



Taking Responsibility in Sourcing to the Next Level with Meri Geraldine

THRIVE BY DESIGN WITH TRACY MATTHEWS

"We also look at transparency, this was a very important indicator. So many business making claims, but not offering any transparency. I was like, "Okay, if we're going to do this, we got to share whatever we're doing, even if it's not perfect, we're going to share this." Because who's going to believe that I'm really doing it if I'm not showing it?"

You're listening to Thrive by Design, business, marketing, and lifestyle strategies for your jewelry brand to flourish and thrive. Let's get started.

Tracy: Welcome to Thrive by Design episode 211. Hey, it's Tracy Matthews, chief visionary officer of Flourish and Thrive Academy and I'm super stoked because we have another ethical sourcing episode today. I'm talking today to an amazing designer who's been in our community for a long time. She's one of our top contributors, I just love her so much. And by top contributors, I mean top contributors in our group. She's always adding so much of value in our [Diamond Insiders](#) community. She was a member of our mastermind program years ago when we were still running, which is like basically, which is similar to our [SOS coaching program](#), and she's really at the forefront in responsible sourcing.

So it's been an honor to have her on the show today. In fact, she gave me suggestions for some of our previous guests, including [Ash from Dreams Diamond, Ltd](#), and also [Austin Brauwner](#) who brought so much value to talk about customer lifetime value a couple of episodes ago. So make sure that you check those out, we'll have them linked in the show notes 100%.

Anyway, Meri is just an amazing designer and I'm going to tell you a little bit more about her story before we get started, but when she approached me, she's like, "You know Tracy, you really have this podcast, which is a great platform, but there aren't enough conversations about these things, especially what it really takes to build an eco-conscious or sustainable business in the jewelry space, because there's so much talk about it, but it takes a lot of hard work." and she's really done her due diligence in



making sure that she's buying from suppliers and that she knows that where she can basically trace where their products are coming from that are trustworthy, that deliver beautiful stuff and that are really aligned with what she is doing from a core value perspective in her company. Over the years her business continues to grow because of that mission, she has probably hundreds of thousands of Instagram followers by now.

She does a great business on her website, and is one of those people who is breaking that idea that it's impossible to sell jewelry online. She's really figured out method that works for her. I mention that because I hear from designers, I posted in our free Facebook group, if you're not a member of that and you're listening to this podcast, you can head on over to FlourishThriveAcademy.com/FBGroup or FacebookGroup and you can find our jewelry marketing hub group.

I posted this question, and in that group I posted the question, "Do you think selling online is hard or easy?" and I would say, we've got about 100 comments on that post that would say literally 95% of the people said hard. But many of them, the ones who are successfully selling would say something like, "It's hard and easy but it's really, it's hard until you figure out how to make it easy." which I love that response. Because I think that all of this stuff is doable, all of this stuff is learnable. The problem is that most people try a few things and they're not diligent in their process.

So one of the things that I really admire about Meri, besides her mission to building sustainable jewelry and staying focused on that mission is really what she's done to grow her online sales, and it really just requires you to train your customers to buy from you online, and that's exactly what she's done. With that I just want to remind you that we are doing enrollment for our [Train Your Customers to Buy From you Online](#) 12-week intensive. This is perfect for designers who have revenue coming in from other sources, like maybe you're doing wholesale or doing your shows, but you've really struggled to crack the code on this online piece.

Maybe you've started building an email list, but for some reason the things that you're doing aren't getting the kinds of results that you want. Or you're in a place where you're starting to get some traction online and you really want to double down and maximize, because we realize this, the timing of this is really because it starts in the middle of August, and because of that, because it starting in August, we are going to be ending



right before November, which is the most important. You know, like November is when serious holiday sales start.

So many of the designers in our community are often doing in person shows or events, pop ups and all those things during the holidays, and so we're going to teach you how to leverage those in person opportunities to take those offline sales and turn them into online raving fans who continue to buy from you long after they've met you. This is a really great workshop. We had some amazing results so far, we're just wrapping up the first session.

