Welcome to right here in Mass. We're a weekly podcast that features individuals throughout the Bay State who are on our radar and should be on yours from the Berkshires to Boston, Cape Cod in the Islands. Tune in to learn about who you should know right here in mass.

Welcome back to another episode of Right here in Mass. Joining me today is Emily Carlson, a distinguished travel agent and the owner of the a acclaimed travel agency. We do travel right with a passion for travel and an exceptional knack for planning. Emily has carved out a niche as a top expert in organizing unforgettable Disney vacations.

Emily, welcome to the show. I am so excited to be here. Thank you so much for having me. Yes. I'm excited to have you here as well. And for our listeners, Emily's full bio can be found in the show notes, but Emily, I would love to start off by having you share more about who you are and what you do. Sure. Um, well, I'm local to Western Mass.

I grew up in Wilham, Massachusetts, and I went to Minho Regional High School. Um, after a few years of exploring, um, being a teacher out in the Rhode Island area and, uh, the other part of Massachusetts, I came back home and I actually, um, began teaching. At the elementary school that I went to as a kid at Soul Road School in Wilham.

Um, and then after a few years I moved up in the ranks and I became an English teacher over at Minish Hog Regional High School. And throughout my whole journey, I think that. Um, just being a teacher, I've always loved to work with people and, um, get them to see things in different ways and get them to understand different concepts and really show people how to do things.

So I think that in the back of my mind, I've always had, I. This kind of planner element to me. And, um, you know, just from vacationing with my own family, I really discovered that I really enjoyed planning our vacations and working with people to help them plan their vacations. So, uh, after being a travel agent for a few years, I decided to take the leap and start my own business.

So, um, I do use the tools that I use as an educator and I have put them to good use teaching other agents how to be travel agents, and also teaching travelers how to make the most out of their epic vacations. That's amazing. And I think it's especially great like you mentioned with your educational background to help families like, you know, what kids of younger ages might be looking for on vacations and can help them plan in that capacity and have vacations that are truly great.

Absolutely. I love being able to use my experience as being a teacher and use that while I'm thinking about this family that's in front of me and what they might want for their incredible vacation, whether it be Disney or cruises, or all inclusive, whatever it might be, and trying to find exactly the perfect experience for that family that's in front of me.

I love that. And I also think it's wonderful that you can offer several different types of vacations, but I know that Disney is of course one of your specialties, of course. And so I'm curious to hear what made you wanna specialize in Disney specifically, like if there was anything about the destination that really stood out.

I. So Disney has always been one of those things, and my husband and I joke all the time about like we're a Disney family, but it's one of those things where if you grow up going to Disney and then you find another person who also is, you know, they grew up going to Disney, you just have that like common bond with each other.

And I think that Disney has such a, um, wonderful way of bringing people together. I could be in like the supermarket wearing like a. Mickey bow sweatshirt and it generates so many different conversations with people because in their lifetime they've probably either been to Disney, thought about Disney, or maybe someone in their family has been or, or whatever, and it just sparks this conversation.

So I love that about Disney. 'cause I think it just brings people together. So I think that my core interest has always been with Disney because it's so family focused and um, like I said, it just really generates that connection within. Uh, big groups of people. So I grew up going to Disney. My husband grew up going to Disney and now we are passing on that tradition and, um, bringing our kids to Disney as well.

So fun. I think you might have mentioned this, but is this correct that you had started working for another travel agency first and then went off on your own? I did, I did. I worked for a pretty large travel agency and um, I ran a team over there. And what was really wonderful is that, uh, the team that I had worked with, um, it was 10 wonderful women.

And you know, one day I said, you know what, I'm gonna take this leap and I'm gonna do this. And everyone came with me and we all just started this wonderful adventure. That's really cool too, especially because you mentioned you had kind of been juggling both your teaching position and then also this travel agency until you leaped in.

So what was that like of balancing two careers at once? Um, it was certainly challenging and, you know, I'm very grateful for my family for so much support and patience. Um, my, my husband Scott has been incredible in supporting my dreams and my business adventures. Um, and he actually owns a small business as well, so I think that it was nice that we had that common.

Bond together. And it was good for advice along the way because never owning a business before. It's always a challenge and an adventure, you know, opening something up. But, um, it was, it's been wonderful to have that kind of support from friends and family along the way because it certainly was challenging.

