victims with the help of law enforcement agencies, and then helping them recover and rebuild their lives. Trafficking victims are eligible for benefits and services including shelter, food, medical care, counseling, job training and education.

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Challenges

Ketchum research revealed that the campaign faced two considerable challenges:

1. Human trafficking victims’ inability to directly reach out for assistance and the need to protect some victims’ identities in the media.
2. When human trafficking was covered by the media, the focus was routinely on the international and prosecutorial side of the situation and not on the social service needs and recovery of the victim.

Based on its research, the agency and HHS sought to identify victims for media and speaking opportunities while keeping them safe and on-track with their recovery process.

In general, there is a difference between a company’s obligation to disclose certain kinds of information in a certain manner and the right of the public and press to know whatever they want.⁸ Specifically, regarding human rights issues and victims, public relations agencies have a profound responsibility to protect the security of their programs as well as their employees and spokespeople. It is also extremely important to protect the identities of the human trafficking victims for their safety and help them continue to recover from their ordeal so they can lead productive lives. As a result, Ketchum took the strategic approach to proactively communicate key messages and talking points for HHS officials and third-party spokespeople as well as tailoring media outreach and press conference remarks while educating individuals about the specialized needs of victims, including the importance of protecting certain victims’ privacy. Informational materials were provided to media and intermediaries to assist them in gaining an understanding of

⁸ Doorley, J. and Garcia, H.F *Reputation Management, The Key To Successful Public Relations and Corporate Communication*, (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2007)

human trafficking as a domestic problem. Materials included fact sheets, brochures, posters, toolkits, and a training video.

Another central component of the *Rescue & Restore* campaign is the HHS-funded National Human Trafficking Resource Center – 1-888-3737-888 which helps connect victims to local organizations available to assist them in the community. The *Rescue and Restore* web site serves as a centralized source of all materials and resources related to the issue of human trafficking, including downloadable materials, and information on how to become a coalition partner.

Ketchum launched a structured media campaign in 17 target markets so far to coincide with the creation of formal *Rescue & Restore* coalitions in key areas of the country where human trafficking is believed to be prevalent, including Phoenix, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Tampa, Miami, Newark, San Francisco, Milwaukee, Seattle, Portland, Las Vegas, Minneapolis/St. Paul, St. Louis, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles and Long Island. The domestic and victim-centered story was pitched to national, regional, local and trade media outlets in all of the markets noted above to promote the issue and drive attention to the subject matter. The firm also developed and distributed public service announcements on human trafficking in conjunction with the United Nations and The Ricky Martin Foundation. Throughout the establishment of the program, the revised Ketchum disclosure guidelines, ethics program, and reporter guidelines permeated every aspect of the campaign, and helped to guide Ketchum when establishing and achieving the objectives stated above.

Results

Since the launch of the campaign in April 2004, the program has experienced tremendous success and acclaim. Ketchum reports that the hotline has received more than 5,000 calls from intermediaries, possible victims and the general public. According to its evaluation,

more than 20 percent of these calls have resulted in referrals to local HHS grantees that provide services to trafficking victims. Additionally, more than 110 cases involving potential victims have surfaced through tips to the hotline, and HHS has certified more than 1,000 trafficking victims, with many more in the certification pipeline.

The *Rescue & Restore* program has also been recognized as a groundbreaking campaign in the public relations industry and has received more than 10 industry awards including the coveted Silver Anvil Award from the Public Relations Society of America. The award symbolizes the forging of public opinion and is annually awarded to organizations that have successfully addressed a contemporary issue with exemplary professional skill, creativity and resourcefulness. Silver Anvil Awards recognize complete programs incorporating sound research, planning, execution and evaluation. The programs must meet the highest standards of performance in the profession⁹.