One of my favorites is when I heard Andrea say that she was averaging two sales a month on her website, and within the first two weeks she had over 13 sales, and by the time June rolled around she had 20 sales, and she had only implemented a little bit of what we told her, and it's just really doubling down. Jimena was a little bit skeptical of one of our list building trainings and the strategy that we used about using a quiz as a lead magnet, and she doubted it, but she tried it just to see what would happen, and she was she shocked because it started working. She's building her email list, and because of the sequencing she put on the back end was starting to make sales.

I would love to invite you to join us for this intensive again. This is like one of those things, like you have to be willing to do the work and to implement quickly, because learning stuff doesn't really do anything, it's all about implementation, and that's what we've modeled this workshop in intensive in a way so that you are getting implementation done as you go. That's the key.

So if you're interested in learning more about that, you can head on over to FlourishThriveAcademy.com/TrainMyCustomers, that's FlourishThriveAcademy.com/TrainMyCustomers and you can apply for this intensive, and basically you'll be getting on a call with our business accelerator specialist Natasha, and she'll chat with you to see if you're a good fit. We just ask that you be in a place where you are committed, you're ready to invest in your business and you are also someone who is ready to kind of get that next level of success selling jewelry online, and I'm ready to help you do it. So let's do this, it's Tracy here, I'm going to dive into this episode with Meri, but before I do, I would love to introduce Meri and record a little bio from her.



Meri the founder of the ethical jewelry brand [Gardens of the Sun](#). Before setting up her own jewelry business she helped other companies become more sustainable. She now challenges herself to transform the supply chain of her own business. Meri is on a mission to meet every person in her supply chain. She partners with a group of indigenous women of mercury free gold, and only a few days ago when we recorded this video she came back from an adventure in Borneo to meet artisanal sapphire miners there. She is really walking the walk, you guys. So let's dive into today's episode.

Tracy: I love it bring it on guests to talk about various topics, in particular sourcing because that is something that we get questions about all the time. With the rise of responsibility in jewelry and really not only taking care of the environment, but taking care of the people surrounding the jewelry industry. I'm really excited to have one of our community members on the line today for the podcast, Meri Geraldine Garden of the Sun. Meri, thank you so much for being here today.

Meri: Thank you for having me.

Tracy: So Meri has been in our community for quite a while. I think you originally found us maybe in 2016 or 2017 and then you joined our mastermind program which we were still running at the time. Right?

Meri: Yes, yeah, I found you first in 2016, and I think I pretty much quite quickly joined mastermind.

Tracy: Yeah, you did, and you were such an active member. I remember specifically you were in our Diamond Insider community from the get go, and you always were providing so much value and sharing so many amazing tips and takeaways. When you reached out to me a couple of weeks ago and said, "Tracy, I think you need to interview this guy Austin." and then you started saying, "You need to interview this other guy, you need to interview this other person." I was like, "Why don't I interview you, girl?" because you have so much value to add, and so I really wanted to talk to you. What we were chit chatting over Facebook Messenger, were mentioning that you were going to Borneo to source some stones and to really work with the miners. I know we were working with you in the mastermind program, we were working on messaging around all this responsibility that you're doing in your commitment to supporting female



miners and all that jazz. So I'm just really thrilled to have you here, and I wanted to start with a really basic question, if you're cool with that.

Meri: Yeah.

Tracy: Okay, let's talk about how you kind of got into jewelry in the first place, because that's not your background, and how did you kind of get to this point where you now have a really successful jewelry brand.

Meri: I never planned to create jewelry. I was actually working as a sustainability consultant already in Indonesia. I just had my daughter, she was about one, one and a half years old, and I just needed something to do. Like I'm terrible at not doing anything, I can't not do anything. My husband was travelling a lot at the time, and I just needed something that I could do from home. Where I didn't have to leave, where I didn't have to find childcare, anything. So I started making beaded jewelry, and then after a while, I realize that I don't actually like this stuff that I'm making. It took me, really took me one to two years to find, you know, to narrow down and find more of my style. Yeah, I think it was only when I found rough gemstone and raw diamonds that I was like, "Yeah, I like doing this."

Tracy: You're like, "This is my thing." Yeah, you make such beautiful jewelry, and for someone who's untrained and just started as a beader, like I didn't even know that about you, that blows me away.

Meri: Thanks.

