



ROCK
LAMANNASM

ROCK'S DIAMONDS



HOW TO FIND CLARITY ABOUT WORK/LIFE
BALANCE AND YOUR OWN STYLE OF SUCCESS





Rock's Diamonds

Rock's Diamonds are the most important nuggets of wisdom I've learned from my mentors and from my own life and career. After publishing a version of Rock's Diamonds in my business memoir, "They Named You Right," in 2022, I received such good feedback on this brief section of the book that I'm presenting them in this standalone format.

As you probably know, diamond crystals are forged by heat, pressure, and time – that's part of what makes them so valuable and precious. If you've forged some Diamonds from your own experience that you'd like to share, please visit RockLamanna.com and leave a comment. And while you're there, you can purchase a copy of "They Named You Right" or download the ebook version at no cost.

Wrap your suit in paper and pass it along.

My book begins with the story of my grandfather Vincenzo's borrowed suit. Vincenzo had decided as a teen to leave Italy for America. A relative who had already emigrated to America had sent back the suit – wrapped in paper -- that he'd worn on the journey. Vincenzo donned the suit, made his own journey, and then he also returned the suit to Italy. Today we call that "paying it forward."

I encourage you to do the same for future generations. The suit may not literally be a suit – my "suit" is this book. Now that you're reading this, it's your turn.

Take what you learn and find a way to teach it to the next generation. Help them cross the ocean (real or metaphorical), build something amazing, then wrap their own version of the suit in paper and pass it along.

Don't be afraid to break the chains.

The LaManna family has deep traditions and norms. We've always adhered to giving our children family names. We hired our brothers and sisters. From when I was little until I went to work for my father at a company called Vomela, it was always the LaMannas against everyone else. And I'm one of 11 children, so we were formidable.

My family kept me grounded. My father never let my head get big as he mentored me, and my mother was always there to reassure me. Even when we've disagreed and fought, we've always been tight.

But some norms and traditions can inhibit your growth. When I refused to keep one of my brothers on Vomela's executive team, I was breaking with family traditions. But it was the only way for the company, and for my brother, my family, and me to grow. And it worked: Vomela, a Minneapolis-based printing/packaging/converting company, is still going strong today, ## years after I sold my stake in it.

Honor your family traditions, but don't let them hold you back. Dare to create your own legacy even when it means you have to break the chains.



Sometimes you have to quit on dreams.

We've heard countless stories of people pursuing their dreams at all costs and succeeding in the end. It's inspiring. But we rarely talk about the countless times people realize that no matter how hard we try, we won't be able to achieve our dreams.

A big dream I had to give up was playing college hockey. No matter how much I practiced and how hard I worked, I could see that I wasn't going to be a professional hockey player. I quit the team and school and went to work at Vomela.

It wasn't easy to quit on that dream. But cutting that cord showed me that when a dream no longer lines up with your vision for future success, you need to find a new course.

Learn from your relationships.

Even in today's digital age, everything comes back to relationships. You will build many, many relationships throughout your career – don't let them become transactional. Learn from every human encounter, good or bad, whenever possible.

I learned how my father and Jack Vomela built a relationship based on mutual trust and shared rewards. From my own relationship with my father, I learned about being a mentor and a student. I learned from the failures of my marriages.

Study all your relationships. What was good about them? Why did they succeed? Why did they fail? Why did YOU fail? Be honest, and your answers will help you build stronger relationships in the future.

Finally, remember that forgiveness is a gift. The ability to sincerely say you're sorry, forgive others, AND accept forgiveness (even from yourself), must become part of who you are.

Don't be afraid to say, "I got this," even when you don't.

When Vomela's largest client, 3M, changed course and essentially left us to die, I told my dad, "Don't worry, Dad. I got this."

The truth is, I didn't really have it. I didn't even have a clue how I would get it. But I looked in his eyes that cold morning when he told me about 3M's death sentence, and I knew he was done. I knew I had to step up and not let us die. And we didn't. The two companies had even begun working together again in recent years.

You've got to believe in yourself and your God-given talent, even if there is no clear-cut path. So, speak those bold words and make your own path. Patience and perseverance are special gifts from God to help you follow His plan.



Count on your friends and family to help you achieve work-life balance.

I've seen first-hand what happens when your work and home lives are out of balance. Listen to a workaholic: Working too much will implode your personal life, which in turn can hurt your career.

In business terminology, you might call this a lose-lose-lose scenario: you lose, your family and friends lose, and in the end, your business will probably lose, too.

Work-life balance is hard, so don't try to achieve it alone. Lean into your friends and family. They know you, sometimes better than you know yourself.

If you can't be the best at this, be the best at that.

My difficulties in studying and learning are among the greatest challenges I've faced in life. I didn't learn to tie my shoes until well after most other kids my age. I was embarrassed to read in front of my K-12 classes. My struggles were so significant that I was held back a grade.

But just because you struggle in one area doesn't mean you can't be successful in another. Learn to compensate for the areas where you have problems.

For example, I struggle with writing, so I hire writers and marketers to channel my voice and get my message across. That allows me to focus and become better in areas where I really excel: building relationships and generating ideas and business opportunities.

If you're not the best at this, pivot, and be the best at that.

How do you get to be "the best" at something? I've found it's a matter of choosing something that makes you a better person. I try to open myself to change and growth, which often doesn't come easy. But you're more likely to find your way when you're generous, kind, and selfless.

