

An Excerpt From

Ice Cream Social
The Struggle for the Soul of Ben & Jerry's

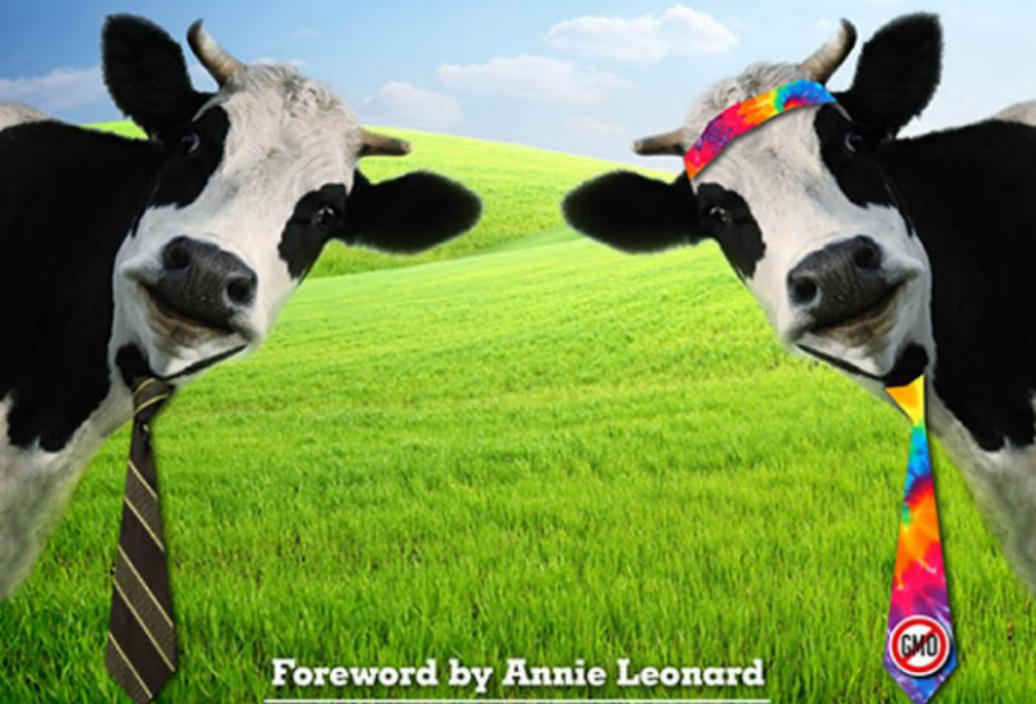
by Brad Edmondson

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Brad Edmondson

ICE CREAM SOCIAL

**The Struggle
for the Soul of
Ben & Jerry's**



Foreword by Annie Leonard

**Epilogue by Jeff Furman, Chairman, Ben & Jerry's
Board of Directors**

More Praise for *Ice Cream Social*

“The pioneering experience of Ben & Jerry’s shows that corporate social responsibility can, thankfully, be contagious. Brad Edmondson takes us behind the scenes to tell this riveting and timely story.”

—**United States Senator Patrick Leahy**

“This book reveals the true ingredients that go into every pint of Ben & Jerry’s: GMO-free cream, fair-trade cane sugar, and a lot of blood, sweat, and tears.”

—**Eric Utne, founder, *Utne Reader***

“What once was radical is becoming mainstream. By earning B Corp certification, Ben & Jerry’s has proven that you can sell without selling out and scale with integrity. Much of the global movement to redefine success in business stands on its shoulders, and much of what we know about better practices and better governance can be traced to lessons the company learned the hard way. Finally, this important story has been well and completely told.”

—**Jay Coen Gilbert, cofounder, B Lab**

“Brad Edmondson vividly conveys the passion, conflicts, and raw humanity behind an iconic brand. He gives us an uncensored look at how smart, caring people poured their hearts and souls into making Ben & Jerry’s the standard-bearer for ‘caring capitalism.’ The story leaves the reader in awe of all they achieved, and it also imparts invaluable lessons by talking frankly about their failures. It puts on full display the contradictions and painful choices that eventually confront all successful mission-driven businesses. It’s a journey into uncharted territory.”

—**Rink Dickinson, cofounder and copresident, and Rob Everts, copresident, Equal Exchange**

“The founders of Ben & Jerry’s put up a long and determined fight to keep their dream of a socially responsible company intact. Cutthroat capitalism doesn’t make it easy for entrepreneurs who want living wages for their employees, environmentally sustainable ingredients, and socially beneficial business practices. Brad Edmondson gives us a fascinating look behind the scenes of a company as beloved as the ice cream it makes.”

