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One of the hardest lessons we learn is to be cautious of people who utter the words, "Trust me." The same rule applies to anyone who says, "Believe me". | Source: Sticky Branding

Can we trust the 'leaders' of the jewellery industry?

Posted March 15, 2024 | By Samuel Ord

Many trade associations fail to uphold the standards they set themselves. SAMUEL ORD discusses an ongoing issue facing the jewellery industry.

Many people and industry bodies in the jewellery industry preach 'trust', 'ethics', and 'transparency'.

Unfortunately, when it all comes out in the wash, these same people and organisations look more like plaster saints than industry leaders.

Indeed, one of the hardest lessons we learn is to be cautious of people who utter the words, "Trust me." The same rule applies to anyone who says, "Believe me".

These are off-handed statements people often liberally use; however, they betray a profound fear – a suspicion that they need to demand your confidence for one reason or another.

We must be wary of people who make claims about things that should be implicit.

Trust and faith are the foundations of the jewellery industry. The international diamond industry was built on trust; one only needs to consider the concept of 'appro' to ascertain the level of trust required to succeed.

In turn, retailers must be able to trust suppliers, and consumers must trust retailers; however, we find so many people – particularly in positions of 'authority' - routinely threatening to undermine this faith by failing to adhere to the standards they publicly set themselves.

It goes without saying that transparency, ethical behaviour, truthfulness, and leadership are important; however, I am continually amazed at the number of industry organisations that do not practice what they preach.

Bull & Blunder

As an example, consider a recent issue concerning 'trust' with the World Federation of Diamond Bourses (WFDB). This industry body has a track record of problems and missteps, and it recently cast further doubt over its own governance standards.

On 9 February, the WFDB distributed a press release making claims about a French legal decision to *"ban the use of all terminology other than synthetic for non-natural diamonds."*

Although this appeared to be an important development for the diamond industry, *Jeweller* could only find one media outlet covering the story – and the article's details about the legal ramifications were sparse.

At this stage, it's important to note two key details: the article was published on 5 February, four days before the WFDB press release, and it was not published by an industry-adjacent media organisation.

Given the topic's importance, it was a great surprise to *Jeweller* staff that, after an extensive online search, no official sources could be found to support the WFDB's claims.

On 12 February, the WFDB's director of communications, Sharon Gefen, was contacted to verify the claims. Ms Gefen was asked to provide background information used to prepare the press release because, at the time of publication, there seemed to be no official announcements from French government sources.

It's also important to note that *Jeweller* was not the only media organisation unable to verify the WFDB's claims.

On 7 February, Rob Bates, high-profile editor of *JCK Online*, said on social media platform X: "I have been looking for this announcement and can't find it. Not 100% clear from press release if this comes from government or industry."



Gefen subsequently replied to *Jeweller's* email, stating that the information for the press release came from the *"French and US media"*, confirming that she had not used official government information. Additionally, she did not provide sources or any further information as requested.

The next day (13 February), the request was repeated – pointing out that *Jeweller* could not find supporting information to that which the WFDB published.

Gefen was asked if she could direct *Jeweller* to any news reports she had seen detailing the matter. Only one source – the original fashion website article - had been identified.

Rather than providing links to the *"French and US media"* articles to clarify the now confusing matter - and in what can only be described as an extraordinary reply - Gefen said, *"I suggest you use Google to find the media reports."*

Claims & Allegations

In more than a decade of working in the media, I've never encountered a response of this nature. The suggestion that it was our job to verify the allegations made by the WFDB was baffling.

It should be noted here that the WFDB effectively alleged that many French jewellery companies were routinely breaking the law. In an unusual twist, it seems that Ms Gefen believes it's the media's responsibility to ensure her allegations are factual!

The WFDB's president, Yoram Dvash, was contacted and asked if this was an acceptable way for a media representative to communicate with the international media.

This was particularly important given the WFDB had made claims for which it was now refusing to provide evidence.

Three factors were taken into consideration: the release's lack of details, the timing of the release following the publication of a story online similarly devoid of detail, and Gefen's reluctance to provide any background information.

Indeed, it seemed plausible that the 9 February press release may have even been issued solely due to the 5 February 'fashion' article, and there was no other source, official or otherwise.

Dvash never responded; however, in what appeared to be an embarrassing attempt to save face, Ms Gefen would later send a follow-up email containing snippets of background information.

Unfortunately, by that stage, several industry publications had published the WFDB's claims –many verbatim – without questioning their accuracy or veracity.

Industry publications such as *Jewellery Outlook*, *Diamond World*, *Times of India* and others accepted the WFDB's word unchallenged.

Australia's *Jewellery World* not only parroted the WFDB's unsubstantiated claims, it also added to them by incorrectly stating that the decision was "effective immediately". It wasn't!



"I suggest you use Google to find the media reports."

SHARON GEFEN, WFDB COMMUNICATIONS
DIRECTOR

It is the media's role to question those in 'authority', not to act as their *de facto* public relations department.

In the weeks that have followed since this interaction with Gefen and Dvash – who is also president of the Israeli-based Dvash Diamonds - [Rapaport News](#) and [JCK Online](#) have published thorough reports detailing the intricacies of the French decision.

Unfortunately for the WFDB, these reports cast further doubt over its overly simplistic media release.

That is to say, none of the intricacies of the issue – such as the fact that it was a decision to uphold a ruling from 2002 and not the introduction of new legislation - were ever reflected in the initial WFDB press release.