Tracy: So when did you launch your first line of jewelry collection? Because you really launched your jewelry brand on Instagram, and you were like an early adopter, you got a ton of followers, you used to do these Instagram auctions that really built your audience. Tell me a little bit about that, like how you kind of got the ramp up. I mean you're in Bali now. Where are you from originally, you're from...

Meri: I'm from the Netherlands.

Tracy: Yeah, you're from the Netherlands, you live in Bali now and you built this international brand, you ship around the world, and so you really built the following on Instagram. Talk to us about how you launched and kind of got exposure in the early days?



Meri: Okay. Well I just launched, like I'm a doer. Yeah, of course, I think, I have an idea, I have a dream and I just start, I just do it. So it's the same with the jewelry brand. I was like, okay, I made stuff, I'm just going to put it up on Etsy, because that's I knew, and five, six years ago Etsy was where you sold things.

Tracy: Yeah.

Meri: Like having your own website, I think that's something that's more recent years, there are more possibilities as an independent designer to set up your own brand and have your own website and actually have people find you. I moved on to Instagram and I met other jeweler there, other makers. I really looked up to them, there was, I remember Mel Wingo Star and she just showed so much of her personal life, like she's really good at personal branding, and she would just always be on there with that beautiful big smile of hers, and it was so wonderful to be part of that community of all these people who are like okay, it's exciting to be on this platform and to meet other people when it was really all about connecting for me, and it really wasn't selling. I think your question about when I started selling my first fine jewelry, I didn't actually set it up as a line, I just had people asking me, "Could you do this in gold?" I'm like, "Sure I can." Then, of course, I had to figure out how to do it in gold and set that up. But it's again, just yes, I just say yes and I start doing it.

Tracy: That's awesome. Well here's the thing. People think that building a business is so hard, and it is challenging, I'm not going to lie, like there are ups and downs and things that you have to do and you have to really be committed to the process, because it will take time, but if you have a yes mentality, like as Marie Forleo, she's even launching a whole, entire book about this, like everything's figure outable. Like if you approach life with like, through that lens, like, "I don't know what I'm doing, I'm just going to figure it out." like anything is possible. In fact, that's how I launched my first business, that's how Flourish and Thrive was launched in a way to kind of help people kind of cut through that figure outable thing to make their process a little bit faster, and I really love that you're just like, "Here's how you do it, I'm just going to put a shop on Etsy." then you found Instagram, you kind of watched what other people were doing that worked for you and you mimicked that in your own way and started building this amazing audience. I know back when we first met you, you



were having a lot of success with Instagram auctions, but then you stopped doing that. Why did you stop doing the Instagram auctions?

Meri: I think it was when Instagram, they changed the feed from being chronological. We ran into problems with comments not showing up or showing up in different order. It was really confusing to keep track of it.

Tracy: Yeah, so you just stopped doing that. I think that your business model now is great, because you've now transitioned... Are you still selling on Etsy?

Meri: I have a few things still on Etsy because there are some very persistent Pinterest pins that keep sending people to Etsy.

Tracy: Okay, perfect.

Meri: I want to get those sales; I don't want to lose them.

Tracy: But your main focus is your website now and selling online. Okay. And I'm going to be interviewing Meri for a virtual summit that we're having in the fall, more will be revealed about that, I'm really excited about it, because Meri's doing some really great things. She's completely built her business using her website starting with Etsy, but now using her website because she realizes that she wants to capture the audience, and she's doing some really incredible things, so I don't want to spoiler alert the whole what we're going to be talking about for that virtual summit, but definitely keep your ears perked up, because it's going to be an awesome interview, and you're going to learn a lot about how to really make this work. Today's conversation though, is really about sustainability. I remember when we were working, when Robin and I were working with you in our inner circle group, which is now like similar to our SOS program, we were discussing like the messaging and the languaging around this commitment that you have to responsible sourcing. You come from a sustainability, you were a sustainability consultant. Are you still consulting for sustainability?

Meri: No, I quit that almost a year ago now.

Tracy: Okay, awesome, because your business was taking off, I'm sure. And you really go leaps and bounds to make this work, and you just you've been going to Borneo to buy gold, diamonds and sapphires from artisanal miners and indigenous people. Obviously sustainability and responsible sourcing is like in your blood, but how did you start like finding all these



suppliers and like how did that, you know, let's unravel this a little bit, like how did you start? So I think for a lot of people it's really overwhelming.