It still is a challenge every day. I. Absolutely miss the, the classroom and the kids and the environment, but I think that I am doing my job as an educator in just a bit of a different way I. Definitely. And also being able to have the flexibility that you would like with that too, and being able to have the huge plus of being able to see all these cool new places and have it be research for your job.

Absolutely. And when you were growing, we do travel, right? What are some things that you had learned along the way with that? Whether it was like unexpected, exciting things that happened, or even roadblocks might have faced. Um, I think that a few things that I learned certainly have been that. It's not a bad thing to dream really big and to have really big goals.

So when I first opened, we do travel in, uh, 2022. One of my huge goals was to get Disney earmarked, which is basically their, um, program that they have for agencies, their high performing. And I really, really, really wanted to be in that program. Um, at the time, our agency was pretty small, but I thought, you know what?

Let's just keep chugging along. We can do this, we can do this. So. I think that part of setting goals and having big dreams is putting together plans and. Trying to lean on what you're really good at in order to achieve your goals. So it's more than just saying, I want this to happen. It's like, how are you gonna make this happen?

So I think that one piece of advice I would give to business owners is don't be afraid to dream big, but also. Really try to lay out a plan. No matter if it takes the plan, takes a year, the plan takes two years, whatever it might be, just make some steps to try to achieve that goal. Um, because it's more than just putting it out there into the universe.

You gotta kind of make a plan. I. That's a great reminder. It's like we all have such aspirational goals that we wanna reach, but it's like if you just kind of put it out there without really thinking about the steps to take, that's what can feel really overwhelming. And so I think that's perfect advice to really break it down into those manageable steps, no matter how long it may take you to reach that goal in the long run.

Absolutely no matter how big and small too, because every single day, you know, we have different goals that we have for our businesses and for our family life, for whatever we're doing. And I think it's important to always know that it's okay to just chip away little by little, because in the long run it's gonna pay off from just saying you wanna do something to like, what are you gonna do about it?

Absolutely. And say that there's someone listening who's like, you know what? I am ready for a vacation, but I have no idea where I wanna go, or even what types of things I'd wanna do. What would you recommend for kind of walking them through that process of just figuring that stuff out? So. What we usually do if someone comes to us and they're like, I wanna take a trip, but I just don't know where to go, um, we'll ask them a few questions like, what are they looking for?

Because depending on what they're looking for, if they, what type of experience they want, do they want things that involve water? Do they want things that involve a lot of, uh, walking and hiking or something like that? Um. It can kind of direct us into an avenue that we think might work best for them.

Oftentimes too, we will present maybe a few different ideas to whoever's coming in front of us and we. Most of us are former teachers or are currently teachers. Nice. So we really try to present in a visual way what this vacation could be like. So someone could see something and go, you know what? I could picture myself doing that.

And they could see visually like, oh yes, oh, look at all these pictures and videos, and they could picture themselves doing whatever that trip might be. So we really try to match a trip up with. The person that's in front of us. So it's okay if you don't know what you wanna do. We really try so hard to ask you certain questions to kind of navigate you in the right direction.

I love the visual piece that you mentioned, because that's huge. Just like you said, I mean, I. Being able to read something on a paper might be one thing, but when you actually see the photos and the videos and even hear about other experiences that other people had going to that place or doing that excursion, I mean, that makes a whole difference within that.

So I love that, um, opportunity that you provide, but just being able to really show to your clients what it's like. Absolutely. Um, we consider ourselves visual storytellers. So whenever one of the agents will go on a trip or travel, and we really try to showcase what it is like so people at home can kind of think to themselves, you know, can I picture myself doing this?

Would my kids like this? Is this something that I would wanna do with my family or my friends, or whatever. Um, because I think it's really important. Especially since a vacation is, it's an investment of mm-hmm. Um, you know, your time and your money and it's really important for someone to really feel excited about what they're about to do.

Absolutely. And what would you say sets your travel agency apart from others? I. Oh, geez. Um, so many things I just, I can't help but really, um, really brag about this wonderful group of people that I work with every day. So, uh, we do travel is really, um, I. Like I said, there's a lot of us that are former teachers, former educators, so we really tried to focus on that.