—**Barbara Ehrenreich, *New York Times* bestselling author and Founding Editor, Economic Hardship Reporting Project**

“Ice Cream Social is a factory tour of the ups and downs and arounds of Ben & Jerry’s. We get an insider’s description of the struggle of two guys who strived through good times and bad to achieve their mission to make the world’s best ice cream, pursue social change, and treat both employees and shareholders fairly. Much of the time, they succeeded.”

—**Madeleine M. Kunin, former governor of Vermont**

“St. Albans Cooperative has been a proud partner of Ben & Jerry’s since the beginning. Through all of its organizational changes, it has remained committed to its core values, family dairy farms, and the cooperative. I am proud to be part of this story.”

—**Ralph McNall, dairy farmer, St. Albans Cooperative Creamery**

“When Calvert first heard about Ben & Jerry’s, we wondered whether our mission of social investing could even include a company that sold ice cream treats. This book shows how the founders convinced us. For decades, they have been a stellar example of walking the talk.”

—**Wayne Silby, Founding Chair, Calvert Funds, and cofounder, Social Venture Network**

“A fascinating business morality tale . . . Edmondson offers an entertaining and enlightening account of the highs and lows that can be encountered in the quest to give capitalism a soul.”

—**Lynn A. Stout, Distinguished Professor of Corporate & Business Law, Cornell University Law School**

Ice Cream Social

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The Struggle for the Soul of Ben & Jerry's

Brad Edmondson

Foreword by Annie Leonard

Epilogue by Jeff Furman, Chairman,
Ben & Jerry's Board of Directors



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Ice Cream Social

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Late
1990s

2000

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Foreword

When I heard the title of Brad Edmondson's book, my first thought was, "the *soul* of Ben & Jerry's?" Ben & Jerry's is a corporation. It doesn't have a soul. The US Supreme Court may not be able to fully distinguish between corporations and people, but I can. Corporations aren't people, and they don't have souls.

Then I read the book. And it became clear that the *people* in the Ben & Jerry's story definitely have souls. The founders, workers, board of directors, and ice cream lovers everywhere pour their souls into this company.

Some businesses require their owners and workers to check their souls, their consciences, and their values at the door. The story of Ben & Jerry's is a story of what happens if people are allowed, even encouraged, to bring their consciences to work with them. In today's soulless corporate culture, how can such a business exist? What would it even look like? How could it remain true to its values? And if an ice cream company can do it, why not every company?

Ben & Jerry's, like a few other remarkable American companies, shows that another way of doing business is possible. The company has consistently walked the talk on environmental and social issues. It stands for something important, delivers on its promises, and provides a good product, creating a win-win-win. This book tells the story of a beloved company moving forward on principles that respect people and the planet—and in doing so, gives us a taste of how business could be.

Brad Edmondson takes us inside the beginnings of Ben & Jerry's, charting the origins of its social mission and its rise to

become an American icon beloved by hippies, yuppies, kids, and CEOs alike. But then the plot thickens, as this small Vermont outfit with roots in the counterculture gets bigger and struggles to keep its identity—its soul—in the world of multinational brands.

Although there has been extensive media coverage of the sale of Ben & Jerry's to Unilever, this book is the first to tell the whole story: how the company fought to keep its three-part mission intact after the sale, how those principles were compromised in the decade following the sale, and how the two parties have ultimately learned to work together to preserve the brand's vitality and integrity.

Just as Ben & Jerry's is no ordinary business, this is no ordinary business book. It's fast-paced, it has compelling, fully realized characters, and the narrative is gripping. The chapters about the Unilever takeover were my favorites. I knew the ending, and I still couldn't put the book down. That made it difficult to eat my Cherry Garcia at the same time.

Annie Leonard

Berkeley, California, June 2013

Annie Leonard is founder of the Story of Stuff Project (www.storyofstuff.org), which makes videos and other educational material on the effects of corporate globalization, waste, and consumerism.

Prologue

I met Jeff Furman in 1998, when he offered to rent me a corner of the large room he said was his office. I knew that Jeff had degrees in accounting and law and that he also had something to do with Ben & Jerry's, but I didn't know exactly what that was. Perhaps Jeff worked for a local not-for-profit group that hires teenagers, which operated the ice cream shop directly below the office and had its papers and junk taking up most of the room. Or maybe he worked for the Ithaca Skate Park—one afternoon I had to pick my way past a group of teenagers who were politely holding a meeting, some of them balancing on skateboards while they talked. It was a chaotic but friendly place, and everyone around Jeff was doing something interesting.

