

New post on **heyheyrenee**



James Lawrence got phat, the kids got fatter

by [paulie](#)

"James Lawrence Got Famous, the Kids Got Fatter".

I started following James Lawrence, aka "The Iron Cowboy", when I first heard about his 50-50-50 — complete 50 Iron Man distance triathlons in 50 days, in 50 consecutive states from the Rich Roll podcast. I know a little about endurance events, so I started following James's story about 2 weeks before #1, which was in Hawaii.

When I first started following James I did so for two reasons: one, I didn't think it was possible. In fact #9 was here in CO, I never thought he'd make it. But if he could pull it off, I wanted to be there along the way, for what would be one of the great endurance sport achievements ever. Two, I thought his heart was in the right place. James said he wanted to raise awareness of childhood obesity. He appeared to me a selfless, righteous, and humble person.

James completed the 50-50-50 on Saturday July 25th in Provo, Utah. I was there to see it. The 50-50-50, well, there's no words. But that's not what why I'm writing this.

The reason why I'm writing this is that after following him each day for 2 months I think the real winners here were James, Facebook and Twitter, and his sponsors.

Once James got past CO, #9, and it occurred to me he just might pull this off, I started to notice that:

- most of the pictures on social were of him and his crew
- as days went by the conversation became about James, not, childhood obesity
- this followers were mainly about the physicality of it all, not childhood obesity

Here I Am, Lyle Lovett:

Given that true intellectual and emotional compatability

Are at the very least difficult

If not impossible to come by

We could always opt for the more temporal gratification

Of sheer physical attraction

That wouldn't make you a shallow person

Would it

This was starting to look like the James show sponsored by anyone who'd write a check.

How come there wasn't any mention of childhood obesity on the travel vehicles?

The Jamie Oliver Foundation appeared, with links to donate. I checked out their site. They're a UK company. My wife is active in our son's school here in Eagle. It's a totally legit foundation. But once I started to dig deeper, the foundation appears to do about as much as Michelle Obama does about childhood obesity — just about nothing.

Not only that, they're a giant operation. Yeah sure, it's great that money was going somewhere. But the Jamie Oliver Food Foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization. By IRS rules, they're prohibited from lobbying. So any notion that the money raised was going to be used to influence policy, was out the window. And, they're also prohibited from the concept the IRS defines as "action", the very same word James was supposed to be about.

I couldn't see where the Jamie Oliver Foundation gets anything done but inspiration. Inspiration isn't action. From what I could see and what my wife told me, Jamie is all about Jamie; ratings, books, media — if the brand of Jamie happens to spill onto kids plates, great.

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I wondered how much money goes to the operation and maintenance of all these websites? How could James account for the money? And I just couldn't get my head around why on earth James was raising money for a freaking UK conglomerate.

From what I could see, James's 50-50-50 had turned into a business-business-business. The big winners were Facebook and Twitter, because they were getting all the data mining from James's legions of followers. And James's sponsors looked like they were going to do well. What about the kids?

Young Living Oils seemed to be a big sponsor. I did a little Googling on them. The first thing that stuck out was they're a network marketing model. So James is now about network marketing?

Then I found link, where the FDA sent them a warning letter:

<http://www.fda.gov/ICECI/EnforcementActions/WarningLetters/2014/ucm416023.htm>

I also found other links complaining about the efficacy of the oils and their authenticity. Young Living Oils seemed to be controversial. For me, they seemed sketchy. Definitely not a company we'd support in any way. Here's another link:

<http://www.utahstories.com/2014/08/damning-evidence-that-young-living-and-doterras-essential-oils-are-adulterated/>

James was sponsored by these guys? This 50-50-50 thing started to smell bad.

So when it was clear to me that James was going to make it to Utah, I booked a room. I wanted to see it first hand. Maybe I was wrong? Going there and seeing it myself was the only way I'd know for sure.

I get there, not one childhood obesity cause sponsor. Nada. Not one logo for childhood obesity? Couldn't they at least have made a banner and painted "Please help eradicate childhood obesity" or something like that on it?

Subaru was there, sporting goods companies were there. But not one childhood obesity cause sponsor.

Iron Cowboy t-shirts were being sold. But the t-shirts were all about Iron Cowboy. None of the swag sold had any reference to childhood obesity. Nothing.

