

# 'Do Life' urges Americans to turn things around

June 28 2011, by Rachel Karas

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Can a blog by an overweight, depressed American introvert who reinvented himself as an Ironman and public speaker start a grassroots campaign that leads to lasting lifestyle changes in a country known for excess?

The latest test, on June 22, gathered nearly 75 strangers in Washington, D.C. who finished an unofficial 5K (five-kilometer) race around the US capital's National Mall park.

And this was no ordinary congregation -- among the participants, they have lost a collective 1,350 pounds, quit smoking, changed careers, removed themselves from debt and ended drug and alcohol addictions.

It's only the early days of a 31-city summer tour to create a support network for people trying to reclaim their lives in a nation with well-documented weight and addiction problems.

After four hours, 3.1 miles and a bonding dinner, the D.C. runners left as friends.

They are members of the "Do Life" movement, an idea founder Ben Davis says is about using health and fitness to find happiness, connect with family and friends and start lifelong relationships.

Davis, 25, began the Tumblr blog "Ben Does Life" in December 2008 to document his weight loss.

Soon, he found that his ongoing transformation from 358-pound (162-kilogram) depressed introvert to 230-pound (104-kilogram) marathon runner, Ironman and public speaker had inspired thousands worldwide to change their lives.

Davis and other participants in the D.C. 5K event stressed, however, that "doing life" is a universal concept.

"Not everybody needs to lose 150 pounds," Davis said. "Some people have other addictions, other things in life that they're struggling with, and we found that in a lot of ways, you have to find a way to replace those areas of your life with something positive."

George Washington University student Estee Gabel, who began following "Ben Does Life" after watching Davis' popular inspirational [YouTube video](#), applies this motto on the water.

"(Doing life) definitely is rowing for me, because even though that's how I get my exercise, it's also when I have the most peace of mind and when I have the most time to focus on myself," she said.

Others, like Avi Kempler, use the mantra as a second chance. Kempler joined Weight Watchers in 2007 after his father was diagnosed with cancer.

"I was ashamed to go be with my family because I didn't want them to know how big I was," he said.

"I missed a lot of memories with my father and my grandmother, who died five months apart from each other. Be active and do whatever you can to be happy, because you know, life is really just too short."

For Kempler, "doing life" is really about taking responsibility for

decisions and making the necessary changes in all aspects of life.

"It doesn't matter if you're losing weight like Ben says, or trying to get off drugs or drinking or smoking or get out of debt," he said.

"Everything is about taking that first step. I was 396 pounds (180 kilograms). I was \$20,000 in credit card debt. I was a smoker, smoked a pack and a half a day. Now, I have no credit card debt, I weigh 230 pounds (104 kilograms) and I haven't smoked for three years."

To spread the movement, Davis -- along with his father, John, and brother, Jed -- founded Do Life, Inc. in January.

"Anybody can take this message and apply it to their life, and so we turned 'Ben Does Life' into 'Do Life'," Davis said.

"It became sort of a message and a motto that people have applied to their lives and said, 'This is how I'm doing life. Maybe I'm not running a marathon but I'm out there every day with my kids, walking and jogging,' and that's what it's about."

This summer, the three Davis men are driving 12,000 miles across America and Canada to host the first annual Do Life Tour from June 18-July 27. The tour is a series of free, untimed run/walk 5K events in 31 cities that invite people to meet for exercise and a post-run meal.

Davis said the 5K distance works into the Do Life message in that it's a good starting goal, and that it is the first race for many tour participants, however unofficial.

The tour's estimated 420 attendees through nine cities have lost a total of 7,883 pounds (3,576 kilograms), according to Davis, who is surprised and humbled by the enthusiastic response and said the D.C. event "blew

all of our expectations out of the water."

"Honestly, for a grassroots movement, this was phenomenal," Kempler said. "For about 70 people to come out, do a 5K together, come to eat, hang out -- I mean, we're D.C. -- everyone's busy.

"This is a big city, and for this many people to show up because of a website, Ben's gotta feel good about that, and I hope he does, because there's such camaraderie just talking with everybody. It's such a blast."

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