So if someone was needing extra help in an English, English class, uh, we would get them a tutor. So we're kind of like your vacation tutors. We have, um, seminars that we do every month to highlight different aspects of the vacation. So for example, Disney just implemented a new, uh. System for their rides, the old Fast Pass.

Um, but now it's called something else and they keep changing different strategies and ways to use it. So every month we host a live seminar that we do for our travelers, and it comes with a live q and a. So we'll sit there and we'll answer any questions that people have live in the moment because people may have questions right then and there.

Uh, we also have. A wonderful clearinghouse of tons of digital content, uh, videos, PDFs, whatever you could imagine. And we're adding to that all the time that our travelers have access to. Uh, another thing that sets us apart is that we have the amazing dining and experiences team that is a part of, we do travel.

So if you're going on a cruise or if you're going to Disney or Universal, wherever you may be going. And there are things that you need to reserve. Our team takes care of it for you. So you don't even need to wake up early or think twice about the plans that you need to make because we are on top of it and they are incredible at what they do.

So, um, I would say we provide a ton of support and, um, just, I don't know, excitement for the upcoming trip that they'll be having. I love that, and I especially think that all of the content you create is really great because just having those resources that your travelers can refer to at any time is huge, especially if it's somewhere they've never gone before and they might be feeling a little bit overwhelmed or a little bit nervous about traveling to a new spot.

Having all those resources they can turn to, I imagine will make it so much easier for them to just truly enjoy it. Absolutely. We think so. And our travelers think so too. Uh, they, they love the support that we provide and I think that it makes them feel like they're a part of it as well, because it's, when you're a teacher, you are not just showing somebody how to do something and then walking away.

You're really trying to have them live and breathe how to do whatever the task is, and you're trying to show them all different ways to do it. So that's what we try to do. So they feel like they're a part of it as well. Definitely. And I think one thing. That can be a little bit challenging, which is travel in general is like when things outside of your control happen, like if plans need to get canceled or something like that.

And it sounds like your agency is very on the ball of being able to adjust to those changes that might be happening or little snafus that might be going on in different trips. Of course, yeah. We really work as a team and um, we really try to help each other and lean on each other to help all travelers.

So even though someone might be working with one agent, there are so many people behind the scenes that are helping out, trying to make that trip just be executed perfectly. Absolutely. And one thing that I'm curious about too, 'cause you mentioned this, how Disney made the change with the previous FastPass.

I know that things are always changing in the travel industry between resorts going under renovations and new attractions coming out and stuff like that. Absolutely. So how do you stay on top of all of that and just kind of be able to consume all these changes and share that info with your clients? We, um, well, we're very, very lucky in that, like I said, we have a really great team and we work really well together.

We have two amazing women that run the, we do travel Instagram and they stay on top of all of the news. Uh, they are, um, local to, uh, the Florida area. So they're able to kind of go and get information as they need to. And then we also, of course have, um, agents that will pitch in in any way. When it comes to our social media accounts or, um, anything that if we need to get news out there fast, um, we can all work together to get that across the finish line for our travelers and make sure they're up to date with everything they need to know.

That's great. And I assume that for any destination or place that you send your clients to, you probably wouldn't send them to some place that you personally don't stand behind or don't personally Absolutely. Trust. So I'm curious to hear like what's your process for finding and vetting these different destinations, hotels, resorts, whatever it might be.

Um, we establish excellent relationships with our vendors and we really try to, uh, lean on them to give our agents some opportunities to explore the different areas for, um, for their travelers because, you know, like you said, you would never want to try to convince someone to go somewhere when you haven't actually experienced it yourself.

So, uh, we all stand behind that and we will not take care of doing any trips. For a traveler, unless we have personally been there. So if someone comes to me and they're like, Hey, I wanna do, uh, an Alaskan cruise, I would say, Hey, that's so great. I have the perfect person for you because they've done an Alaskan cruise and they know exactly all the things to tell you all about it.

So we. Try to really lean on that teamwork to try to always put that client first and make sure that they are getting someone that is well versed in that area. Um, and like I said, we do try to really lean on our vendors to provide opportunities for our agents to go to all these different locations and experience firsthand what this.