Jeff used the office mostly to change clothes before he went for his daily run. He had a small desk in one corner, mounded over with dusty papers, and balanced on top of the mound was a spectacularly grimy, sticky telephone. The phone looked like it belonged in a dairy barn. A lot of people used it, and many of them worked downstairs, where they handled ice cream. Every so often Jeff would come in and talk on that phone for a while, and then he'd leave.

I was alone in that room one day, wandering around the way writers do, when I noticed that Jeff had taped, right above his telephone, a quote from Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*: "I admit that twice two makes four is an excellent thing, but if we are to give everything its due, twice two makes five is sometimes a very charming thing too." After that, I couldn't stand it anymore, so I asked Jeff what kind of accountant he was. He smiled and said that he was training to be an *alter kocker*, which is a Yiddish term for a

foul-tempered, forgetful old troublemaker. We started hanging out in coffee shops, and over the next fifteen years, he gradually answered my question.

Jeff is an interesting guy, but I learned that he was protecting something even more interesting. He is the co-creator and guardian of the social mission of Ben & Jerry's, and a stubborn advocate for a vision of business the company calls "linked prosperity." This is the simple but radical idea that when the company benefits, everything it touches should also benefit, including employees, suppliers, customers, communities, and the environment. One day, Jeff suggested that I write a magazine article about linked prosperity at Ben & Jerry's. This book is the result.

The journey of linked prosperity spans four decades, has a cast of thousands, and contains as much human drama and unexpected plot twists as anything by Dostoevsky. I spent a solid year learning about it, interviewing more than three dozen people and digesting several hundred pounds of company reports and internal documents. (If a source is not attributed in this book, it comes either from these personal interviews or company documents.) It was all I could do just to tell the story, dear reader, so please do not expect a typical business book with a lot of easily summarized "take-aways." This is a story about inspiring, fallible people and their shared quest to attain a goal they know they will never reach. They fail and struggle, and sometimes they think they have failed even when they have succeeded. They are also extremely funny, and they make a product few can resist.

If we are to give everything its due, the story of linked prosperity is a very charming thing. But it is also a very complicated and provocative thing. It raises so many big, fascinating ideas that beg for discussion: What is fair compensation? When publicly traded businesses invest in social change, how do you define success? If you liberate a hen from her cage, is she happier, and what is that worth? And so on. To

encourage those discussions in informal groups, I have prepared a study guide with free documents and links at www.bradedmondson.com.

I was welcomed by almost everyone I approached while writing this book, with the notable exceptions of Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield, who said they didn't want to relive the past (see "human drama," above). That was okay, because this book isn't really about them, or Jeff, or any other person. It is about the extraordinary organization a small group of committed people helped create and how they managed, almost despite themselves, to preserve their vision for future generations.

Jeff was patient, honest, and unfailingly helpful during the long process of writing and revising this book. I am equally indebted to his spouse, Sara Hess (favorite flavor: Liz Lemon Frozen Yogurt), who read and commented on each chapter with the wisdom of someone who was paying attention as she watched the whole thing happen. Twenty percent of the book's royalties are going to a not-for-profit organization Jeff and Sara maintain to support community organizations, and that doesn't begin to repay the debt of gratitude I feel toward them.

This book is an entirely independent effort. It is not endorsed and was not financially supported by either Ben & Jerry's or Unilever. So I am especially grateful to the people of Ben & Jerry's who remained engaged through months of writing and fact-checking, especially Chuck Lacy, Liz Bankowski, Howard Fuguet, Lisa Wernhoff, Michael Graning, Debra Heintz, Rob Michalak, and Jostein Solheim. Everyone I spoke with was cooperative and generous with their time and attention. As I kept pushing and probing, their genuineness convinced me that their commitment to linked prosperity is also genuine.

I am fortunate to have large groups of friends who supported, encouraged, and challenged me in ways too

numerous to mention. I would particularly like to thank Jon Crispin for the author photo; the staff of the Finger Lakes Land Trust for being nice to the writer who works upstairs; Nancy Wells, Henry Tepper, Fred Connor, and Stephanie Sechler, for their friendship and encouragement; my children, Will and Emma, whose intelligence and work ethic give me something to aspire to; and my wife, Tania Werbizky, for always believing in me and never giving up.

