

53 Launching a Dream in Blawenburg

Not all of Blawenburg's history is old, as this Tale of Blawenburg will show.

Ben Weiss is a man who dreams big and has a passion for creating unique beverages. A Princeton resident, he spent 15 years in his early career creating coffee and beverage products, but his success was modest. He wanted to take on Big Sugar, as the beverage conglomerates are sometimes called, but he knew that this would be a David and Goliath story. Nevertheless, he worked in the basement of his Princeton townhouse to create his concoctions, persisting against all odds.



Bai beverages

Then in 2009, he developed a beverage that would be a market changer. It is made from coffee fruit, the red outer pulp of the coffee bean that is usually discarded. His drink brand, which he called Bai, is an antioxidant infused, low calorie, low sugar, caffeinated beverage. He named the brand Bai, a Mandarin word that means pure.



Cover of Basementality by Weiss and Quinones

In October 2020, Weiss and his co-author, Eric Quinones, published a book that tells the Bai story: *Basementality: How This Entrepreneur Drove His Fight Against Big Sugar and Rose from the Basement to a \$1.7 Billion Brand*. The book title was aptly chosen to match Weiss's drive. The Amazon site for his book says: "Basementality [beys-men-tal-i-tee] / noun: A mindset that blends foresight, scrappiness, flexibility, and passion, empowering you to turn vision into reality and achieve success."

His Bai success story is amazing. He went from no customers and a marketing team of two, himself and this step-father, Ray Schaefer, to 400 employees in just seven years. In 2016, he negotiated a deal to sell the company, known as Bai Brands, to the Dr Pepper Snapple Group for 1.7 billion dollars. The understanding was that Weiss would stay on to make sure the Bai products were successfully transitioned to the new mega-company. He was given the title of Chief Disruption Officer, an acknowledgement that his ideas and actions often bucked the mainstream industry. But Dr Pepper Snapple Group CEO fired Weiss after just eight months, and it wasn't long before the entire Dr.

Pepper group was sold to Keurig Green Mountain for 19 billion dollars. The new company, known as Keurig Dr. Pepper, includes many brands that you would recognize—7Up, Mott, A&W Root Beer, Schweppes, Yahoo, and many more.

You may wonder what this has to do with the Village of Blawenburg. When they first started marketing the product, Weiss and Schaefer were the marketing team. Weiss took New York City as his territory, and Schaefer, took Princeton and surrounding towns. Schaefer lives in the Cherry Valley Country Club development, so his first customer was a local eatery known as the Blawenburg Market. That's the old corner store established by Judge Cornelius Stryker in 1832. In *Basementality*, Schaefer recalls, "Our first account was a place called Blawenburg Market up the road from my house. I knew the owners – a mother and daughter – because I went in there all the time, so they agreed to give Bai a try. I remember going back out to my car and saying, 'Yes!' It felt as good as selling a whole community of real estate at one time."



It's nice to know that although it played a small role in a very successful endeavor, the Village of Blawenburg helped launch an entrepreneur's dream. Bai is sold all over the country, but there is only one small village where its first account was established!

Interesting Facts

1. Weiss has entrepreneurship in his blood. He parlayed some of his profits from the Bai sale into a new product brand known as Crook and Marker, an organic alcohol beverage. There are 30 different drinks under this brand in "spiked" categories such as Spiked and Sparkling, Spiked Lemonade, Spiked Tea, Spiked Coconut, and Spiked

Soda. The alcohol used in the drinks is made from quinoa, amaranth, millet, and cassava root. Weiss is right where he wants to be, putting a new face on an old industry.

2. Weiss has been recognized for his business success by many industry and media organizations such as Inc., Forbes, and CNBC. Basementality has been endorsed by Justin Timberlake, Katie Couric, and former senator Bill Bradley on the Amazon website.

Information

Sources

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Keurig_Dr_Pepper_brands

<https://www.businessinsider.com/bai-coffee-fruit-drink-business-story-2015-11>

Weiss, Ben with Eric Quinones. *Basementality: How This Entrepreneur Drove His Fight Against Big Sugar and Rose from the Basement to a \$1.7 Billion Brand*. Sun Owl LLC, 2020.

Photos

Bai drinks - <https://www.businessinsider.com/bai-coffee-fruit-drink-business-story-2015-11>

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Book cover – [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

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