Meri: Okay. I think for the gold, the diamond and the sapphires it's three different stories. I started with the gold, and when I was still working, I was part of a certification scheme that worked on stopping deforestation, and I just asked my colleagues there, and just people in my network and I said, "Look, on the side I have this jewelry brand that I'm running and I hate that I'm using gold and I don't know where it's from. Only thing that I know is that it's probably using mercury at some point in the process, and I don't want that anymore.

So do you know any indigenous community or any local community that is mining gold that I could buy from directly?" And I've just been putting the word out, I've just been sharing my dream and just hoping that people could keep an ear out and see if they could eventually help set me up. So after some time, someone did set me up and I think that was towards the end and Flourish and Thrive, of the mastermind group that I actually got the first contact. That was really via this one person who introduced me to someone in Canada, who then introduced me to someone in Jakarta, who then introduced me to someone in Borneo. Then we had a lot of calls and just emails, project proposals and different ideas that we shared. Last, what was it, November, October or November I went there and actually met the miners.

Tracy: You shot a video of that for your maker video, didn't you?

Meri: Yes.

Tracy: I loved that. Your maker video is so good. We were working with you like a little bit on like what to do you and stuff like that, just loved the outcome, and you posted in our Diamond Insiders group, and it was just such a beautifully told story. So when I watched that video I was just like, I felt so peaceful after. I loved it. Okay, so that's the story of the gold, it was like basically you just kind of like hunting down and, for lack of a better word, chain of command. I feel like we're talking about the show Scandal right now, and digging deep, finding this resource in Borneo. What about the diamonds?



- Meri: Well I've heard already before I was doing anything with jewelry, before I was even remotely interested in jewelry. I heard that from a family that I was living with at the time, Indonesian family, and the woman, she was telling me about these black diamonds from Borneo, and that they were so unique to that area. So at one point like I just remembered that, like, "Wait, but actually they have Diamonds in Indonesia. Why am I not finding these on the international market?" I'm looking, I'm searching high and low for diamonds were nowhere to actually from, so that I really know from which country. What if I just go to Borneo and see if I can find any. I started just searching on Indonesian seller sites, like Etsy or eBay, but then really focused on Indonesia. And on Instagram, and I just searched for Borneo diamonds in Indonesia, and I got in touch with a few sellers and just asking to send me pictures of what they have to get an idea of pricing. Then I just hopped on the plane and went over. Yeah.
- Tracy: Easy when you're in Bali, because you're just hop, skip and a jump. Right?
- Meri: Yeah, it's like two flights, two domestic flights. It's about six, seven hours.
- Tracy: Yeah, it's not too bad. I think I need to go visit you in Bali and then we can do some sourcing together.
- Meri: Yeah, you should, definitely.
- Tracy: Okay, cool. So you found a supplier in Borneo, but you were also buying from other suppliers that you found on Instagram, you're buying through WhatsApp. My question to you about that is, number one, how do you know that they're legit, and then number two, what do you do about returns, because I've been like approached and connected with tons of buyers on Instagram before, but you just don't know like if what they're sending you, or what they're shooting in the pictures is really what you're going to get, and then you're out all this money, it takes time for the shipment, importing fees and stuff like that. How have you been able to like trust these people that you're actually getting something good?
- Meri: I get like 20 messages a day from really random sellers that want to sell me really random stones I'm really not interested in. Normally I do not respond to those, but I have a few people that when I land on their Instagram I can see that they've been getting actual likes and comments and that they're not negative, so I just build up a little bit of a relationship with them and I'll make a very small order, and then that first order, I'll have it tested. I'll look at what I got, like are they actually diamonds, are



they actually sapphires, are they actually like the treatments they say, is that correct.

Tracy: How do you test that or know?

Meri: I just send it to a local gem lab.

Tracy: Okay. Awesome.

Meri: Yeah, if I set up a trade relationship, I want it to be based on trust. Yeah, and if I'm not, you know, normally I place a small order, so if I'm out like a \$100, \$200, I'll be like... And it's not, if it's not what they said it was, I'll try and get my money back, and if it ever comes, then I lost that money, but it's not a huge amount. I would just slowly build up my order value.