I ran the last 5k with James and at least 1000 others. James's hat and running shirt were from his sponsors and branded with his logo — nothing on his hat or t-shirt said anything about childhood obesity.



When James finished, they had a ceremony. I stood there for all but a few seconds. James thanked his

kids, his wife. Then it was time for a couple of sponsors to show up and make a donation. Okay, I thought, they're gonna make it rain.

At this point everyone in the crowd had their iPhones going, James was worldwide. Amazing Athletes was first. They gave \$500 bucks.





Yep, \$500 bucks. Now think about it. Their brand is now being seen by anyone on social, live television is there. A documentary is being filmed. Periscope is probably going off on Twitter. Amazing Athletes got all the exposure for \$500 bucks.

All on the back of, oops, in the name of childhood obesity.

They got phat. No one got skinny.

Don't Ask Me No Questions, Lynyrd Skynyrd:
Well it's true I love the money
And I love my brand new car

So don't ask me no questions
And I won't tell you no lies
So don't ask me 'bout my business
And I won't tell you goodbye

Standing there chagrined, I went to the Amazing Athletes website. They're not a non-profit. They sell franchises. Here's the link to their franchises page:
<http://www.amazingathletes.com/franchise>

What was amazing to me, is how did they manage to weasel their way into the spotlight for just \$500 bucks?

The grand finale was the check from the Jamie Oliver Foundation. They presented a check for \$68,000. At this point I thought they left out two zeros. Yeah sure, 68 grand isn't a pittance. But given that they're a giant, UK company (say what?), I was having trouble figuring how much of that 6 grand would make its way to childhood obesity. No one else in the crowd was impressed, either. No one clapped.

But wait a minute. They're a UK company. James never said this was about American kids, but that's what the inference seemed to be.

At this point I'm walking around kicking the grass.

When the party broke up I spotted James's wife Sunny. She was kind enough to talk about it, she was genuine. She mentioned they have a deal going with a national retailer. I wondered what the tradeoff was? The retailer gets to mine Iron Cowboy Facebook and Twitter data and kids go to school once a week dressed in clothes bought at the retailer?

All on the back of, oops, in the name of childhood obesity.

She also mentioned an idea to change schools. I know a little about education - even though I dropped out of school in the 9th grade.

They might be able to. But they'd need an army of lobbyists, a boat load of money, and influence - just to get a meeting. If they think they're going to march into 1 school, snap their fingers and make a change, they're not only a corporate billboard, they're naive.

James Lawrence succeeded at what is a Herculean personal accomplishment. Emphasis personal. He made some corporations a lot of money and created a lot of awareness for sponsors. He failed, at everything else.

Instead, what's easy to see is that the branding of James Lawrence has begun. It's also really easy to see how sponsors made out big. What's hard to see, is where anything measurable connected to childhood obesity happened.

Yes, people exercised because of finding out about James. That's a really good thing. Some (most?) would have done that regardless.

Sunny mentioned to me the idea of trickle down benefits. Something to the affect of, "but look at all the lives we touched" - ostensibly on social. Trickle down didn't work for Reagan - just ask David Stockman, his former budget director. Trickle down doesn't work, it's voodoo economics. It doesn't work in economics, or in life.

What really happened is that the sponsors sold stuff. But not one penny from those sales will go to kids and for that, James and co. should all be ashamed. Epic failure

Good Intentions, Lyle Lovett:

She wasn't good

But she had good intentions

James's first, post 50-50-50 comments on Facebook started with "I want to thank my sponsors". The post didn't mention childhood obesity.



Rich Roll had the honor, and SEO benefit of the 2nd post. Rich followed suit, thanking "sponsors for making this happen". No mention of

childhood obesity, either.



Today I'm looking at his page. The splash image is him and his family.

<https://www.facebook.com/Ironcowboy>

Scrolling down the page, nothing about childhood obesity. All see are James, his sponsors, and the commercialization of James Lawrence.

Sure, a handful of children's lives will be affected. But those kids lives probably would have changed had they never found out about James. When you weigh the handful of kids next to the trove of data mined, brands advanced, retail sales, it's the sponsors that made out by a factor of 10,000x. And of course let's not forget James is now a national brand.