Ketchum was able to alter the focus of the media's coverage of human trafficking from solely an international problem to a domestic problem, with a dramatic increase in coverage focusing on victim assistance. According to Ketchum, the media coverage positioned HHS as the lead in this multi-agency campaign collaboration and generated approximately 200 million media impressions throughout the country. All of these successes were achieved while maintaining victim security and comfort with the campaign. Ketchum has significantly raised expectations for media access and how successful a human rights program can be while guarding victim recovery and safety.

Since the *Rescue & Restore* program's inception, Ketchum has offered its services and unconditional support. There is the hope that Ketchum's work with HHS and human trafficking victims within the United States will have a long-term impact not only on this issue but on other human rights issues around the world. Going forward, with

⁹ <http://www.prsa.org/awards/>

“The Silver Anvil, symbolizing the forging of public opinion, is annually awarded to organizations which have successfully addressed a contemporary issue with exemplary professional skill, creativity and resourcefulness. In the over 50 years that these citations have been made, more than 1,000 organizations have been awarded Silver Anvils for excellence in public relations.”

cooperation from clients, public relations companies will hopefully be able to provide a service and have a positive effect on society.

Ketchum and HHS findings suggest:

1. Raised awareness among intermediaries who can identify trafficking victims through the establishment of local coalitions comprising more than 800 organizations;
2. A secured national partnership with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children as well as partnerships with some 75 additional national organizations;
3. Workshops and exhibits at national and regional conferences; and
4. Establishment of the *Rescue & Restore* Web site – www.acf.hhs.gov/trafficking and the National Human Trafficking Resource Center hotline.

Ketchum's analysis indicates that a public relations campaign can have the power to change perceptions as well as shape future discussions about critical human rights issues such as human trafficking.

ISSUES FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

Ketchum appreciates the importance and value of building relationships. One of the primary ways HHS will continue to change the American public's perception of human trafficking is through open, honest, and ethical communication. Because public relations involves identifying audiences and molding messages, it is perfectly positioned to help facilitate communication characterized by accuracy, transparency, and community support. Over the long term, it is expected that increased educational programs and domestic support for human rights victims will lead to improved government policies, expanded corporate responsibility and an increase in community involvement. .

Ketchum accepted the offer to work with HHS with the understanding that the Government agency adhere to and support Ketchum's disclosure guidelines, ethical standards and reporter guidelines created to support and protect victims. Not only has

HHS embraced the guidelines and standards, but the media have shown a continued respect for their importance. According to Account Team Member Frances Bernhards, reporter guidelines continue to be important for setting the ground rules for interviews with victims. “They also help sensitize reporters that victims have undergone horrendous exploitation at the hands of their traffickers, and therefore, must be treated with the highest respect and delicacy so their recovery process is not harmed as a result of the interview.”

Ketchum’s support of the campaign demonstrates the agency’s leadership in promoting a socially and ethically responsible agenda. Agreeing to work with HHS serves as reputation branding for the agency and continues its commitment to promote transparent and honest communication while encouraging corporate social responsibility. Accepting the challenge also embodies the organization’s mission statement and internal values – to encourage and build trust among all publics. Although Ketchum as a business was not directly challenged, the process of developing an effective public relations campaign can be viewed as a test of the way in which exceptional communication programs can impact and support the Global Compact principles.

The results of Ketchum’s work on behalf of the *Rescue & Restore Victims of Human Trafficking* campaign highlight the positive connection between public relations and the promotion of human rights. Ketchum reports that its efforts have been positively influenced by the company’s disclosure guidelines, ethics training program, and the reporter guidelines developed specifically for the campaign. The company’s internal programs and guidelines can be considered to work in tandem with the Global Compact principles¹⁰.

With the assistance of its disclosure guidelines, ethics training program, and reporter guidelines, Ketchum continues to support the campaign to help victims of human trafficking and others, demonstrating the importance and value of the intersection of communication and human rights. The guidelines followed by Ketchum staff and the

¹⁰ <http://www.unglobalcompact.org/>

resulting campaign help display the agency's willingness to champion the Compact guidelines and act as a catalyst for change in the global community.