What there is to see in the world. So, um, so yeah, it's really important to us to be able to, uh, really give that firsthand account experience and pass that on to our, uh, travelers. Absolutely. And it's like a win-win win situation for all because your travelers get a great experience. Yeah. You are able to share really wonderful places they can go to and then the destinations or the resorts, whatever it might be, they're getting new guests that they can be able to provide a really wonderful experience and time for.

So I love that everyone involved, all three parties can really, can benefit from that. Absolutely. And at the time of this recording, it's January, 2025. So one thing that I'm really interested to hear is what you would say are the most popular destinations that people are looking for at this time. So I'd say probably for 2025.

And I imagine you have people looking at 2026 as well for booking trips. Absolutely. Well, there is so much that is coming up in the next year, two years. Um, when it comes to travel, one of the

big things that's coming up in the springtime is Epic Universe is gonna be opening, which is at Universal in Orlando.

That is gonna be a whole new land over there. So a whole new park, uh, which features some Harry Potter and I know everyone loves Harry Potter, so that is a really big deal. They've been working on it for quite some time, so I am excited to see what that will be like. Um, Disney Cruise Line is also. Um, they have their brand new ship that has come, which is the Disney treasure, and then next up will be the Disney Destiny, which will happen in the fall.

So that is another exciting thing. Um, additionally, the 70th anniversary of Disneyland is coming up in May, so there's gonna be tons of new celebrations, new experiences out there in California. Um, for families to experience and of course the all-inclusives, uh, they are always building and changing and adding new, um, locations.

They are, um, really trying to like revamp a lot of their spaces to, um, modernize a little bit and, um, just. Get people to travel more to, uh, places like Jamaica, The Bahamas, um, and things like that. So a lot of exciting things are coming for the travel sphere, if you like to travel. Oh, there's a lot of new stuff.

Lots of new stuff happening. Totally. And this, your answer to this question might depend on the destination, but how far in advance do you typically recommend to your clients that they start thinking about implanting their next trip? So we advise to people as soon as that little glimmer of that you might wanna do something pops in your head.

Let's chat because for some places, um, a lot of the really great locations or great resorts or types of rooms, they get snagged up really fast because of course we've got our planners in the worlds that like to plan ahead for their family trips. But we also say that it's a good idea to. When you have that little glimmer of an idea to get in touch right away is because, um, you can chip away at your vacation and people don't realize the benefit of time.

So a $5,000 vacation, you know, traveling in two months looks a lot different from a $5,000 vacation that's traveling in a year. So you have more time, um, more. I don't know, it doesn't feel as rushed. Um, of course we can put together last minute trips for families, and we do that every day, but it is really nice to be able to say to a family, Hey, I know you're not traveling till 2026, and by you chipping away, you'll have this paid off way before you even travel.

So it won't even be something that is on your radar. It's gonna be in the past, and then you can just look forward to your vacation. Those are two great points. You shared one about being able to give people the option about paying it off throughout time, so that way it's not just one big expense hitting the bank account at once.

And then two, like you mentioned, the additional time of just giving people time to sit and think about what it is they really wanna get outta their vacation and what it is they really wanna do.

And then that way they're able to really pick stuff they truly enjoy and not just picking something because they're running out of time ultimately.

Exactly it. One of the things that we, our mantra, one of our mantras is we always say life is short. Take the trip. And that is based on real life events that have, you know, probably occurred in every single family where you say, oh, you know what? Oh, I wanna go on this big family trip, or I wanna do this thing with my, uh, with my child or my husband, or whoever.

Your family member. A friend, and. It's just one of those things that we talk about, but we never actually do it. And honestly, life is short and we should do the things that we want to do. So it's not like saying that is any kind of marketing. It is from real life. Um, my. My parents in the past three years, both of them have passed away.

And one thing that I always valued about my family and my parents is that they would take us on family vacations every year, whether it was to Cape Cod or to Disney or maybe to Boston for the weekend. We would go on these family trips together and, um, I don't know that people understand until you get to the place where it's too late to understand the importance of.

Creating those memory banks. You wanna create those moments and those opportunities, having time together, because time's a thief. And so that's why, you know, as soon as you have that little thought in your head that you might wanna take a trip, life's short, take the trip, let's do it. Let's get you across the finish line.

