



People tend to over exaggerate things that change their lives. They say things like "this soy latte changed my life" or "these cat pajamas are everything." We have become desensitized to words that used to evoke awe and inspire us. For that reason, it almost seems boring to say that the Kansas City Corporate Challenge changed my life in ways I could not forget, if I tried. The years of this competition have created so many moments when a person, just an average person, suddenly realizes they are capable of so much more than they give themselves credit for. That moment That moment is everything.

My moment began at the first mention of the KCCC. I was 9 months pregnant for the 2nd time in as many years. I was getting ready to go on maternity leave when someone who had come from another company started talking to people in my office about this city wide sports competition. I did not give it any notice. I was overweight, tired and about to have another baby. I hadn't done anything remotely resembling a sport in many many years. I thought this would just be something for an elite group of athletic people and I wouldn't hear any more about it.

Two months went by and I came back to work after a long and difficult maternity leave.

My newborn son had special needs that we were not prepared for. I was stressed out and tired and I just wanted to be home with him. This was February and people were starting to talk about this corporate challenge a little more seriously. I was approached by a close friend about participating. I thought he was joking. Me? What could I possibly do? He encouraged me to attend an informational open house that my company was having to talk about the Kansas City Corporate Challenge. I reluctantly agreed as a favor to him.

I attended the informational open house still believing there was nothing I could possibly get involved in. There was a video playing showing all these people doing all these awesome events. I couldn't even run across the parking lot. I looked through the big book of events and felt overwhelmed and totally inadequate. Then, someone on the company committee approached and started talking to me about events like the mile walk, darts, bowling and such. I mean, I guess I could probably do one of those if it meant not being bothered about it anymore. So, I signed the waiver and scribbled my name down for a couple of events.

I didn't really give the KCCC much further thought, even as the kick off approached. I was still juggling young children and my work and I still didn't feel I had a great deal to contribute. I attended the kick off walk and I was surprised at how many people were involved. "Wow! Some people really get into this," I thought. I picked up my shirt and a friend involved in the planning convinced me to go to the first event, disc golf, to cheer on our two guys in our very first KCCC event. I figured it would be a nice afternoon out, anyway.

The next day, I went to watch two of our maintenance guys play in our first event. They had never played disc golf in their lives and I thought it was great that they were out there giving it a shot. They did a great job and I was really proud of them for trying something they didn't even know they could do. It planted a seed.

Friends at work started talking to me about the 5k coming up. Were they serious? Me? I laughed. I hadn't walked 3 miles since my age started with a one. But . . . I had been walking on the treadmill at work to feel better and lose weight. I walked a mile almost every day. Maybe, just maybe, I could walk 3.1 miles. The day was approaching and I still had major doubts but I agreed to sign up. I was freaked out. This would be my first event and it would be something I just didn't know if I could do. The morning of the 5k was absolutely freezing and I was so nervous I wanted to throw up. I thought I was crazy for doing it. I met up with our company group and quickly absorbed their fun and enthusiasm. I had doubts but at least I was ready to take it on with the support of my team.

My first 5k ever was about to begin. Would I even finish? What if all those people there just blow me away? I would be so embarrassed. It was too late to back out. I had to suck it up and go. The buzzer sounded and the crowd lurched forward. I was not a runner so I hung back with the walkers. There were lots of walkers. When we rounded the first turn, the leader was already coming back. That was crazy. I was crazy for being there. I pressed on. The rest of the race was grueling. My legs were screaming. It was so cold. My body was just not used to what I was asking it to do. I saw the finish and my eyes swelled. I was going to the end. I was going to do it. I saw my team as I got closer. They were cheering me on and I made my legs keep going. I heard the music and I saw the arch. I did it! Me! Can you believe it? As I finished, I thought about my kids and how proud they could be of their mommy.

That 5k was the hardest thing I had done in a very long time and that was it. That was my moment. I was totally hooked. What else could I do? I started looking at other events and other ways to stay involved and test my limits. This little spring inside of me swelled with pride and accomplishment. By the time that first year ended, I had done my first 5k, played softball, long jumped and pulled in the tug of war. Not bad for a girl who couldn't even run across the parking lot.

After that first season, I decided to have an open heart surgery to correct a defect I was born with and had gotten worse when I had my children. I had a new purpose and I needed my heart running on all cylinders. My doctor understood my goals and gave me the latest in technology that would maximize my endurance. He gave me a heart that would keep up with my new way of life. I recovered fully before the next KCCC season. I joined my company's committee and became a cheerleader for anyone else looking for that moment. I let myself be inspired by others in my company and in other KCCC companies. I met someone from another company who taught me how to swim just weeks before the swim meet. I did so many events that year and the trend continued.

Fast forward to now. This is my 4th year in the Kansas City Corporate Challenge. I continue to serve on my company's committee so I can be an advocate for a program that makes a difference. I am signed up for 9 events and there are ALWAYS more that pop up. I do 5K'S several times a year and 3 miles is a walk in the park with my kids. I learned to swim for the KCCC and I do it on a regular basis because I love it. There are lots of times I am still the fat nerdy girl at the back of the class but, for a few shining moments, I am pretty awesome. I surprise myself every year and it never ceases to amaze me. I have been inspired. I have fallen down. I have given my last winded breath for my team. I have laughed. I have been disappointed. I have cheered for some incredible people. I have heard stories that humble me. I have seen people conquer their fears and push through their own barriers. I have seen it. I have done it. It never gets old.

So, you can post a pic of that latte and talk about how it changed your life but, when you are done, click over to the KCCC page and see lives being changed in ways your coffee never will. Once you are finished watching everyday people push through incredible obstacles to win over the doubts in their own mind, put down your cup, tighten those laces and get out there. Who knows? A new you might just be waiting out there for you.

~Erin Wilson, Harcros