Public relations firms are guided by their clients' interests. This can present a challenge when the firm is not emotionally engaged with the topic at hand. On the other hand, when stated values align it is likely to lead to more productive relationships. This is because, as illustrated in this paper, the client and agency's values are congruent and therefore not at odds. Going forward, Ketchum's innovative disclosure guidelines and ethics program should continue to be used as an example for the industry, illustrating how companies can contribute to developing communities and societies facing human rights challenges.

To directly improve the campaign, Ketchum is developing materials that feature individuals from diverse cultures. The agency is also working to develop reliable long-term metrics to understand the impact of the public relations campaign on local communities and victims.

Conclusion

The goal of this paper is to illustrate the relationship between public relations and human rights. In this regard, more work needs to be done in the field to collect data, to create metrics for efficacy, and to accurately measure both the administrative process and the effectiveness of programs, such as HHS's Human Trafficking campaign.

The public relations industry can make an important contribution to human rights initiatives. Specifically, it can serve as an effective vehicle to promote targeted public service messages, programs and community action. The industry is able to, and should be responsible for, developing programs addressing contemporary issues and demonstrating how principled communication is an essential component of corporate social responsibility. Moreover, principled communication is an integral part of what is

termed corporate responsibility, which encompasses corporate efforts to meet the financial and non-financial expectations of various stakeholder groups. Corporate responsibility goes beyond philanthropy and legal compliance.¹¹ Ketchum CEO Ray Kotcher simply says, “What it all means is that the old aphorism that an organization can do well by doing good still applies.”

Ketchum and the industry as a whole have recognized the importance of reputation management and that client campaigns can be enhanced with the aid of open, honest and accessible communication. Ketchum’s ethics program and revised disclosure guidelines are a concrete example of this commitment. Having these guidelines equips the industry with the credibility to represent clients whose interests are related to social issues such as human trafficking. Additionally, in the HHS case, Ketchum further refined its principles to address the specific concerns of human trafficking victims.

It is imperative that the industry work to empower communities around the world – including within the United States – to effectively communicate to individuals, organizations, and the media, the objective of protecting human rights and affirming the industry’s full support of human rights. Going forward, public relations companies should continue to provide socially responsible services and that have a positive effect on society and the promotion of human rights.

SOURCES

The information for this case study was obtained from a variety of sources. A significant amount of background information as well as performance measurements were provided by Ketchum. John Doorley and Helio Fred Garcia’s textbook, *Reputation Management, The Key To Successful Public Relations and Corporate Communication*, was also used extensively as a resource for this paper. Additionally, the authors of this paper were provided access to a number of other documents and senior management officers at Ketchum in New York, Washington, D.C. and London. The authors would like to

¹¹ Doorley, J. and Garcia, H.F *Reputation Management, The Key To Successful Public Relations and Corporate Communication*, (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2007) Pg. 357

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APPENDIX 1: REVISED KETCHUM DISCLOSURE GUIDELINES (10)

1. When pitching the media, always identify the client you represent.
2. Be forthright with information about our clients' sponsorship of information, spokespeople or events.
3. In all written materials, clearly articulate the client, product or service being represented.
4. In booking an interview, conduct a straightforward discussion of messages the spokesperson wants to communicate. This helps ensure that everyone's expectations are clear (the producer, the spokesperson and the client).
5. In preparing spokespeople for media interviews, create messages and provide training that allows them to be transparent and to portray accurately who they represent.
6. In video news releases (VNRs), b-roll and audio news releases (ANRs), disclose fully to TV or radio stations who produced and paid for it. Written identification of sponsorship should be placed on packaging and on slates throughout the VNR.
7. When producing a VNR, the narrator will not use the word "reporting" or refer to themselves as a reporter.
8. Web sites should disclose clearly their ownership, private or public, name their parent company and/or sponsors, and reveal any relevant business relationships, including sponsored links to other sites.
9. When blogging, use your real name, be clear who you are, and identify for whom you work with.
10. We encourage word-of-mouth advocates to disclose their relationship with marketers in their communications with other consumers. We will not blur identification in a manner that might confuse or mislead consumers as to the true identity of the individual with whom they are communicating, or instruct or imply that other should do so.