The bottom line: You want to die happy.

I give credit to my father for this one. All the cash and financial success in the world don't mean anything if you're not happy.

Is your ultimate goal in life to die with a million bucks in the bank, or with a smile on your face? I guarantee if it's the former – especially if you lose your family in the process of making that cash – you'll sacrifice the latter.

Our family received God's gift of seeing our mother die a happy person. She passed with dignity, knowing that she'd lived with purpose in her life.

Thank you, Mom and Dad. Out of all you taught me, this might be the most valuable lesson.



If family and business overlap, don't let them overwhelm.

When my father agreed to bring in a family business therapist to help with our struggles and the anticipated succession plan, I met Tom Hubler. Tom had a great piece of advice: in a family business, the family and the business will overlap. What's important is not to let one overwhelm the other.

Tom advised starting with clear business goals and making sure the people within the organization understand and are devoted to achieving them. If someone in the family fails to perform and meet the shared goals, they should suffer the consequences like any other employee.

I believe this mentality works in the other direction as well. You need to dedicate time, love, and respect to your family. If you let the business side overwhelm your family life, you lose the emotion that makes us human. And happy.

Always have a back-door plan.

This one comes from my Uncle Frank. I used to drive for hours on my business trips, and I'd have lengthy conversations with him. He always told me to have a "back-door plan." In other words, if your first plan doesn't work, make sure you already have a Plan B.

In the end, you have to protect yourself and the immediate family. Communicate with them and how them that they are your top priority. And make sure they understand why you're making strategic moves before you make them.

If your family understands your personal and professional ambitions, they will support you through the tough times. Your back door plan will then be their back door plan too.

Losing makes winning sweeter.

I wrote "They Named You Right" mostly in 2021, the year the Atlanta Braves won the World Series. Braves first baseman Freddie Freeman was pivotal in their playoff run.

The Braves drafted Freeman in 2007 and he broke into the big leagues in 2010. Although he established himself as one of the league's best players, it was 11 years before the Braves got to the promised land.

As I watched the Braves and Freeman become World S, I cried because I know how much the losses that came before those victories hurt. If you're bound for bigger things, you'll see the wins as baby steps in the game of life, and the losses as the stakes you must plunk down just to play.



When you have a vision, you're always four or five moves ahead.

I love playing chess because you're always strategically thinking about the next moves. In business, you want to do the same thing. But business and life don't always follow the rules or play nice, and it's difficult to accurately predict or control where you're headed.

Even so, having a long-term vision of where and who you want to be puts you ahead of more competitors that you might imagine.

Start with the end in mind. What do you want your business to look like? How will it change the lives of your customers? What will make you unique in how you deliver your products or services?

If you have that vision in place, you can develop a plan that helps you stay the course even when outside forces (or inside forces, for that matter), threaten to push you astray.

Stick and stay, it's bound to pay.

One of the biggest diamonds of them all. I know that above I told you to know when to give up on a dream, and when to break the chains that hold you back. However, it's just as important to know when to stick with something.

This diamond is also about developing what my Uncle Frank called "non-profit relationships." These are relationships with people who believe in you, trust you, honestly support you – and who will tell you the truth when you need to hear it. These may be "non-profit" relationships, but over time, they'll be the most valuable asset you can have.

When others say can't, let it fuel your can-do.

I'll never forget 3M's words to us when they delivered their doom's day message: "You're going to need us," meaning that I should shutter Vomela and join 3M now that they were taking the work in-house that they'd been subcontracting to our company.

That lit a fire in me. It gave me the inspiration to build the Can-Do Graphics Company, even though all the tea leaves predicted Vomela was on the way down. Let the naysayers speak and use it as locker-room inspiration to fight harder every day.

Do you have a chip on your shoulder? Good. Use it.



Time heals all wounds.

When someone says that time heals everything, it literally means time erases the pain. It means that sometimes you are hurting and going through a healing process, but at the same time you are actually doing better with each day that passes. Usually, you're not even aware this is happening.

But time doesn't heal all wounds. Sometimes you've got to look at the ones that are still causing you pain. That's why I wrote my book. I didn't write it to reopen old wounds – I wrote it to help heal mine.

If you are a friend or family member who is reading this, and you don't think my memory matches yours, please know this: Memory is fallible. Some who lived through these experiences with me will doubtless remember them differently, and that's to be expected.

I mean no one any harm: My only intention is to be an open book, and to share my story with my family and future generations of entrepreneurs. Even if you don't write your own memoir, find a way to share your life story and your lessons learned, at least with the people you love. After all, journeys are better when they're shared – so thank you for joining in this little part of mine.

Meet Rock

After nearly five decades in the printing/graphics/packaging industry as an owner/founder, entrepreneur, consultant, and mergers and acquisitions (M&A) deal maker, Rock LaManna is an advisor to business owners, investors, and directors. Rock now focuses on corporate and non-profit boards of directors.

He advises boards on CEO selection/retention and accountability, M&A strategies, succession planning and strategic growth -- and on emerging, urgent issues such as sustainability, social responsibility, and governance.

Rock belongs to the National Association of Corporate Directors, the most trusted national organization for board directors. He is an alumnus of Metropolitan State University, St. Paul, MN and Harvard Business School's Owner/President Management program, Boston, MA.

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