

Andrew Hoffman

## Tony's Chocolonely: A Bittersweet Journey to Make Chocolate Slave-Free

Just a few weeks before breaking for the holidays in December 2022, Johanna Hendricks<sup>i</sup> was preparing for her last meeting of the year with her boss, Paul Schoenmakers, head of impact at Tony's Chocolonely, a Netherlands-based company whose chocolate bars were known for colorful packaging, fun flavors, and a mission to make "100% exploitation free the norm in chocolate."<sup>1</sup> As Schoenmakers' advisor, she was tasked with assessing the state of the company and helping formulate a plan for key strategy and goals in the next year. She considered what to cover with Schoenmakers, reflecting on Tony's progress and challenges as a company over the past few years.

With increasing brand awareness came widespread support for Tony's impact-driven mission. However, despite efforts to incite actionable change—from creating an open supply chain to starting a non-profit foundation supporting cocoa communities—the brand found itself caught up in controversy regarding certain aspects of its approach to addressing modern slavery and child labor in the industry.

In 2021, Tony's Chocolonely lost its spot on a list of ethical chocolate brands curated by the organization Slave Free Chocolate because of its partnership with mega chocolate producer Barry Callebaut, a company often denounced for use of child labor. *The Times of London* published an article calling out the irony of Tony's removal from an anti-slavery organization's ethical list and quoting critics condemning the company's association with Barry Callebaut.<sup>2</sup> To make matters worse, just a day before *The Times* article was published, Barry Callebaut, Mars, Hershey, and other major industry players had been named defendants in a child slavery lawsuit in the United States.<sup>3</sup>

Tony's team quickly responded with an explanation that the company worked with big players like Barry Callebaut to solve unethical conditions in the chocolate industry from the inside. However, a year later, Tony's branding ethos was called into question again when *The Times* posted an article highlighting

<sup>i</sup> Johanna Hendricks is a fictional character.

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