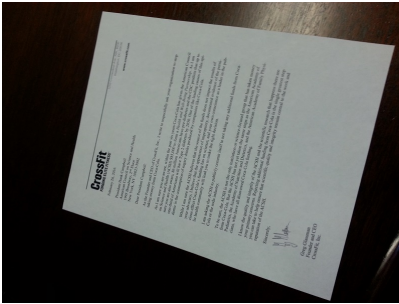


Fitness Fallacy: An Open Letter to CrossFit CEO Greg Glassman



By Hank Campbell — March 1, 2016



Yesterday I got a letter from the CEO of the exercise group

CrossFit, Inc. His name is Greg Glassman and he discovered the perfect way to get my attention: Hard copy, in an over-sized envelope. I love getting mail. But most of the time it is opened by someone else and I never see it. However, a FedEx package will come to me because people assume it may be baseball season tickets or something.

I certainly always appreciate hearing from the public but his letter had enough misstatements and errors I had to wonder if it was a PR stunt. Since he included no contact information -- the letterhead says Washington, D.C. and I am actually in D.C. today to testify before the FDA about ways to prevent opioid abuse so I'd happily stop by -- I reached out to him on Twitter, but he didn't reply there either.

Still, it is easy to get misinformation about science and health on the Internet. The pro-science side of the cultural aisle plain and simply gets the pants beat off of it, there is a reason that NRDC and Greenpeace have 500X as much revenue as we have, and it sure isn't because they are right. The reason is instead that promoting fear and doubt is easy, while understanding biology is hard. Creating a narrative like "soda causes diabetes" is cheap and a lot of people will believe it -- worse, if you try to show that is not true, many default to "you must be a shill for Big Soda" rationale.

For that reason, I will itemize the high points in his letter and clarify some things, and correct others, in the hope that those with a sincere interest in evidence-based information can have some issues cleared up.

Mr. Glassman starts with:

"As the founder and CEO of CrossFit, Inc., I write to respectfully ask your organization to stop taking money from Coca-Cola."

You can see why I have to consider this might be a PR stunt. This is a logical fallacy, basically an "I have more money than you" appeal to authority. Why else would anyone think a business

charging people money to do something they can easily do in their living room (exercise) has some moral authority in how a non-profit pays scientists and doctors?

As Mr. Glassman knows, you don't take business advice from people who are never going to give you money, any more than you should accept a 'no' from someone who can't give you a 'yes.' So it is strange for him to ask us to not take money from one corporation when his has never shown any interest in promoting science and health that he is not profiting from. And though we did get a few small unrestricted donations from Coca-Cola years ago, it is rather hard to stop doing something you are already *not* doing.

I suppose I could say we are going to stop doing something we are not doing, for PR purposes, [like Oxford University divesting from fossil fuel company stocks without telling anyone they didn't own any](#) [1]. That might make me qualified to run an exercise company but I don't have the ethical stomach for it.

"...within the past six years Coca-Cola has given the American Council on Science and Health (ACSH) \$85,000 to form a Health and Well-Being Partnership."

Incorrect, which is an odd thing to claim about me [since I wrote a whole article discussing what money we did get from Coca-Cola](#) [2] and how it related to our science content. This sort of error makes me suspect Mr. Glassman has not actually read any of our work, he is only reading the claims of activists in what the evidence-based community likes to call the "War On Fun." We were never part of any *Health and Well-Being Partnership*, nor did they ask us to "form" one. Perhaps, like Donald Trump, Mr. Glassman thinks everyone is for sale because Mr. Glassman buys friendly public relations, but that is not what we do. Anyone who knows me knows that.

"As I am sure you are aware, 86 million Americans have pre-diabetes"

Incorrect, because that condition does not exist and we have debunked such scaremongering, which, if accepted, will lead to more people demanding prescription medication they don't need. [The UK's National Health Service has asked people to stop using the term, as has the World Health Organisation \(WHO\) and the International Diabetes Federation](#) [3].

You can't be pre-diabetic any more than you can be pre-pregnant.

It is no surprise Mr. Glassman does not know this, since he also does not know the difference between Type I and Type II Diabetes. He openly mocked diabetics on his Twitter account [and was vilified for it nationwide](#) [4].