Tracy: Have you ever had someone sent you something that wasn't real?

Meri: Yeah, I have a bunch of like really crap stones, I don't know what they did with it, but it's definitely... I don't even send it to the gem lab, because it just doesn't even feel like gemstones.

Tracy: Feel like plastic or something? Pieced together.

Meri: Yeah, not even, like I don't know what it is, but it's not what I thought I would be buying.

Tracy: Okay, so that's awesome. You've been like really doing the research, you're like calling the people out, you're taken some chances getting the stones. Now let's talk about how you kind of weave that into your brand story and all the other things that you're doing with Garden of the Sun.

Meri: I shared about the tricks I've been doing, so to gold mining trip I have the photographer and videographer join, he does both, and he joined again too, the last trip to meet the sapphire miners. He didn't join for the diamond miners because I wasn't really quite sure what we were going to see there, I just didn't know whether it was going to be worth it to go. Yeah, and I used those videos and pictures on my website on Facebook, Instagram, and I sent it to the clients. So for example someone reaches out to me and they say, "I love your brand because it's ethical, you know where your stones are from, so I'm looking for this, this and that. Do you have something?" And then I'll be like, "Yeah, I actually have something for



you, and it was mined here and here." and I can tell them the story about it, I can send an actual photo of the cutter who cut that particular stone.

Tracy: So cool.

Meri: That really increases my conversion rate, because imagine someone's reaching out and I can over deliver on that promise that I know where it's from, because I have pictures, I have proof, I have a whole story behind it, and clients really appreciate that.

Tracy: If we're not in Indonesia and we can't literally go to the suppliers and see the supply chain and take all the pictures and get the videos and all the things, like how can someone who wants to have the same kind of commitment but doesn't have the flexibility, or the budget, maybe to travel from the U.S. or Canada or Europe, because it is a much longer trip. Do you have any recommendations for them on how they can create the same sort of like supply chain routes where they're getting like imagery and all the things?

Meri: I think there's two options. The first is to buy from a lapidary artist and to buy directly from the cutters. I mean there are so many very talented stone cutters out there. They usually also know where the stones are from.

Tracy: Okay, so buy directly from the lapidary because they know where the stones are from, that's a good idea.

Meri: I don't think not being in Indonesia or in Asia is really an excuse because there's like, you have the Himalayan mines in California and you can get Herkimer diamonds in New York, I mean you could just go there.

Tracy: Exactly.

Meri: I don't think it's an excuse. In Europe you have gem stones in Scandinavia and in Czech Republic and you have rare gem stones in Spain, in Germany. I don't think it's an excuse.

Tracy: I love you. You're like, "Don't make excuses, just do it." Right?

Meri: I think, "Why don't you do it?" Yeah.

Tracy: Yeah. I mean that's sort of your mantra, right? You know, it's like you're pulling a theme from Nike, "Just Do It" moving forward. You hear a lot of people talking about sustainability and ethical sourcing and responsible



sourcing or whatever the words we're supposed to use these days are, but you've really just said like, "I don't want to talk about this anymore, I'm just going to figure it out." Like why is this commitment so important to you?

Meri: When I was 19 I went to Indonesia for the first time. I was studying tropical forestry, and I studied this because I went to the tropics first when I was 17 or 18, I went to Sri Lanka with my parents, we went on a family trip. When we were there, I ran outside, I just loved the tropics, and really love the beautiful rainforest there and nature. I wanted to move to tropics and I wanted to go and live in Indonesia where my grandparents were born and where some of my family roots are, so I wanted to experience this part of the world, and I didn't want to just go backpacking, I wanted to do something more meaningful and something where I could really immerse in the culture. So when I was 19 I went on an internship to Indonesia, and after a few weeks I went to Kalimantan to Indonesia and Borneo with this local NGO. My colleague from this NGO joined me on the first part of the trip, and then he just left me in the village where no one spoke English. I had to just do it and learn Indonesian.

I had to live like they did, because there was no other option. So that meant washing in the river, that meant sleeping on a very thin mattress on the floor, and eating rice three times a day and just eating what was there. And yeah, and I think during this time I felt such a connection to the indigenous people in Borneo, just living with them and reaping, immersing in their culture and being invited in their ceremonies, being invited to drink rice wine with them and get completely drunk together. Especially at this age it's very formative. So I went back multiple times during my studies. I went three times, half a year each time, and each time I just spent in the villages living with local communities and learning how they were living there and seeing their struggle. I was just like, "Okay, I want to help these people make a living." because life is really, really hard there.