In fact, most of the brief 200-word statement was not about the French decision but a promotion of the WFDB. This, combined with Ms Gefen's unwillingness to provide source material, raises serious questions about how thoroughly the WFDB understood the issue before releasing a public statement.

It was a shocking sequence of events from an organisation that claims to promote "trust, transparency and integrity among all members of the industry."

Context & Background

It's not the first time the transparency of the WFDB – and/or its directors - has been called into question.

In 2022, *Jeweller* questioned the WFDB's [membership claims](#), which seemed false or at least unsupported by the facts. It was also not the first time the WFDB's governance standards had been called into question.

The matter first arose over a lack of transparency between the Diamond Dealers Club of Australia (DDCA) and its president, [Rami Baron](#), who represents Australia on the WFDB executive committee.

Baron refused to divulge the number of DDCA members and subsequently in hot water over the conduct of his business, the Australian Jewellers Consortium, otherwise known as Jewelclaim.

He found himself at odds with the prestigious Gemological Institute of America (GIA) and the World Jewellery Confederation (CIBJO) after the business [misappropriated](#) imprimaturs and logos.

So much for "trust, transparency, and integrity" within the industry!

Background reading: [World Federation of Diamond Bourses logo deleted by Jewelclaim](#)

I've been with *Jeweller* for two years, and in that time, I've witnessed a surprising number of 'industry-leading' associations fail to adhere to their self-described standards.

For example, like the DDCA, the Jeweller's Association of Australia (JAA) has been [unwilling](#) to provide its membership number even though it boasts about industry transparency. The JAA continues to list non-existent stores/members on its website.

The Responsible Jewellery Council has not been transparent on several issues, including in 2019 when Michael Hill International began promoting its new lab-created diamond range in a way that could [mislead](#) consumers.

Jeweller contacted the RJC seeking clarification on several issues, and what ensued can only be described as a tale of obfuscation and misdirection!

Over the course of 18 emails, back and forth from 27 November to 15 December (18 days), with three people at the RJC – including then executive director Iris Van der Veken – simple questions remained unanswered.

Further, in 2022, the RJC refused to acknowledge issues with its online membership directory, which contained hundreds of incomplete records and listed companies that appeared [not to exist](#).

The RJC website showed 1,455 members, and while more than 400 members did not provide a website link in their directory record, after extensive research, *Jeweller* could not locate contact information for more than 200 RJC members.

The RJC did not explain why an online directory service intended to connect people with its members contained more than 200 members who could not be located.

Its About Us page states: *"We are the world's leading standard-setting organisation for the jewellery and watch industry. We promote standards that underpin people's trust in the worldwide jewellery and watch supply chain."*

The RJC has recently appointed a [new chairman](#), Dave Meleski of the Richline Group, and it will be interesting to observe whether the RJC starts to practice what it preaches to the rest of the industry.

Maybe Meleski will take the time to investigate the information uncovered about the 200 RJC members who seem not to exist. That is, the former management showed no interest in the confusion; it showcased some of the most intriguing conduct from the industry's so-called '*standard-setting*' organisation.

Trust & Transparency

The World Federation of Diamond Bourses, the Responsible Jewellery Council, the Jewellers Association of Australia and the Diamond Dealers Club of Australia all have two things in common:

- They preach the importance of ethics, trust, leadership and transparency - to you and the industry.
- They all do not practice what they preach – do as I say, not as I do!

They are suddenly silent when asked simple and important questions - or to explain - their own activities and/or conduct. Why?

It is as if the demands to be transparent, ethical and truthful must relate to you, but not them!

“
"The Responsible Jewellery Council has not been transparent on several issues, including in 2019 when Michael Hill International began promoting its new lab-created diamond range in a way that could mislead consumers."
”

These moments of weakness threaten the overarching trust within the industry, and one can only wonder what kind of flow-on effects these incidents have on consumer trust in an industry already burdened by misconception.

So why do we see this endless parade of supposed values, and what causes so many of these industry bodies to fall short when asked to live up to their self-appointed standards?

One could argue that they should be held to a higher standard than everyone else, yet they cannot even meet their own standards and claims.

That leaves us with one final question: *Should you trust the 'leaders' of the jewellery industry?*

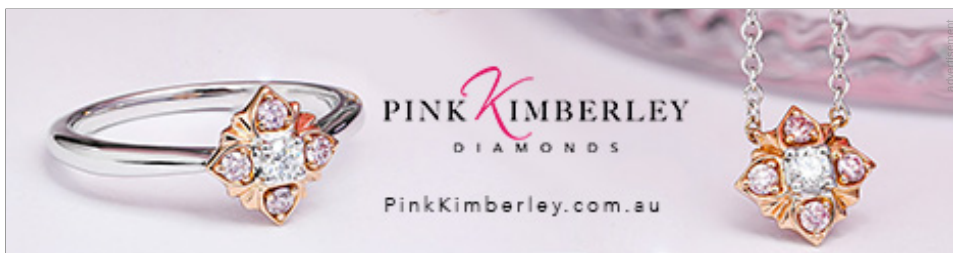
More reading:

- [More confusion over DDCA and WFDB operations and practices](#)
- [World Federation of Diamond Bourses logo deleted by Jewelclaim](#)
- [Legal concerns over DDCA's claims; World Diamond Mark abruptly deregistered](#)
- [Logos deleted from Jewelclaim website without explanation](#)
- [Mystery behind the Diamond Dealers Club of Australia](#)
- [Diamond Dealers Club's claims about New Zealand remain unsubstantiated](#)

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