I could not have written this book without Tania, or without Jack Greer, David and Sharon Schuman, James McConkey, John Marcham, S.K. List, Cheryl Russell, Robert Wilson, and many other editors and teachers who insisted that I go back, again and again, until I got the story. This book is dedicated to all of them.

Brad Edmondson
Ithaca, New York
July 2013

Main Characters

In alphabetical order, with jobs and (favorite Ben & Jerry's flavor):

Andrea Asch, manager of natural resources use since 1992
(From Russia with Buzz)

Liz Bankowski, board, 1990–99, director of social mission, 1991–2001, Ben & Jerry's Foundation board since 1994
(Cherry Garcia)

Bruce Bowman, chief operations officer, 1985–2000

Jane Bowman, human resources director since 2005
(Vanilla Heath Bar Crunch)

Merritt Chandler, board 1987–96 (Peace Pops)

Ben Cohen, cofounder, board 1977–2000, chair 1977–98, vice chair 1998–2000 (Cherry Garcia)

Yves Couette, CEO, board, 2001–4

Daryn Dodson, board since 2012 (Phish Food)

Tom D'Urso, treasurer, 1994–2000 (Pistachio Pistachio)

Jon Entine, investigative journalist (doesn't eat Ben & Jerry's)

Pierre Ferrari, board since 1997, chair, 2007–10 (Cherry Garcia)

Walt Freese, chief marketing officer, 2001–4, CEO, 2005–10, board 2005–10

Howard "Howie" Fuguet, legal counsel 1984–2000 and 2009–11 (Coffee Coffee Buzz Buzz Buzz)

Jeff Furman, board since 1982, board chair since 2010, and board of Ben & Jerry's Foundation since 1985 (Cherry Garcia Frozen Yogurt, for health reasons)

Richard Goldstein, head of Unilever North America until 2000 (Mint Chocolate Cookie)

Jerry Greenfield, cofounder, board 1990–2000, vice chair 1990–98, chair 1998–2000, Ben & Jerry’s Foundation board since 1985 (Coconut Almond Fudge Chip)

Sean Greenwood, scooper, truck driver, and public relations, 1988–2003, and director of public relations since 2005 (Cherry Garcia, “fresh off the line”)

Debra Heintz, various jobs since 1994 including materials and distribution manager, and director of retail operations (Wavy Gravy)

Jennifer Henderson, board of directors since 1996, board chair 2000–2007 (New York Super Fudge Chunk)

Robert Holland, CEO, board, 1995–96 (Sweet Potato Pie)

Helen Jones, director of brand development for the UK and Europe (1995–2009), board since 2010 (Phish Food)

Charles M. “Chuck” Lacy, general manager and president, 1988–94, board 1990–95 (Coffee Heath Bar Crunch)

Fred “Chico” Lager, general manager, president, and CEO, 1981–90; board, 1981–97 (Heath Bar Crunch)

John Le Boutillier, head of Unilever’s North American Ice Cream division, 2008–12, president of Unilever Canada since 2012 (Chocolate Fudge Brownie)

Rob Michalak, public relations czar, 1989–98, global director of social mission since 2006 (Vanilla Caramel Fudge)

Fred Miller, board 1992–2000 (New York Super Fudge Chunk)

Anuradha Mittal, board since 2007 (Americone Dream)

Terry Mollner, board since 2000 (Chocolate Fudge Brownie)

Henry Morgan, board 1987–2000

Perry Odak, CEO, board, 1997–2000

Carol O'Neill, franchise site selection manager, senior contract administrator, since 1985 (New York Super Fudge Chunk)

Paul Polman, CEO of Unilever since 2009

Fran Rathke, chief financial officer, 1990–2000

Ronald Soiefer, chief counsel, Unilever USA until 2012, board ex-officio 2000–2012 (Soiefer's Sweet Soiree—see chapter 12)

Jostein Solheim, CEO of Ben & Jerry's and board since 2010 (Chunky Monkey)

Dave Stever, several jobs, including chief marketing officer, since 1987 (Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough)

Naomi Tannen, Ben & Jerry's Foundation board, 1985–94 (Liz Lemon Frozen Yogurt)

Kees van der Graaf, global ice cream strategy and other senior executive positions for Unilever until 2009, Ben & Jerry's board since 2009 (Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough)

Eric Walsh, head of Unilever's North American Ice Cream division until 2008 (Americone Dream)

Lisa Wernhoff, designer and archivist since 1986 (Chocolate Cointreau Orange Fudge)

Judy Wicks, founder, White Dog Café, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; former board chair, Social Venture Network; cofounder and board member, Business Alliance for Living Local Economies (Coconut Almond Fudge Chip)

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ONE

“We’re Completely Insane, and We Need Your Help!”