Tracy: Yeah. Wow, that's so powerful. Did you meet your husband through the same like channels, or did you meet him somewhere else?

Meri: Yes, yes. We actually met in Indonesia because he's also in forestry but more biophysical.

Tracy: Wow, that's so cool. I kind of got the chills because it's like you really spent, you really walk the talk, it's not just like, it would be a nice to have thing and I'm just going to sit in my lux home in Bali and talk about it. No, you're



like, "I spent years roughing it and really understanding the struggles of these communities, and I want to give back and be able to help them feed their families and have money given back to the villages so that they can actually elevate their living." Wow, that is like such a powerful story, I think that you really walked the walk and lived the talk, if you will, if that's something that you would say, because you really started with this commitment to giving back to these small communities and helping them elevate their lifestyle by supporting them at the community level, which is pretty awesome. It's incredible. A lot of people, I think they just sit in their cush housing, including myself, wanting to do something good in the world, and you're really like going out in the fields to make a difference, which is really, really powerful.

Meri: One of the reasons is also, I got looking at what's there, there is a lot of greenwashing.

Tracy: Yeah.

Meri: I looked at it, "Okay, maybe I can join in the certification, maybe I can join..." you know, there are a few other initiatives out there, so I looked at what they did and then I found like, "I could become a member." A member basically means I can use their badge on my website, but I don't really do anything. I could choose to do something, but I could also just say like, you know, pay the money and then be like, "Look, I have a badge. I'm sustainable and ethical." I hired a sustainability manager, she was one out my earlier hires, actually, just because I care so much about this. When she started I asked her, "Okay, let's make a list, just do a quick Google search and look for ethical jewelry brand.

Responsible jewelry or sustainable jewelry and let's look at what comes up. We made a list of all these brands and also I came up with some that I heard were doing things with ethical sourcing or were marketing themselves being sustainable or ethical or responsible, and then we looked at what are they actually doing and what are they saying they're doing. I compared that with where's the proof. Basically calling out their BS.

Tracy: Yeah.

Meri: Because there is a lot, there is a lot of BS out there. I looked at why do other jewelers claim to be ethical. There is no standard for it. I know there's



like ethical jewelry glossary project going on now, which is really great that's being pulled together.

Tracy: Is that for ethical metalsmiths or something else?

Meri: Yes, that's for ethical metalsmiths. I love that they're pulling that together now and setting a standard. So what we did was looking at okay, what are other parents doing or saying they're doing, and which points make me doubt. So where am I looking for proof. I took that, I kind of made that my, like a guideline for where I was going to go with my work. We looked at, okay, policies. Do they have sourcing policies, what public commitments do they make, how do they take care of their employees, do they provide a living wage, benefits, do they ensure fair of trade throughout their supply chain, do they have any extra certification, do they have any membership to any forums or active participation in organizations like ethical metalsmith.

I look at the environment, do they have eco-friendly packaging, eco-friendly CEO practices, carbon offsetting, their recycle minimums ways, and then looking at the materials. Do they know where their materials are from, and how do they know, and do they just say they're doing it and then leave it at that, or do they provide a longer back story that actually proves that they're really knowing where the materials come from. We also look at transparency. For me this was a very important indicator. There are so many businesses making claims but not offering any transparency. I was like, "Okay, if we're going to do this, we need to share whatever we're doing, even if it's not perfect, but we're going to share what it is." Because who's going to believe that I'm really doing and if I'm not showing it.

Tracy: You know, it's so cool. I'm like literally texting Susan Wheeler of the [Chicago Responsible Jewelry Conference](#), I'm like, "You must get Meri to speak or be interviewed at the conference this year." Because this is really powerful, I think that you know that your approach to this is really something to be admired, because it's not just about the badge, it's not just about claiming things, it's not just about a list, it's about like literally walking the walk, which I think is so amazing. I know Susan has the same kind of commitment to you, in fact, I was hoping to go, I just wasn't able to pull it off at the last minute.

