

A **DIAMOND**  
IN THE **ROUGH**

**STEVEN** VAN BELLEGHEM

Lannoo  
Campus





This book was originally published as De ruwe diamant.

D/2023/45/257 – ISBN 978 94 014 9546 2 – NUR 800, 802

Cover design: Karl Demoen

Interior layout design: Karl Demoen

Typesetting and interior layout: Adept vormgeving

Translation: Lynn Butler

© Steven Van Belleghem & Lannoo Publishers nv, Tielt, 2023.

LannooCampus Publishers is a subsidiary of Lannoo Publishers, the book and multimedia division of Lannoo Publishers nv.

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced and/or made public, by means of printing, photocopying, microfilm or any other means, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

LannooCampus Publishers  
Vaartkom 41 box 01.02  
3000 Leuven  
Belgium  
[www.lannoocampus.com](http://www.lannoocampus.com)

P.O. Box 23202  
1100 DS Amsterdam  
Netherlands

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	12
<b>CHAPTER 1 – A DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH</b>	<b>22</b>
A shining diamond in the construction sector	24
How Disney messed up a marriage proposal	26
The slide in everyone’s presentation	27
A diamond in the rough	28
Creation of rough diamonds in the 1980s	29
Technology is not a short cut to enhanced customer experience	31
What if technology reaches the 99% standard?	33
Customer culture is the basis for shining diamonds	35
From a diamond in the rough to a polished diamond	38
<b>PART 1: THE BRIGHT DIAMOND</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2 – THE TOP GUN EFFECT</b>	<b>46</b>
People long for blue, sunny skies	48
The Top Gun Effect	49
The Top Gun Effect in practice	50
The Top Gun Effect on Social Media: GAS	51
The science behind the Top Gun Effect	52
The risk of negative bias	54
Are those three days of Tomorrowland really that crazy?	55
Do you aim to sell products or to aim for a positive change?	57
MrBeast: positivity with impact	60
EveryTable: working from the heart	62
Customers do not want perfection – they want positive intention	64
Concrete customer experience tips from this chapter	67

### **CHAPTER 3 – THE CIRCLE OF INFLUENCE** **68**

Angel City FC	70
There is no more Switzerland	72
Your circle of influence	75
Filou & Friends wants every child to play in sustainable clothing	76
‘The earth is our only shareholder!’	79
When digital products become geopolitical weapons, does influence go too far?	80
Sewa: Sometimes it is in the culture!	82
Toms Shoes is hard on itself	84
Every challenge is a potential opportunity	85
What if you get caught with your hand in the biscuit jar?	87
Attracting talent requires commitment and transparency	88
Circles of influence and the bottom line	89
How to begin?	89
Concrete customer experience tips from this chapter	91

### **CHAPTER 4 – BELIEVE!** **92**

WeCrashed!	94
Who believes these people anymore?	96
Yes, yes, do, but remember....	97
Are you a customer-centric leader?	99
Make them believe	108
It is not about measuring your success; it is about building a culture	110
‘Make your bed!’	112
You need ACTION!	114
The rough diamond versus the bright diamond	115
Concrete customer experience tips from this chapter	117

## **PART 2: THE POLISHED DIAMOND**

**120**

### **CHAPTER 5 – THE CUSTOMER LOYALTY FLYWHEEL**

**124**

What if friends become customers?	126
Show up with passion!	126
My most unique dinner ever!	128
Loyalty to the brand or to a loyalty programme	130
Wild Alaskan Company proves its loyalty	131
The customer loyalty flywheel	134
From loyalty programme to a community	142
The customer flywheel in action: B&M Optics!	148
Polished diamonds give but expect nothing in return	153
Will I still make a profit if I pamper the customer like this?	153
Concrete customer experience tips from this chapter	157

### **CHAPTER 6 – EFFECTIVE EMPATHY**

**158**

A bad system will beat a good person every time	160
Panic on 31-12-21	161
The customer experience ritual at Atlantis, The Palm Dubai	163
Effective empathy	165
Hertz puts customers in jail	167
The perfume of petrol versus the California Sushi Roll	168
Make decisions in packed football stadiums	171
Are you good at saying 'no' in a friendly way?	173
The 'open door button' hero!	176
Partner in life!	177
A partner in the successful launch of a career	179
Effective empathy seems like quite a step for my business, Steven. Where do we start?	181
Concrete customer experience tips from this chapter	183

## **CHAPTER 7 – WHEN DIGITAL BECOMES HUMAN** **184**

The Chinese algorithms	186
It's hard without AI: ChatGPT can make your customer experience more efficient	188
The new gatekeeper	189
The added value for customers of technology	191
SparkX	194
'We are not a technology company!'	196
Intelligence Augmented	197
The new skillset	200
When Digital becomes Human	202
Dare to be truly human	203
Each department has two responsibilities: the operational and the cultural	205
Concrete customer experience tips from this chapter	207
A diamond in the rough versus the polished diamond	208