Jennifer Henderson can’t forget the day in 1988 that she met Ben Cohen, Jerry Greenfield, and Jeff Furman. “Ben and Jerry were famous, and I was a young community organizer, so I was excited,” she said. “They were starting a new organization, and they wanted a bunch of people to get on board.

“We met in a big room that had a thin wooden divider down the middle. They started talking, and pretty soon Ben got all excited. He was waving his arms and saying all kinds of things, like how he was going to prevent war by printing up a million bumper stickers. He was shouting and getting red in the face and I was thinking, this guy needs professional help. They all had long hair, Ben and Jeff had big wild beards, and they were wearing old T-shirts. Jerry was just sitting there beaming. Jeff was very calm, like he knew some secret reason why this was actually going to work. It was not at all what I expected.

“We took a break, and I went to the other side of the divider and called a girlfriend and told her that I had met these crazy people, and she just wouldn’t believe what they were like. I forgot that the divider was really thin, so everybody could hear me. When I came back in, Ben rushed up to me and said, ‘Yes! You’re right! We’re completely insane, and we need your help!’ Then they took us down the street

to where they had a store, and Ben scooped us all ice cream cones. He didn't introduce himself to the people there or anything. He just walked behind the counter and started in, with everybody staring at him.

"I thought about them all the way home. Jerry was really sweet. Jeff was smart and funny. Ben scared me, but he was also funny, and he said something I couldn't get out of my mind. He said that businesses are the most powerful institutions in the world, and they could become the world's most powerful forces for social change. It seemed to me that they were on to something, so I signed up."

Jennifer started consulting with Ben & Jerry's just as they committed to a radical vision of business. She stayed with the company through an epic struggle, including a change of ownership, as it kept trying to live up to that vision. Although Ben & Jerry's has been a wholly owned subsidiary of the world's second-largest food company since 2000, it is still committed to a different way of doing business. This book is about that difference.

Jennifer has been on the board of directors of Ben & Jerry's for eighteen years. The company's annual sales were \$167 million when she showed up; now they are somewhere around \$500 million, and the company has devoted customers on every continent except Antarctica. It is the kind of company that might consider setting up a shop there, too.

A few years before Ben Cohen met Jennifer, he decided that scooping ice cream wasn't enough. Ben and Jeff Furman led the company through several years of experimenting, sometimes painfully, with the idea that business could be a force for progressive social change as well as a machine for making money. Ben & Jerry's became a leader in the movement to make businesses more socially responsible, and the company pursued what it called a "double bottom line" while operating as a publicly traded company from 1984 until 2000. They were among the first companies to adopt



Top: The first Ben & Jerry's store in Burlington, Vermont, shortly after it opened on May 5, 1978. Bottom: The first Free Cone Day, May 1979.

policies that are now widely known, such as paying a living wage, publishing audited reviews of social and environmental performance, and teaming up with not-for-profit organizations, to name a few.

Ben & Jerry's took radical, crazy-sounding ideas and proved they could work. It made it easier for other companies to try these ideas. And behind all its efforts was one big idea the company called "linked prosperity." As the company prospered, it said, all of the employees, suppliers, customers, and other living things that had contributed to its success should prosper as well.

The company's mission had three parts that were equal and interrelated. It wanted to make the world's best ice cream, to pursue progressive social change, and to provide fair compensation to employees and shareholders alike. Ben & Jerry's stuck to these principles as it became an international brand with passionately dedicated customers. But the company eventually grew beyond the managerial abilities of its board, and after years of struggling, the board was forced to sell the company to Unilever. Ben walked away from the deal with \$41 million. Jerry got \$9.5 million. Jeff got about \$1 million. Yet Ben and Jerry have also said that losing control of their company was one of the worst experiences of their lives, and they still don't want to talk about it. It's a hard subject for Jeff, too.

