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turning potential into performance

## **Unconventional Inspiration©**

**Chris L. Johnson, PsyD.**

I hadn't really 'felt' like getting out from under the warm, cozy covers last week. However, Thursday morning found me begrudgingly at the health center in the early hours in hopes of greater fitness in 2011.

Of course, January 1<sup>st</sup> is a great time to commit, or re-commit, to something that's important to us. Yet, as anyone knows who has ever set resolutions, it can be tough, really tough. It felt tough that morning.

What I happened to catch at the gym, however, spoke to me, inspired me actually. Let me fill you in.

While I don't typically watch too much TV, I do confess to indulging while on all machines cardio. That a.m. I happened to catch Cory Booker on CNN, the current mayor of Newark, NJ, a sprawling urban area ridden with high crime, deep poverty, and rising unemployment.

In 2010, Booker had proposed a bold goal for the city of Newark: to set "a national standard for urban transformation by marshalling its tremendous resources to achieve security, economic abundance, and an environment that is nurturing and empowering for families." Big. Bold.

And, of course, this bold declaration came with all the consequent stresses of many a difficult job: late hours and long days in dealing with the conflicting needs amongst stakeholders, budget issues, required cuts in law enforcement even while battling high crime. As is often true, stresses of this kind can come with bad habits—in this case, eating habits.

Booker had been invited by First Lady Michelle Obama, to join in the national campaign against childhood obesity, Let's Move, as her vice-chair. In one moment, on a stage touting the benefits of a healthy lifestyle to schoolchildren, Booker reported that he felt, "the shame of it all," his own personal inconsistency growling from his belly in attempts to digest the French fries and cookie dough from his late night foray to the fridge the night before.

Booker, a varsity football player while at Stanford, had a moment of coming to his senses, "you can't live an inconsistent life and truly be a part of change. I simply couldn't help feeling the shame of falling so far short of my own words to the children."

Booker took an unconventional step. (As a public servant Booker's no stranger to setting intentions and following them up with actions, even if unconventional. Seems that as a city council member, prior to his election as mayor in 2006, he staged a 10-day hunger strike, and lived in a tent to protest open-air drug dealing and associated violence).

As a leader and public official, he knew he set an example, one way or another, and people would be watching. He resolved, then and there, to live his intentions into action.

He had my attention. What struck me, as I was by now sweating away on the elliptical, was his solid commitment, literally, to 'being the change'—even if unconventional.

We can learn from his actions.

- He *publicly declared his commitments*, "I am going to be the leader I dream of being in every area of my life, and lead by example."
- He *admitted* to gaining over 65 pounds in the prior, harrowing 18 months.
- He *confessed* to his stress-filled rationalizations that traded late night pizza for creature comfort.
- He *mixed it up* and started something different e.g. no TV unless on his stationary bike.
- He began to *plan* his meals, his exercise, his daytime calendar.
- He *enlisted* support from others via Facebook & Twitter to the point that others have pledged to join him in his fitness commitment.

Booker had taken a negative, shameful experience even, and turned used it *to live his intentions into action*.

Intentions under gird our actions, like steel pilings supporting a bridge. If we don't set them firmly, consistently in our values, our actions don't have any mooring, and instead of reflecting a solid path toward a desired outcome, they reflect instead the ups and downs of each stress-filled moment.

By unconventionally admitting to his personal shortfall, Booker's turned the public eye to engage everyone, to lead by example, all to a greater good. In doing so, he's touched into the lives of many, including mine, and provided us with instructive inspiration.

Big, bold, unconventional—plus, I can admit I don't always want to go to the gym, and still get there tomorrow morning.