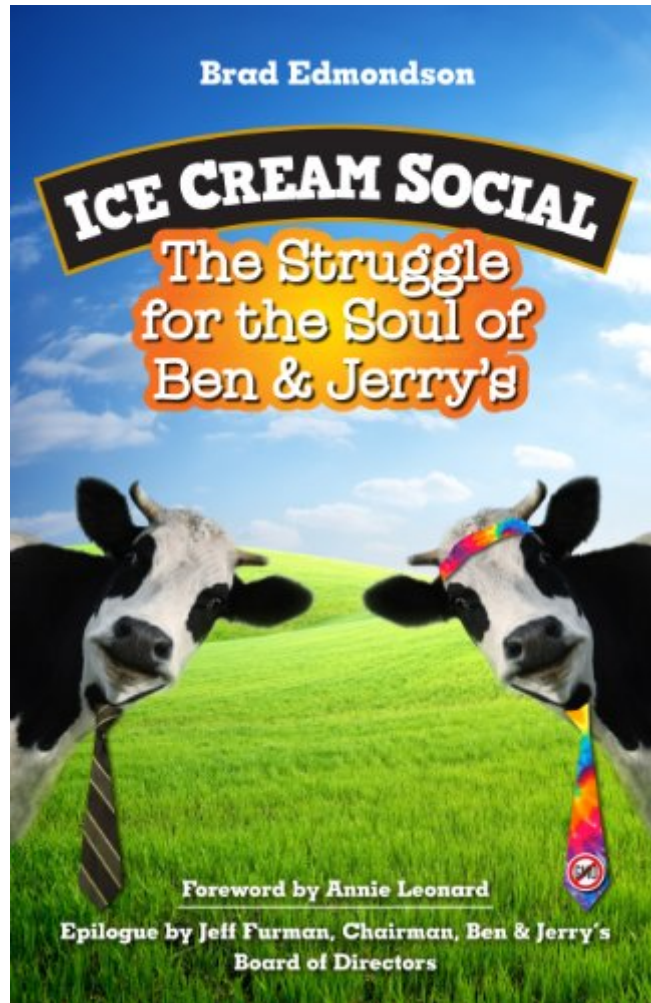


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Ice Cream Social: The Struggle For The Soul Of Ben & Jerry's



Synopsis

Ben & Jerry's has always been committed to an insanely ambitious three-part mission: making the world's best ice cream, supporting progressive causes, and sharing the company's success with all stakeholders: employees, suppliers, distributors, customers, cows, everybody. But it hasn't been easy. This is the first book to tell the full, inside story of the inspiring rise, tragic mistakes, devastating fall, determined recovery, and ongoing renewal of one of the most iconic mission-driven companies in the world. No previous book has focused so intently on the challenges presented by staying true to that mission. No other book has explained how the company came to be sold to corporate giant Unilever or how that relationship evolved to allow Ben & Jerry's to pursue its mission on a much larger stage. Journalist Brad Edmondson tells the story with an eye for details, dramatic moments, and memorable characters. He interviewed dozens of key figures, particularly Jeff Furman, who helped Ben and Jerry write their first business plan in 1978 and became chairman of the board in 2010. It's a funny, sad, surprising, and ultimately hopeful story.

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Customer Reviews

One of my most vivid memories of the dozens of Social Venture Network (SVN) conferences I've attended over the years was seeing Ben Cohen walking into the dining hall in 2000, in tears over the sale of Ben & Jerry's to Unilever. I went over to hug him - that's the sort of thing you do at SVN conferences - and as he sobbed I said something stupid like "Look at it this way, Ben. You walked away with a s**tload of money." (\$41 million, actually.) Ben was not consoled. As I recall, I first saw Ben Cohen sitting in a circle at an SVN conference in 1991. (Anita Roddick was sitting next to me, literally bouncing up and down, impatient to speak.) Not to put too fine an edge on it, I was star-struck. We didn't speak then, but within short order I found opportunities to ask Ben about some of the innovations he'd introduced to Ben & Jerry's to advance social justice. I learned a great deal from him, with profound results for my company when I later put those lessons into action. In the ensuing years - SVN's four-day conferences were held twice annually - I got to know Ben as a person rather than a star. He invited me to join him on the board of his organization, One Percent for Peace, and I became engaged in the negotiations to merge that small venture into Business for Social Responsibility, of which we'd both been co-founders in 1992 (along with a cast of dozens). At one point, believe it or not, this marketing genius even hired me to do some marketing work for his company's huge nationwide campaign in support of the Children's Defense Fund. Much later, I felt comfortable enough with Ben that I was able to talk him into putting his name as my coauthor on a book I was writing for SVN, published in 2006 as *Values-Driven Business: How to Change the World, Make Money, and Have Fun*.

I went into this book with low expectations about the subject matter. The analyses of socially conscious businesses which I have read all point to business models that hope to turn an additional x% uptick in costs into a 2x% increase in margins - essentially another marketing angle. However, the history provided in 'Ice Cream Social' is an excellent illustration of the social mission challenge from an insider's perspective - something I haven't read before. In one way, the story is one giant irony. The final pages say that Ben, Jeff and friends have realized that "Ownership matters", and "chain stores are like invasive species to local economic ecosystems. We need to encourage locally made ice cream..." Ben & Jerry succeeded locally years ago. It is now an invasive species. They could have survived indefinitely in their local market area, and would have successfully been able to keep Haagen-Dazs from becoming dominant in Vermont. And they would have had a positive social impact locally. Jerry would have been satisfied with that outcome. Ben wasn't. Ben Cohen is a businessman, not a saint. He had focus, vision, ambition. He was a clever and bold marketer. He also has his own political vision, and pursued it with his money and time via the vehicle of his

company. Others do, or have done the same, such as Henry Ford or the Koch Bros to name a couple. The personal ethics of Ben & Jerry appear to be average. They both achieved personal financial independence in the first growth phase of the company. The only sacrifice they make for the good they want to achieve is to not be obsessed with accumulating even more money, again something I suppose most people would share.

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