Because someday you won't be able to have that choice, sadly. And we wanna make sure that we get families to have those experiences together. Yes. I love that reminder. And it's so important with potentially losing loved ones and and not expecting that. And then also too, time just goes by so quickly where you could have little kids and you keep saying, oh, next year we'll book the trip.

Next year you'll book the trip, and next thing you know, they've graduated college and they're moving out and you never take that trip and they don't wanna talk to you. Exactly. So it's really such an important reminder to just nudge people to book that trip, whatever it is. Like you said, whether it's something on a smaller scale, like a weekend in the state or something that might be more bigger.

Absolutely. Time together is what's important. It doesn't matter what you do, but we wanna help families find something that they can do together and, um, create those memories. Definitely. And so one thing I'm curious to hear about in terms of the travel industry in general is what updates or trends might be coming up this year beyond like the new and exciting things that are happening within Disney and other destinations.

So, um, new and exciting trends for travel, like places to go or could be places to go, or even how you see the industry might be changing. Anything like that. So one thing I think that is

happening with the industry is certainly, um, this idea of like the multi gener, my multi-generational trips. Mm-hmm. So we are seeing a lot of instances where.

Um, a family will come to us and then three weeks later the grandparents wanna join. Then a few weeks later, the aunts and uncles wanna join. So a lot of people are trying to do things in big groups together, which is awesome. Mm-hmm. Um, another thing that we notice is that, uh, different. Travel vendors, um, are trying to be more inclusive towards, um, their client in front of them.

So having lower deposits or doing specific promos to try to, um, get people to book their travel sooner. Um, there's a lot of that that's going on and it. So of course important to stay on top of that information because you wanna get the best deal you possibly can. Um, so I think that planning ahead and those multi-generational, multi-generational vacations are what is really, uh, big right now.

Yes. And the multi-generational one, especially I noticed is big with Disney, where you see everyone has the matching shirts and the fun outfits and it creates memories for the entire extended family, not just your immediate family, which I think is really nice. Absolutely. And one thing I'm curious to hear about, uh, in terms of traveling in Disney is how you manage potentially working with clients who wanna run any of the Disney races.

I'm a runner, so I feel like I always see people running in them, and I'm like, one day I will do that. But I'm curious to hear if you've planned that for people and, and how you have done that. Absolutely. Um, and you should do it. Remember, life is short, you gotta do it. Um, so the run Disney is a really, really big deal for, uh, runners and of course for people who love Disney.

And, um, we do have a lot of travelers that every year we know that they're going to be doing the races. So we make sure that we. Get them accommodations that work out with where the races are taking place, and, uh, making sure that they are thinking of things like, you know, how are they gonna rest? How are they going to, um, reenergize?

Making sure that they are, um, you know, stocked up with things they need, like their water and. Uh, and so on. Um, and making sure that their itinerary is very flexible in case that they're feeling, um, exhausted or tired or just need to kind of recuperate a little bit. That they're not going too heavy on the plans.

Also, because those rates as well, they're so fun. Um, there's a lot of adrenaline that has to do with it. So afterwards you can feel very, very tired because you're not realizing it as you're running. I can imagine that, I think it was a few weeks ago I saw the Dopey challenge, I think it was called, um, which I was like one perhaps to anyone who does those four races in one weekend, but two, I also see with Disney, depending on the race, it can be super early, wake up times and start times, so absolutely.

You bring up a great point about just having that flexibility and to kind of let people do what they need to do in order to rest or whatever it might be. Absolutely, especially for people who have never run the races before and you, you are not really sure what you're getting yourself into. Um, it's good to work with an agent who has done the races and who knows exactly what is going to, uh, happen in that, you know, span of what three in the morning time that, uh, you're gonna be running around the Disney parks.

Absolutely. And you just brought up a great point about the benefit of working with an agent, being that there's someone, it's someone who's done that before, so if you haven't gone to a destination or done something specifically your agent has, and so I'm curious to hear about other events that come from working with an agent versus trying to DIY with planning your own trip.

So one thing that people don't know is that when, for any kind of trip, Disney or hotel stays or cruises, whatever, uh, vendors actually work into the price that you see online. The cost of working with a travel agent. Um, so if you use one or not, it's still the same price. It is built into the price. So I always tell people.