The social mission did survive the sale, however. The founders and the board accepted Unilever's offer only after negotiating a detailed agreement that guaranteed them a continuing role in the company and gave them legally enforceable powers. Under the agreement, Unilever is the sole shareholder of Ben & Jerry's, and it controls the company's economic and operational decisions. But Ben & Jerry's also has a separate board of directors that is not controlled by Unilever. This board elects its own members, and it exists in perpetuity. It acts as a watchdog and has the legal authority

to block proposals that lessen product quality or the social mission. As sales increase, investment in the social mission must also increase.

The story of the company’s endless pursuit of linked prosperity offers answers to the questions Ben put in Jennifer’s mind: What would the world look like if businesses got serious about pursuing social and environmental justice? What if a business was directed toward several equally important goals, with profit being only one of them? And what would happen if social justice activists controlled the board of directors of a large, global enterprise? Could that work?

There’s a second, related question. It’s the question of legacy. Thousands of business owners do value their employees, the natural environment, and the community at least as highly as their own bank accounts. But investing in these areas rarely produces an immediate financial return, and many investors see social investments as unnecessary costs. So how can socially responsible businesses retain their progressive values after the founding generations retire? Or, to put it another way, how can someone give up control of a successful enterprise without throwing away its purpose?

The Ampersand

In this story, the good guys and the bad guys are not always where you might expect them to be. For example, Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield are widely known as pioneers of socially responsible business. But the people who wrote the sale agreements that preserved Ben & Jerry’s as a socially responsible business were elite corporate lawyers, about as far from Vermont hippies as you can get. Several Unilever executives have become so enthusiastic about the drive for linked prosperity that they have said and done risky things to promote it. And the social mission’s most steadfast champion—the only person who consistently fought for it at every

stage of the story—describes himself as an activist first, and adds that he has little interest in being a business executive.

Jeff Furman's coworkers often describe him as "the amper-sand in Ben & Jerry's." He became friends with Ben and Jerry years before they scooped their first cone. He helped them write the company's first business plan in 1977 by borrowing a similar plan from a pizza joint and substituting the word "cone" whenever that plan used the word "slice." He did a lot of different tasks for the company as it struggled to get going; he joined the company's board in 1982, and he was a key contributor during its decade of rapid growth. He is still on the board in 2014, and since 2010 he has been its chair.

Jeff really is a lawyer and an accountant, but not in an ordinary sense. One Unilever executive refers to him as "a lawyer in disguise." He is a balding guy with a fringe of long hair that he tucks behind his ears. He smiles a lot, trims his beard only occasionally, wears a T-shirt every day—no matter how cold it is—and spends his time working with not-for-profit groups and businesses that have progressive values. And he didn't even meet Ben or Jerry until he was thirty.

Jeff got a degree in accounting in 1965 and a degree in law in 1969, but as the 1970s began, he was not exactly on a career track. In fact, he couldn't keep a job. He was a parole officer until he was given a gun and told to prevent a suspect from fleeing out the back door. He couldn't even bring himself to load the thing. Boston University fired him for spreading the word about an antiwar protest. What he did like was working for the Workers Defense League, representing blue-collar folks and conscientious objectors. That experience gave him strong feelings of compassion for people who hold entry-level jobs. It was a big reason why he later suggested that Ben & Jerry's adopt the policy of paying the company's top employees no more than five times its starting salary, and it is why the company continues to pay a living wage to its employees today.

Jeff met Ben Cohen at Highland Community, an innovative school for twenty-five emotionally troubled teenagers near the isolated mountain town of Paradox, New York. Jeff did administrative work, and Ben taught pottery. Naomi Tannen, the school’s founder and director, was a powerful influence on both of them. Jeff says that they were Naomi’s employees, not her students, but it could have gone either way. “She had a dream, and she pursued it relentlessly,” said Jeff. “She was also tolerant of eccentric people, as long as they were pointed in the right direction. I think Ben and I both learned a lot from her example.”

Jeff was raised in a Jewish family, and so was Ben; Jeff grew up in Queens, and Ben grew up on Long Island, less than twenty miles away; they both had been cab drivers; they both liked to laugh and do silly things; et cetera, et cetera. Hilarity ensued. Ben soon introduced Jeff to Jerry Greenfield, who had been Ben’s best friend since they struggled through the seventh grade together. Jerry was cut from the same cloth. The three men shared ideals that were formed in the 1960s and tempered by Vietnam and Watergate. They were smart and creative but ambivalent toward government, suspicious of big business, painfully aware of injustice, and looking for better ways to live.