APPENDIX 2: REPORTER GUIDELINES FOR INTERVIEWING VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING (8)

When conducting interviews with victims of human trafficking – as with any victim of a violent crime – it is important to empathize with what they have gone through and to understand their mindset – molded by coercion, violence and intense fear at the hands of their traffickers.

1. Human trafficking victims were lured to the United States with promises of a better life, marriage and/or a good job so they can provide for their families back home. These promises and dreams quickly turned to nightmares as the victims found themselves trapped in the sex industry, the service industry, in sweatshops or in agricultural fields – living daily with inhumane treatment, physical and mental abuse, and threats to themselves or their families back home.
2. Trafficking victims have been through brutal physical and psychological trauma, often suffering long-term or permanent damage to both their physical and mental wellbeing. Their recovery process takes a long time, and many victims find it extremely difficult and troubling to talk about their ordeal. Because telling their story forces them to relive their nightmare, it is extremely difficult to find trafficking victims who have progressed sufficiently in their recovery process that they are willing to talk with reporters – even if they understand that by telling their story, they can help other victims of trafficking.
3. Traffickers are ruthless criminals who subject their victims to repeated violence and threats against themselves and their family. Therefore, trafficking victims often fear reprisals against themselves or their family back home should they talk with reporters. And even if their traffickers are hopefully behind bars, trafficking networks still exist and the victim's safety or the safety of their family could still be in jeopardy. Therefore, you often will be asked to not reveal the victim's identity (name, likeness or voice) in your story.

4. Trafficking victims fear authority figures and are only beginning to trust others. The individual they trust the most is their social worker, who has been working diligently with them in their recovery process. Therefore, the social worker should be consulted on how to best approach the interview with the trafficking victim. We recommend an initial interview with the social worker to receive a general overview of the victim's case. During this initial interview, the social worker will want to discuss the types of questions you may want to ask the victim – and most importantly – identify any overly sensitive questions that could hurt the victim's recovery process. It is vital that the social worker is then present for the actual interview with the victim to provide emotional support for the victim and to be alert to situations that may be harmful.
5. Many trafficking victims do not speak English and do not understand American culture or how the American media operate. Therefore, it is vital even for victims with some English skills to have a skilled translator available during the interview – ideally, a translator who both speaks the victim's language and who understands the victim's culture. In many cases, the victim's social worker will be the best translator, since this individual has achieved a measure of trust with the trafficking victim and can screen out and/or soften potentially sensitive question areas. If an independent translator is used, the social worker should still be present for the interview.
6. Interviews can be intimidating for even media-savvy individuals. However, interviews with an unknown reporter can be utterly daunting and frightening for a trafficking victim. Be sensitive to their fear of authority figures – and yes, you will be seen as an authority figure – and reassure the trafficking victim that you have their best interests in mind and that you are conducting the interview to let the public understand scope of the human trafficking problem, and therefore, help other victims escape this devastating human rights violation.
7. Avoid negatively worded or accusatory questions that will likely intimidate, frighten and cause the victim to shut down. Sensitivity is especially important when talking

with sex trafficking victims, who may be extremely hesitant and ashamed to discuss their situation and what they were forced to do.

8. Sometimes trafficking victims feel that it was their fault they became enslaved. As a result, it is important to not reinforce this guilt by insinuating that they should have known better or somehow avoided becoming a trafficking victim. Above all, understand that this individual is a victim, not a criminal, and should be treated with the respect and understanding they deserve. Trafficking victims should not be made to feel they have done anything wrong.