## **PART 3: CUSTOMER FOCUS IN 'THE NEVER NORMAL'** **210**

### **CHAPTER 8 – THE NEVER NORMAL (BY PETER HINSSSEN)** **214**

Magic to Normal	216
New Normals and The Great Acceleration	218
The S-curve as a mechanism	219
Seismic shocks	221
Technological shocks	221
The Cognitive era	222
Biological shocks	223
Ecological shocks	224
Social shocks	225
Geopolitical shocks	226
Never Normal	227
Gradually, then suddenly	229
Four characteristics	231
The cuckoo clock	236
Thriving in the Never Normal	238
Mindset	238
Skills	239

Beyond digital	239
Great expectations	241
Conclusion	243

**CHAPTER 9 – THE NEVER NORMAL CUSTOMER** **244**

One black swan after another	246
The Never Normal Customer	247
How to address the needs of the Never Normal customer?	257

**EPILOGUE: THE 100+ CONCRETE TIPS!** **259**

Thank you!	268
Notes	271
About Steven	276

# **INTRO- DUCTION**



The Meteora mountains in northern Greece are unique. Millennia of erosion have resulted in a breath-taking spectacle of high, somewhat rounded peaks, deep valleys and mysterious formations. The Meteora was a highlight of a family road trip across mainland Greece. Ancient Greek Orthodox monasteries are perched atop the peaks and six of them contain active orders of monks and nuns, evoking images of Greek religious life in bygone times.



The architectural beauty of the monasteries and their setting was striking, but the irrepressible marketer in me was also struck by the poor quality of their souvenir shops. Each of the active monasteries has a shop. On our visit, five of them were devoid of customers. These five offered an identical range of dusty knick-knacks and were staffed by bored salespeople staring listlessly at their mobile phones.

One monastery, Agios Stefanos, presented quite a different scene. There, it was the nuns themselves who ran the shop. They described their products to customers with enthusiasm, proudly rang up sales of homegrown herbs and homemade teas, oils and liqueurs and kept the shop in order. Unsurprisingly, this shop was packed with customers during our visit and few left empty-handed.



# WHY WERE THE NUNS MORE SUCCESSFUL THAN THE MONKS?

There are six market players in Meteora. The context of the market is the same for all six. Yet only one of the six shops seemed successful. Why?

At first glance, the answer is simple: the nuns' products were better and, combined with their passion and charm, this gave customers a unique and appealing experience.

But perhaps there was something more at play. They may have had an inspiring leader, skilled at motivating the nuns to take part, or a reward system that motivated the nuns to optimise the customer experience. Maybe there is a rich history behind their unique products? I do not know the answer, but there was clearly a different culture at Agios Stefanos compared to the other five monasteries.

Why is it that one company manages to build a unique customer experience, while others fail miserably, even if the context and market conditions are identical? Could all the shops have been successful? Of course! What do they need to change and what steps would be involved? How does one polish a diamond in the rough?

Questions like these fascinate me! That's why I wrote this book.

# IS YOUR BUSINESS A DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH?

Over the past 22 years, I have had the privilege of a front row seat, watching scores of companies as they succeeded or failed with customer-centric strategies, an approach that seems very simple on the surface, but is often difficult in practice. **Companies can easily become bogged down by rigid systems or faulty communication. A common complaint is, 'We have so much potential, but it remains untapped.'**

I have yet to meet a company that does not have good intentions for customer experience; (almost) everyone has the intention of getting it right. Yet, most companies remain diamonds in the rough in terms of customer experience: their customer experience potential is not fully exploited.

How can companies close this gap? How can their potential to create a winning customer experience be maximised? How does a company evolve from a diamond in the rough to a beautiful, sparkling and radiant diamond?

## **THAT IS WHAT THIS BOOK IS ABOUT, AND IT IS ONE I HAVE WANTED TO WRITE FOR A LONG TIME!**

Some readers may be familiar with my previous books, such as, *The Offer You Can't Refuse*, a book about marketing strategy and vision. It, along with my other books, was based on theory and used market data to derive marketing models. *Diamond in the Rough* is different. It is made up of stories and practical tips from my personal experience gained during more than two decades of consulting in the field, involving hundreds of company visits. Thus, this book is a compendium of practice-based market knowledge. I share my opinions and my insights. Do not expect great new theories, but rather lots of fresh insights and 'Aha!' moments to strengthen your customer-centricity in daily practice. Included are more than 100 concrete tips to improve your customer-centricity. The tips are woven into the text and summarised at the end of the book for your convenience.

**Many of you already have your vision in focus but are still struggling with its execution. This book is designed to help you put your vision into practice.**

This book is primarily a 'HOW?' book.

'HOW' can your company become more customer-centric? It would surely not be that difficult to make the other souvenir shops in Meteora work successfully. Yet it did not happen. What could the monks have done to change that? What role do managers play? How do managers build a culture where every employee is committed to work in a customer-focused manner every day?