She's doing a trip with the Nomad Jeweler to Africa this summer to go meet the female miners and to speak at the gem conference and all the



things. So it's going to be a pretty awesome trip, I'm so bummed I can't go, it just was to last minute, the time didn't work for me. But at the end of the day, just finding that commitment, getting on the gem level, and like people like Monica with [Anza Gems](#), she's going to mines on the rez to like source her own stones, so I think you are really like amongst some pretty amazing people that are doing really great things for this community. So you talked a little bit about what other jewelers are doing and some of the gaps, because it's not just about having a badge, it's about going deeper. Last year at the Chicago Responsible Jewelry Conference Mark Hanna was talking a little bit about supply chain and also block chain and I interviewed him last fall, which was cool, along with Jennifer Dawes. How are you using the story of how you're sourcing really is a framework to make Garden of the Sun more ethical, and using everything else that's going on in the industry to like really position your brand? I don't know if that's like the right word to be like the go to beader on this movement?

Meri: I'm not here to be the leader. I think for me, my mission is really just to do this and to make sure that I'm not the only one doing it. I can set out to be a leader and to be the most ethical jewelry brand out there, but that doesn't really make a difference if it's just me. My vision is that whatever I'm learning I want to share this with others, and I would inspire others to do something similar in their own ways or to ask these questions to their suppliers. It would really change this industry. Because it doesn't help if I'm the only one doing it. But of course, on the other hand, I do have a business to run, and I do want to make a living. For as long as I'm still doing something that's unique, I do use it to distinguish Gardens of the Sun in marketing, and I think that it really, doing these trips really gives me something to talk about, and it helps me create the stories and to create content, to communicate with my clients and to really tell the story of brand, because doing this, it is a brand.

Tracy: So let's talk, I just want to like kind of circle back to like working with miners, like what are your biggest frustrations when buying from indigenous sources? Because it's not always perfect. Right? What are the things that make you worry about that?

Meri: I think it's there aren't really any standards yet, and because there aren't many people who've done it before, I get a lot of ethical dilemmas. So for example, buying from indigenous miners but there is some child labor. Do I not buy from them, or do it buy from them and then hope that with the money that they get they will send their kids to school instead? Or do I



say, "I will buy from you, but only if there is no child labor." but then how do I check that? Do I step away from it, or do I try to transform it and change what they're doing? I'm really in here to transform it, but it's far from instant, and I get very frustrated just because it's very slow, and I want all these things to happen yesterday and today. But of course, you know real change takes time, and transformation takes time. It's constant process and it's a lot of work. A lot of constant hard work. I really have to keep my expectations real and be really gentle and kind to myself, because it's definitely happening, as much as I don't want it to happen.

Tracy:

I think it's interesting because we have so many standards here in like Western countries, like the United States. In emerging countries it's so different because like things like child labor or like terrible living conditions are just part of like what is acceptable to them, and it's not, I mean as terrible as it is to ask, like I don't think there's enough education for them to know that that's not how things should be done, like that their children should be protected or whatever. I think all the work in progress, education at this like village level, and it maybe it also has to do a little bit with the poverty in those countries.

I remember this one life changing trip that I took years and years ago, I was on like my Eat, Pray, Love thing in my early 30's and I went to India. I was at a retreat which was catered towards Europeans and Americans traveling to India, but it was surrounded by all these indigenous villages, and so I would go on a walk every day and I made friends with the dude at the top of the hill who had a little, what we would call in New York, like a little bodega. I met his family, they invited me over, they didn't even really speak English, but the living conditions of what they lived in were just so, in my opinion, so horrendous. At the end of the trip this is what was really eye opening to me about this. At the end of the trip, like I ended up like donating some of the clothes that I'd brought because I realized I had over packed a little bit and left them with some other things. When I got back I was talking with a friend in the yoga community, because I was doing this yoga retreat and all this stuff and he was like, "What makes you think that they even wanted any of that stuff?" I was like, "Wow, that's an interesting way to look at it." And so I think it's a lot of it's really about like, as Robin likes to say, they don't know what they don't know in certain respects, but like improving their quality of the situation is always, I feel, like a huge mission for people on a mission like you and like I am and stuff like that. So it's definitely an interesting conversation to have. Right?