"Make sure you pour some out for your dead homies."—Greg Glassman #CrossFit

[5] #Sugarkills [6] @CrossFitCEO [7] pic.twitter.com/QnwXOe4BTQ [8]

— CrossFit (@CrossFit) June 29, 2015 [9]

I am not vilifying him; we are here to educate people, but before he spouts health statistics, perhaps he should understand what he is talking about. What is likely to prevent Type II diabetes? A sensible diet and exercise, as we have always said. There is no magic bullet for preventing

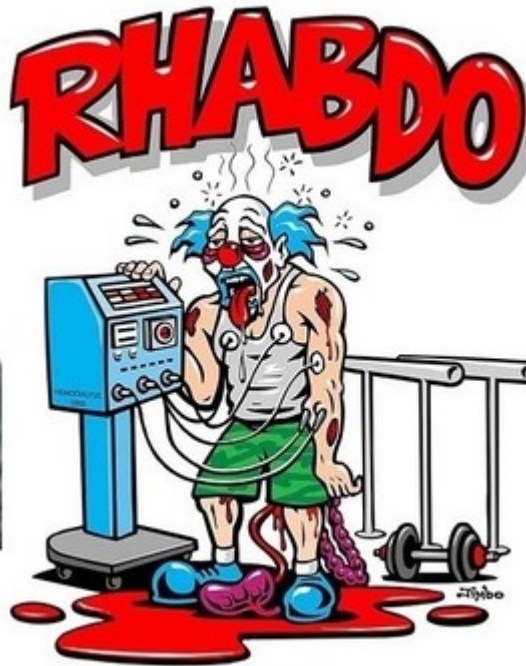
obesity or Type II diabetes, including banning Coca-Cola.

"While I am sure the ACSH believes that the source of the funds does not impact the results of your advocacy"

If I were an advocate, of course, the source of the funding would matter. But, assuming that I am one is unfounded, and he should not try to frame me that way. He wouldn't like it if I did it to him. For example, an alarming number of people in the fitness community regard Mr. Glassman as "vicious" and [willing to harm people for financial gain, and he revels in that](#) [10]. He even advertised his exercise program using a dialysis machine and kidneys splattered in a pool of blood.



Greg Glassman
Founder - CrossFit



Credit: [Examiner.com](#)

[11]

Given his advocacy of mocking dialysis patients and diabetics, should I return a check from CrossFit if they send one? Of course not; it would mean they want to do something important for the public. But I can show empirically that [the second margarita he orders with his tacos](#) [12] has killed far more people than Coca-Cola has.

Maybe he is just an off-the-cuff writer and does not realize it reads like he is claiming I am an advocate for Coca-Cola. If he had instead appealed to the fact I am an advocate for evidence-based science and health, I would have accepted that and then shown him that the data are on my side about soda. But since I routinely battle actual "Deniers For Hire" in the anti-science community, calling me an advocate is pretty annoying.

"Rejecting additional funding from Coca-Cola is the single greatest step you can take to help ensure that scientific quality and integrity remain central to the work and reputation of the ACSH."

No, the single greatest step we can take to ensure our scientific quality and integrity is to ensure our scientific quality and integrity by doing our jobs. And that means not catering to warmed-over Google University beliefs about the causes of diabetes and being trusted guides for the public on complex science and health issues. We've done that for 38 years and never killed anyone.

[Mr. Glassman's CrossFit program cannot say that](#)

[13].

"I am asking the ACSH to publicly commit itself to not taking any additional funds from Coca-Cola..."

As I wrote above, I can't stop doing what I am not doing but he has changed it up a little here. So I will agree to your request, Mr. Glassman, on the condition that you be part of the solution rather than worrying about a problem that doesn't exist. My condition is that you send us the \$85,000 Coca-Cola is not sending us. Then we can continue to do our work and you can know Coke is not controlling us. That is what you want, right? Unless your letter is a PR stunt.

However, I have to warn you (and you are not going to like hearing this) that while your money will be used for evidence-based science and health outreach, there are no strings attached, and we are not going to suddenly promote your beliefs about exercise if they are in defiance of accepted science.

We never have.

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Links

- [1] <http://acsh.org/news/2015/12/12/the-divestment-movement-myth/>
- [2] <http://acsh.org/news/2015/09/28/coca-cola-transparency-and-science-outreach/>
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- [9] <https://twitter.com/CrossFit/status/615539464232902656>
- [10] <https://medium.com/@ericrobertson/crossfits-dirty-little-secret-97bcce70356d#.j3m8vryea>
- [11] <http://www.examiner.com/article/physical-therapy-professor-reveals-dark-side-of-crossfit-uncle-rhabdo>
- [12] <http://www.inc.com/magazine/201307/burt-helm/crossfit-empire.html>
- [13] <http://blog.chron.com/healthzone/2013/09/how-crossfit-can-kill-you/>