I am very keen to help companies rapidly strengthen their customer focus, be they large or small companies, B2C or B2B, based in the East or the West. I am convinced that developing a radiant diamond mindset can make a difference in any type of company. My dream is to soon see numerous rough diamonds shining like beautiful jewels.

I suppose you are thinking, ‘Actually, we are already one of those polished diamonds; is this book still for me?’ I would like to invite you to read on, nonetheless. After all, shiny diamonds can become dusty and dull if they are not frequently polished. But above all: shiny diamond managers usually become excited by learning about customer-centricity. Shiny diamond managers are experts at picking up new ideas and adopting small changes that make the diamond shine just a little bit more. You are sure to find your fill of new and practical ideas in this book.

I wish you much inspiration and enjoyment reading this book, my sixth book on customer-centricity. As always, you can send your feedback directly to me. I love to read your stories and hear what aspects you have been working on. You can reach me via just about any social media or via my direct mail address: [Steven@VanBelleghem.biz](mailto:Steven@VanBelleghem.biz)

## **THANKS FOR THE INSPIRATION, SIEBE**

I owe the metaphor of the diamond to our eldest son, Siebe. He is passionate about science. One day he was studying different aspects of diamonds. When he told me about what he had learned, I was busy working on a new presentation for a client. His story about the evolution of diamonds immediately appealed to me. The following day, I used the metaphor of the rough diamond for the first time in a presentation. I noticed that it resonated with my audience, so I began using it. Eventually, it became the title of this new book.

Here, I will let Siebe explain in his own words how a diamond is formed. This scientific structure the evolution of a rough to a radiant diamond – is the basis for the structure of this book.



The next day I used the metaphor of ***a diamond in the rough*** for the first time in a presentation.



# FROM A ROUGH DIAMOND TO A FINISHED GEM - THE SCIENTIFIC VERSION

By Siebe Van Belleghem, science enthusiast, 03-08-2009.

## #1 WHAT IS A DIAMOND?

A diamond is, simply explained, a mineral that crystallises under immense pressure after a long time and eventually becomes a rough diamond under the influence of pure carbon. To make this possible, you need a few crucial elements. Enormous pressure, pure carbon and a matrix. A matrix is the 'mother' of the diamond. It is the stone in which the diamond is formed. A matrix can consist of materials other than ordinary stone, for example: copper ore, iron ore and sometimes gold.

The matrix can affect the diamond's appearance by increasing the concentration of magnesium, for example. This can cause the diamond to look different in colour: pink, black, green or red are colours you wouldn't expect to see on a diamond. This is probably because bright diamonds are most often used on jewellery such as rings. According to many, this is also the most beautiful colour for a diamond.

Coloured diamonds are often mistaken for other valuable minerals like rubies, emeralds and topazes because of the colour. No matter how similar other gemstones are to diamonds, the difference lies in the hardness. Diamonds are the hardest material in the world, making them the only ones to achieve a perfect 10 on the Mohs hardness scale. Any gemstone that does not reach a score of 10 is therefore not a diamond.

**Before diamonds are treated, they are rough diamonds. Rough diamonds have a rough surface and usually have irregular shapes.** When a diamond is made in a lab, they use a method called crystallisation. This makes them look more like an eight-sided die. A useful tip to tell the difference between a natural diamond and a lab-made diamond is to use a magnifying glass to look for a series of numbers on the diamond. If you see those, then it is lab-made; if not then you have a natural diamond. Obviously, the lab-made diamond is worth less because it is less rare, but that does not mean it is less beautiful. Most people will never see the difference.

## #2 FROM ROUGH DIAMOND TO BRIGHT DIAMOND

A lot of steps are required to turn a rough diamond into a diamond worthy of a ring. Let's start with the most important steps that will drastically change the look.

Rough diamonds always have a lot of internal cracks that don't look pretty. Those cracks are removed with a special oil applied to cover the culprits. They will still be there; you just will not see them anymore. A rough diamond also often has discolourations caused by internal dust, which causes the diamond to look a bit cloudy instead of bright. To ensure that those discolourations do not lower the quality, they are burned away by heat treatment.

To make the rough surface nice and smooth, we need harder means (literally). **To sand a diamond, you need diamond-lined tools, because only a material that is at least as hard can make a diamond nice and smooth. This is how you get a bright diamond.** Then, despite all these procedures, it still doesn't look like a diamond you would see on a ring. It looks more like a glass cone with a cut edge.

## #3 FROM BRIGHT DIAMOND TO FINISHED GEM

Next, the diamond is cut. This is done using special tools, usually made from artificial substances that are at least as hard. **The diamond is cut in such a special way that most of the light entering the diamond frontally is reflected out through the many facets at the bottom.** This creates a stunning effect called 'fire' because of its reddish colour.

The diamond is now ready for the final step. The diamond is very carefully placed on the ring. To ensure that the diamond does not fall off the ring, it is held by four or sometimes three prongs. These arms are then bent to fully secure the diamond. That was the final step; the diamond ring is ready to be sold.



CHAPTER 1

---

# A DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH