

Mina and Jeffrey were only two of hundreds of students who participated in this experiment. But their reaction was typical: without foreknowledge about the vinegar, most of them chose the vinegary MIT Brew. But when they knew in advance that the MIT Brew had been laced with balsamic vinegar, their reaction was completely different. At the first taste of the adulterated suds, they wrinkled their noses and requested the standard beer instead. The moral, as you might expect, is that if you tell people up front that something might be distasteful, the odds are good that they will end up agreeing with you—not because their experience tells them so but because of their expectations.

If, at this point in the book, you are considering the establishment of a new brewing company, especially one that specializes in adding some balsamic vinegar to beer, consider the following points: (1) If people read the label, or knew about the ingredient, they would most likely hate your beer. (2) Balsamic vinegar is actually pretty expensive—so even if it makes beer taste better, it may not be worth the investment. Just brew a better beer instead.

BEER WAS JUST the start of our experiments. The MBA students at MIT's Sloan School also drink a lot of coffee. So one week, Elie Ofek (a professor at the Harvard Business School), Marco Bertini (a professor at the London Business School), and I opened an impromptu coffee shop, at which we offered students a free cup of coffee if they would answer a few questions about our brew. A line quickly formed. We handed our participants their cups of coffee and then pointed them to a table set with coffee additives—milk, cream, half-and-half, white sugar, and brown sugar. We also set out some