

A Mayor's Influence Creates A Positive Outcome

What city:

- Was rated one of the most obese cities in 2008?
- Lost 1 million pounds together as a city by 2012?
- Now is on the fittest cities list?

If you guessed Oklahoma City, you guessed correctly.

After receiving the critical, and somewhat embarrassing, news in 2008 that Oklahoma City was rated one of America's most obese cities, Mayor Mick Cornett took a look in the mirror. He examined himself first and realized he was obese – he fit the profile of his own city. He had battled with his weight for years, but he quietly decided to make a change, losing 40 pounds in 40 weeks.

Along his weight loss journey, Cornett began examining the city he lived in: “Its culture, its infrastructure, to figure out why our specific city had a problem with obesity. The city had built an incredible quality of life if you happened to be a car, but if you happened to be a person, you were battling the car seemingly at every turn.”

After this examination, he decided to take action. Recognizing that the discussion of weight and the way people look is a sensitive issue, Cornett announced, in front of the elephants at the zoo, that the city was going on a diet. The location of the announcement and the way the announcement was made removed any personal affront.

Today, Oklahoma City is drastically different from the concrete, car-centric city it once was. Now it offers bike paths, kayaking, walk-ways, and has even removed a highway to provide more space for people to move independently of motor transportation. The demographics of those choosing to live in Oklahoma City are changing too, becoming more and more attractive to highly educated 20-somethings who want an active yet urban way of life.

IT MATTERS:

Cornett has spoken about this journey often – I recently heard it during his TEDMED 2013 presentation. It's a story worth telling again, and again, and again.

The story of Oklahoma City is inspiring. It offers hope. And it provides a model for dealing with obesity as a society, perhaps maybe even a template of how we could go about making a positive impact in the obesity crisis. It changes the perspective of putting the onus on the individual and the healthcare system, and helps to refocus the idea on our culture as well.

It proves that creating change together, for the better, can result in positive outcomes while opening opportunities for all to participate. What do you think?

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