You know, I, I don't like not getting a service that I have paid for, so knowing that you are already paying for a service. Why not get a service more? Support is always a good thing. Even if you're like, well, I'm a planner, I like to do it myself. You can do as much or as little as you want. It's just basically having somebody that is there to help you to, um, wait on the phone for you, whatever you need, a concierge service.

Um, it, it's something that you already pay for anyway. So, um, using a travel agent is something that I wish that. I could go back in time and when I was planning my own Disney vacations, I had no idea that travel agents were, uh, getting paid to help people. I would've loved to have some help. So I think it's important to know that it's a service that you already pay for regardless of the trip that you take.

It's not just Disney. Every single vendor does it. So, um, make sure that you reach out and use one 'cause it's the same price either way. Great advice, and I didn't know that, and I imagine that many pe other people don't know that either. Yeah, it, it's definitely something that we really try to get out there.

Um, I wish that vendors would help a little bit more with that, but of course they, uh, probably I. Don't wish to do that because, uh, if a travel agent isn't used, they just absorb back whatever the, um, the cost of the travel agent would've been, so, mm, I gotcha. That makes sense. Yep, yep. And I know earlier in the show you shared some advice for business owners in general, which is being able to set goals and be able to then list out steps to take to reach those goals, but.

In terms of anyone who's listening, who may be looking to get into the travel industry specifically, what advice would you have for them for getting started? So, I think that one of the

big things I would suggest to people that want to get into this space is that you have to have more than just a love for whatever the destination is that you wanna specialize in.

Um, you really have to think about. What, how are you gonna market yourself? How are you gonna put yourself out there? What kind of hours are you gonna work? What, what does your day look like? Um, what kind of training are you going to be getting? Are you able to invest in your business in any way? Um, and just different questions like that.

'cause I think sometimes there are people that are like, oh my gosh, I wanna be a travel agent. Don't think about it in a business way where it's a business and it is a job. And yes, it's so fun and it's amazing, but there's a lot that goes into it. A lot of training, um, and you know, a lot of travel that has to, not to do with so much fun, but a lot with learning.

Um, so just kind of planning out where you're gonna be, uh, taking your business. How are you gonna market yourself? That's great advice too. And just, just so people are aware of what goes into it, like you said, it's, of course it's such a fun career, but there's so many other non-fun things that might be involved with it too.

There's definitely a lot of investment into your business as far as conferences and accreditations and certi, uh, certifications that, um, you may need to have. So, you know, our, our Pro Cruiser, um. Agents, they're certified in all the different cruise lines and the um, just things like that that you may not think about.

Just like when you're a teacher, you have to get all your different certifications for the different areas that you teach. And we do the same thing with travel. Yes. Great point, Emily. As we get closer towards the end of this episode, I love to ask our guests what their favorite local businesses are to support.

So I'm curious to hear what yours are. Okay, well I have to shout out Posto because I'm pretty sure if I didn't order Posto on Friday nights, they would come looking for me. So, um, I want to shout them out. They are such a wonderful local business and they do a lot for our, uh, community here in Long Meadow.

They, uh, host a lot of events for the different sports teams that come for, uh, dinners and they give back. So, um, Posta is definitely one that I'd like to highlight. Fit for moms is another one. They are so wonderful at getting moms together and, uh, creating an opportunity for them to be active together in a low pressure, no pressure environment.

So, uh, fit for moms, love them. Um, and. Yeah, I would say that those are two, two of my favorite local businesses right now. Love it. Emily, this has been a wonderful episode and I've enjoyed having you on the show to share everything that you're doing at, we Do Travel Right and now. I would love to have you share with our listeners where they can find you online in case they'd like to reach out.

Absolutely. Um, well people can find me on Instagram at, we do Disney, right? And also our travel agency is, we do travel right. And if you want to head to our website, it is www dot, we do travel right.com. Um, and we look forward to hearing from people. Amazing. And I'll link to those places in the show notes.

That way people can connect with you from there. Great. But thank you so much again for coming on today's show. Thank you so much.

Thank you for tuning into this episode of Right here in Mass. We hope you enjoyed listening to it as much as we enjoyed recording it. Be sure to subscribe, leave a review, follow us on social media and share our podcast with your network. See you next week.