The business Ben, Jerry, and Jeff built sprang from these values. Selling ice cream wasn’t their real purpose. If it didn’t come from the heart, they weren’t interested. As the years went by and the business got bigger, they kept pushing for ways to make things more interesting, more political, and more fun. They went farther than they ever thought they would. Calvin Trillin wrote that Ben represented “one of the people who carried the style of the sixties into consumer businesses aimed at their contemporaries, and whose response to success is to express not gratitude for living in a land of opportunity but astonishment at a world so weird that people like themselves are considered respectable businessmen.”¹

For the first five years of their ice cream business, Ben and Jerry found themselves working a lot of eighty-hour weeks, a lifestyle neither of them enjoyed. The money was not that great, either. They briefly decided to sell the business in 1982, when it might have been worth \$500,000, and they asked Jeff to help with the legal and financial questions. Jerry moved away from Vermont then, but Ben changed his mind and decided not to sell. (Jeff persuaded Jerry to hold on to 10 percent of the company's stock and stay on as a consultant; Jerry returned to the board of directors in 1990 and stayed until the company was sold in 2000). And then the broker that Ben & Jerry's had hired to sell the business sued for breach of contract and won \$100,000.

The moment the judgment was announced, Jeff ran down the street from the courtroom to Merchants Bank in Burlington, Vermont. Ben and Jerry followed close behind, with the county sheriff literally on their heels. The guys persuaded the banker, a friend of theirs, to let them withdraw the entire contents of the company's accounts and give it to them in cash. Then Jeff flew home to New York, where the court couldn't get at the money, with \$90,000 on his lap in a paper bag. When he got home, he dumped the money on the bed, turned to his girlfriend, Sara, and said, "Look what I found!" (Maybe he was trying to impress her; in any event, she later married him.) Jeff kept the money in a safe-deposit box until the lawsuit was settled, and then sent it back to Vermont. Ben and Jerry never doubted that he would.

Stories about the early years of Ben & Jerry's are often funny because these guys did not do things the way normal businesspeople do. For example, Jeff shared his Ithaca office with several others, including me and the not-for-profit group that owned the ice cream shop downstairs. Jeff called it a "PartnerShop." He came up with that idea when the board of Ben & Jerry's asked him to manage the franchising of stores. Some of the stores were just normal franchises, where the

company licenses its logo, formulas, and other valuable property to someone who uses them to make a profit. But Jeff also thought it would be cool to franchise some stores to not-for-profit organizations that give young people job experience. As a side benefit, Jeff’s Ithaca office occasionally filled up with teenagers who were trying to organize a skate park. It wasn’t part of a grand design. It was just Jeff’s way of using a creative twist to combine two of his interests.

Another World Is Possible

One summer day in 1999, Jeff came into the office above the Ithaca store and made a call on his grimy telephone. I didn’t listen to his side of the conversation at first, but then I noticed that he seemed to be getting more serious, and he was using lawyerly words like “share price,” “suit,” “counter-suit,” and “fly to Amsterdam.” He also stared at the ceiling after he hung up the phone, the way people do when they’ve heard upsetting news. He told me that things were not going well at Ben & Jerry’s, and that he couldn’t go into the details. Then he left.

Ben, Jerry, and Jeff did not want to sell their company. Although they still regarded a lot of their duties as chores, they also enjoyed their success. They were responsible for the jobs of about eight hundred people, many of whom they counted as friends. The business had come from their hearts. They struggled for a year and a half to find some viable alternative to giving up control, but they failed. They settled for Unilever.

In 1999, Ben & Jerry’s was rooted in the idea of linked prosperity. It was making progress in a campaign to reduce the environmental impact and increase the sustainability of its business at every stage of its operations, from reducing the nitrogen and phosphorus output at its dairy farms to eliminating bleached paperboard in its containers. It was doing all

kinds of things to improve conditions in its factories and its suppliers' farms, and it paid employees a carefully calibrated "living wage" that was well above the market rate. It was trying to "lead with progressive values" in all phases of its business, according to a statement the board adopted in 1997. Jeff feared that all of this might be lost, and the thought was agonizing.

Ben ended up having quadruple bypass heart surgery a few months after the sale went through; the stress of losing his company might have had as much to do with his heart problem as had decades of taste-testing ice cream. Unilever offered Ben and Jerry seats on the post-sale board of directors, but they never took them. Both men are technically employees of Unilever today, but they do not have job descriptions. And Ben can be sharply critical of Unilever—although, as the founders and brand icons, he and Jerry still have some influence on the company that bears their names.