- Meri: Yes. I was, actually I came back from Borneo only two days ago. I was there for a week and a half.
- Tracy: How was that trip?
- Meri: Exhausting.
- Tracy: I bet.
- Meri: I went with my family. This is one of the things I love about running my own business, I get to make my own rules. I decided that I'm no longer going to leave the kids at home to do work, I'm just going to take them and they can come learn from experience. See how other people are living. It was three days of traveling, one day of flying, two flights, and then like two days of traveling like eight, nine hours a day in the car. And that was one way. We were there for four nights. We stayed all four nights on the wooden floor of their house. There we no proper bathrooms, like you have to wash with a sarong on so no one can see you. Eat, their diets are not very nutritionist, so it was, for me it was really tough just not to have all my nice food, juices and things.
- Tracy: I feel like Bali has the most amazing food, too.
- Meri: Yes.
- Tracy: So it must be hard to only have rice three meals a day. It's a simple thing. Wow.
- Meri: Yeah, but just sitting in this really crap car and going in these tiny little wooden boats, I was just doing, "Ohh my God, ohh my God, ohh my God, I'm going to tip over and I'm going to drown." I'm holding onto my baby, she can't swim yet. I'm like, "Whenever we tip over I'm just going to pull her over my head."
- Tracy: What an incredible experience for them, though.
- Meri: Yes, yes. They enjoyed it. They do enjoy it this life. They're like, "Ohh no, these poor people, they don't have ice cream because there's no electricity, so they don't have ice cream." They'd be like, "Ohh no, all these poor kids, they don't have ice cream."



Tracy: I think that's so funny to look at it through a child's eyes, right? Because it's the simple things for them like ice cream. Wow, that's so great. Meri, this has been such an amazing conversation. I want to thank you for going back and forth and coordinating with me even on the, you know, random time zones, like you're just such an inspiration, I know, to a lot of people, and really a leader in this responsible sourcing community. So thanks for sharing your knowledge and all the insights and everything that you've done. Where can everyone find you?

Meri: Well on my website, GardensOfTheSun.com, or on Instagram, which is just [@GardensOfTheSun](https://www.instagram.com/GardensOfTheSun).

Tracy: Awesome. Thank you so much, and if you are a member of our Diamond Insiders, Meri is in there all the time posting some, dropping some knowledge bombs about things and just a really active member of our community. Meri, thanks again for being here today.

Meri: Thank you again for having me. And just to everyone listening, the Diamond Insiders is really such a great community, and one of the things that Tracy and Robin and the coaches do that I love the most is that they have these, like a few times a year they will have these super shares where everyone in the community gets to share what they've been doing recently that got them \$1000 or \$10,000 of extra revenue in. I love these the most because she can get everyone who's in the same boat sharing what's working for them and you learn so much from just sharing within this community. That alone is worth the membership for me.

Tracy: Yeah, we love the super shares. To me those are like the best thing ever, so great. And you just remind me, like we need to do another super share contest. Thank you for being here Meri, you're amazing and we'll have all the links that we spoke about in the show notes, thank you.

Thank you so much for listening to the show today, this is Tracy. before I sign off I just want to remind you that you have this very amazing opportunity to join us for our Train Your Customers to Buy From You Online workshop. We are starting on August 13th, and so I don't want you to miss the boat. If you apply now you have an opportunity to get a free website review if you're doing this, if you apply before July 25th with your deposit, and so our website reviews, we charge over \$500 for those, and we know that a lot of you have pretty websites, but you might not know that what the way your website is set up is actually hurting your chances



of success. We want to help you get the maximum results out of everything that you're doing in your online strategy.

So head on over to FlourishThriveAcademy.com/TrainMyCustomers to enroll today, or to apply today and to get on board for your free website review if you're accepted and all the good stuff.

Alright, this is Tracy Matthews signing off. Chat with you soon.

Thank you so much for listening to today's episode. It's my mission to help thousands of creative businesses, inside and outside the jewelry space, use their creativity to make money. Make sure that you're subscribed to Thrive-by-Design on iTunes, Spotify, Stitcher and wherever podcasts are played. We would love to hear what you think, please rate and review the show. If you're inspired, please share this with your friends. Here's to seeing you flourish and thrive.