James's reply may be, "yeah but if I changed the life of one kid...". Sponsors will buy that bag of hullabaloo, of course they will. Hooking up with James is really cheap advertising - just ask the guys who paid \$500 bucks to get their name blasted all over the world.

Anyone one with a modicum of intelligence and a strong moral compass, someone who's seen this movie before, will roll their eyes at any thought that this was about childhood obesity.

The world doesn't need another charity that accomplishes nothing more than paying salaries. We had Lance Armstrong, or I should say we were had by Lance Armstrong and his "charity" that paid for his jet and celebrity lifestyle. Now, we wish he'd go away. Now it seems, we have James Lawrence.

What kids need are role models they can look up to, not look up.

Heroes do great work and don't tell anyone. They aren't on Facebook, they don't have podcasts, they don't broadcast themselves. They don't have celebrations, they don't celebrate themselves then feed it to social media. They don't talk about themselves in the third person. They go about their work quietly. They're not famous, because it's not about them.

If MLK was alive today I don't think he'd be on Facebook or Twitter. I don't think he'd

IF MILK was alive today I DON'T THINK HE'D BE ON FACEBOOK OR TWITTER. I DON'T THINK HE'D have a podcast.

Let me guess what happens next. I'll be the crazy one. "What an a@@hole" - they'll say. Those will be the kindest words.

James has 50k followers on Facebook, he's loved, just read the posts. Because if it's on Facebook then it must be real, yes?

Using that logic I'm reminded of the McDonalds slogan - "Over 50 Billion Served".

Saying, "I'm going to raise awareness of childhood obesity" is an empty promise. It reminds of what Common bemoans in Glory — "Justice for all, ain't specific enough".

Instead, pick something small that can scale. Bring what Stephen Ritz is doing to 1 school in Provo. Then use the money you collect to make it happen; buy the seeds, what's need to grow, pay for the greenhouses if that's what needed. If you can't get teachers to do it, use the money to pay for gardeners to come and teach. Fly in some of Stephen's kids if that's possible. Then once you figure out how to grow food in one classroom of one school, then and only then will you be able scale it up to more classrooms, then schools. Now this assumes there's even a chance of schools in Utah growing their own food, like Stephen's kids do. Make sure before you take on anything, you've thought it through - which clearly James did not do. Once you have thought it all through and made a plan hire some smart folks to study your plan, make sure it's solid and there's no gotchas.

Raising money for some foreign website that you can't track will not put fruit on the table of American kids. I don't like giving donations because just about all the time, I have no idea where the money goes. Try this. Before you donate, send them an email and ask them where the money goes. If they can't tell you in granular detail, most can't, they don't deserve a nickel. I think most feel the same way. You want to make sure 100% of the money you've put your name, blood sweat and tears into goes to making kids healthier.

Any website should be funded privately, by sponsors. Employees should be paid for by sponsors. In other words, the money raised shouldn't be used to pay for the overhead of what you're up to. Then, every penny collected should be accountable, in real-time. How? Build an XML link to QB; every penny that comes in and out is updated in real-time, on the website. It's doable, not near as hard as it seems.

It's not a healthy image if the leader of the effort is constantly on social. There's plenty of research out there now pointing to that social media is anything but healthy. It's hard for kids to get good grades when they're distracted. Health is everything or it's nothing.

In fact do it without social media. Instead of publishing your every move, keep everything on your website - no social feeds. Now there's a switch. If what you're doing is great people will tell others, they'll find you. Become the first person in the world to build something great without a Facebook page, without a Twitter or any of that other social media bs. Not only will parents thank you, all the small business that Facebook and

Twitter is killing will thank you.

If you're going to be about childhood obesity, images of you snarling down steak and eggs don't exactly jive with good health.

Dave Scott won 6 Iron Man's on a strict, vegetarian diet.

The Internet has a way of making otherwise ignoble efforts glorious. James Lawrence is proof positive.

Farther Down the Line, Lyle Lovett:

And it's the classic contradiction

It's the unavoidable affliction

It don't take much to predict son

The way it always goes

So let's have a hand for that young cowboy

And wish him better luck next time

And hope we see him up in Fargo

Or somewhere farther down the line

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