Jeff, on the other hand, stayed on the board. He wanted to try to keep the company's social mission alive. He had invested a great deal of time and effort in the social mission, and he felt responsible for the welfare of employees. In fact, the sale agreements had given him the power to sue Unilever if it didn't live up to its promise to pay a living wage. The agreements also empowered the board to block any changes in the product formula and to ensure that the company would continue to invest in social initiatives. Jeff couldn't just walk away.

In the years that followed the Summer of the Grimy Telephone, Jeff and the other board members of Ben & Jerry's struggled to find effective ways to pursue linked prosperity within the strictures of a huge multinational corporation. They traveled a dangerous, twisting road. They didn't always live up to their responsibilities, and the whole thing almost ended up in court. But after a decade of struggle, Ben & Jerry's and Unilever found ways of working together.

Once again, the company is making an honest effort to walk the talk on the social mission. It is still taking risks few other companies would consider, and it still sets an example for other companies to emulate.

When Jeff became chair of the board of Ben & Jerry’s in 2010, he was also involved in supporting the US Social Forum, a national gathering of progressive groups held in Detroit in July that year. He decided it would be fun to persuade hundreds of people from all over the country to ride their bicycles to Detroit—the Motor City, after all—as a way of spreading the Social Forum’s message, “Another World Is Possible.” Jeff was a fit sixty-six-year-old then, still a runner, and although he did not have a lot of experience with bicycles, he resolved to organize a delegation of riders to go from Ithaca to Detroit on a winding route of nearly five hundred miles. I offered to help him train and to ride with him part of the way.

After the first day’s ride, we found ourselves in Seneca Falls, New York, population 6,700. We were two middle-aged guys on the loose, but we were also quite tired and sore. Most of the other riders were several decades younger than us. They were at a nearby campground, eating food cooked on a camp stove, singing around a campfire, and sleeping in tents; we were at a comfy motel in the village, looking forward to a hot shower, a decent restaurant, and an early night. After we finished dinner and called our wives, we had just enough energy left to stroll down Main Street, where we found the Women’s Rights National Historical Park.

The park commemorates a meeting that took place in 1848. More than two hundred women and several men gathered in Seneca Falls to draft a Declaration of Sentiments. The document states that “all men and women are created equal” and calls for women to be given the right to vote, hold decent jobs, and own property. When women finally did get the right to vote, seventy-two years later, only one of the

people who signed the 1848 document was still alive and eligible to cast a ballot. Charlotte Woodward had been just eighteen when she went to Seneca Falls. But when the Nineteenth Amendment passed and she became eligible to register, she was ninety years old and too sick to leave the house. So none of the 1848 attendees ever actually voted.

We sat on a bench in the evening light after reading the historical markers, enjoying the calm that comes after a hard workout. "Riding to the US Social Forum on a bicycle is sort of like running Ben & Jerry's," Jeff said. "It's about looking for alternative ways to make the job more interesting, more political, and more fun. The company ran on that same kind of energy."

There was a long pause. "That's smart," I said. "Change happens so slowly that you'd better figure out how to enjoy yourself while you're fighting for it." I was paraphrasing the columnist Molly Ivins, who wrote, "We have to have fun while trying to stave off the forces of darkness because we hardly ever win, so it's the only fun we get to have. We find beer and imagination helpful."²

Charlotte Woodward spent her whole life struggling for the right to vote, and when the day finally came, she couldn't do it. But perhaps she was not all that bothered about missing her chance. After all, she wasn't fighting for herself. She had been struggling for the rights of women all her life. Perhaps she knew in 1910 what Dr. Martin Luther King said the night before he was killed in 1968: that it might take more than one lifetime for us to get to the mountaintop.

Ben, Jerry, Jeff, and their colleagues made mistakes as they built their business, but they never gave up on their belief that another world is possible. They found that maintaining a three-part mission takes constant effort when you are surrounded by businesses that focus on profits above everything else. To succeed, you must persuade everyone

in the organization to buy in and participate in the struggle. Because your expectations are higher, what looks like success to an outsider might feel like failure. There will always be a temptation to take the easy way. You can always get credit, pocket the money, and let things slide. That happened at Ben & Jerry’s more than once, and there’s no guarantee that it won’t happen again.

What is certain is that the struggle to reconcile profits with social justice will never end. The Ben & Jerry’s story shows that the struggle can also be fun, when you’re doing it right.

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