**The Hard Work of Change**

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Tommy Boone, PhD, MPH, MAM, FASEP, EPC

Professor, Department of Exercise Physiology

The College of St. Scholastica

Duluth, MN 55811

One learns by doing the thing; for though you think you know it, you have no certainty until you try. -- Sophocles

How many times have you heard the expression, “They put their pants on the same way we do.” I have to admit that I have not seen an athlete or another person jump with both legs into his/her pants. It would be rather tragic if I had because the idea behind the expression is that every person has an equal chance of winning, whether it is playing sports or doing one’s work. Understandably, it may be difficult to imagine the truth of the statement since there are so many inequalities among athletes and, yes, among college graduates.

More often than we might realize, success is something someone else did for you. Take physical therapy as an example. Since 1915, physical therapists have been hard at work defining what they do as a worthy healthcare profession. By “worthy” I mean just anyone can’t call him or herself a physical therapist. Yet, regardless of this obvious fact, exercise science majors and kinesiology majors are often encouraged to call themselves exercise physiologists. Some will undoubtedly think little of my emphasis on this point. Apparently, they don’t get the meaning of what I have said because they are in denial. The tragedy is that it helps them to sustain their misreadings – most notably, who is an exercise physiologist and what is exercise physiology?

This sort of misreading isn’t innocent. In fact, as practiced, it is abusive. Imagine a student graduating from “whatever” degree program calling him or herself a physical therapist. Either you have a degree in physical therapy or you don’t. If you don’t, then forget about calling yourself a physical therapist. This is not to deny that a person here or there may get away with doing so on occasion. Just recently in Duluth a man was sentenced to prison for practicing law. He didn’t have a law degree, but nonetheless represented clients in the courtroom. It was just a matter of time before his behavior and unethical conduct caught up with him.

Make no mistake about it that is why lawyers and physical therapists do not allow such behavior to take place in their profession. We, on the other hand, walk around with our heads in the clouds. We act as though we are actually blind to the big picture. There is, of course, something we can do to catch up to those who are true professionals. We can do the obvious! Did I hear someone ask, “What is that?” Yes, it is sad to hear such a question after more than 10 years of work on behalf of ASEP to provide a professional structure to exercise physiology. It is even awkward writing about it. The task at hand, if we are to empower our students to compete successfully with other healthcare students is to get beyond our just-only research initiatives. We must tear down the wall of traditional thinking. It is not serving our students well at all.

This article, as the title indicates, is about revealing the ways in which the most basic rights of every student can be realized. Perhaps, not so strange by the sports medicine standards, exercise science is often defended by exercise physiologists. Why? Why not? After 50 years of endless misinformation, how is it possible to think right? To be sure, I suspect that many aren’t even aware of the abuse that is central to the sports medicine way. To heap irony upon irony, exercise physiologists have for decades spent a disproportionate amount of time doing research with little to no declaration of intent to capture or mandate enthusiasm or commitment to serve the interests of students.

You don’t have to be a super-brain to know that underneath this problem exist the endless misery of the sports medicine culture and the language of a given time and place that is no longer helpful for students looking for a career in exercise physiology. In reality, many of my students, even after majoring in exercise physiology and graduating into the public sector, suffer from awful to meaningless jobs set in place by the resounding incompetence of the sports medicine way of thinking. Why, because my students end up within the same mess created by decades of shameful acquiescence to sports medicine. It is no wonder that an entirely different state of mind is imperative to change the social and economic conditions of the students.

Put simply, the past needs to be dismantled and done with if we are to ensure students of their basic rights as college graduates. It can be done, and it is inevitable if exercise physiology is to gain full exposure of its own distinctiveness as a healthcare profession. The platform for change is the ASEP organization (regardless of its size compared to organizations that are 50 to 100 years old. All it takes is ASEP membership with the desire to collectively work towards change. However uncomfortable it may sound, that means not allowing others to keep things as they have been for decades.

How, by not giving in should the work be too hard to tackle and/or thinking that everything is supposed to happen immediately. Imagine, if a certain small number of individuals had not fought for the rights of others, nothing would have changed. Thank goodness they had the heart to deal with the indifference. Of course, by now everyone must know that change isn’t easy. At least that is what you would expect of adults. While many even look for shelter to hide, others don’t have the backbone to do what is necessary to change or to stay the course. Still others get in the way of change due to their enormous poverty in understanding the history of professionalism.

It’s clear that many exercise physiologists feel paralyzed by the magnitude of the challenge to govern themselves. Think about it for a moment. Where do the exercise physiologists begin their steps towards living the paradigm shift? Where on earth does one start? Why are some able to “never give up” while others quit? The answer is “in the doing, that is, that which comes from the heart.” At considerable risk to themselves, especially those who support the ASEP organization, they act on behalf of their students’ misery and injustice. They act in response to their own needs as well. For what it’s worth, they didn’t question their challenges but understood that failure is always part of every effort.

It is no exaggeration to say that “joining together” is absolutely critical to the professionalism of exercise physiology. If this seems hard to imagine, it shouldn’t be. That’s why physical therapists, nurses, and others write books on professionalism. For this reason and others, ASEP serves recognizable and honorable purposes (i.e., the right to treat the problems they and their students face). Under no circumstances is it appropriate to ignore the students’ problems and tribulations in finding employment. It’s not acceptable for those of us fortunate enough to work in academia to turn a deaf ear to the cries of our students. Our commitment, our loyalty, must be to our students. We can no longer turn to our comforts and our superficialities. The fact is, as many others understand, what is exercise physiology from the sports medicine perspective is archaic and our sync with the work of other healthcare professionals.

As a college teacher, I understand that I have more flexibility in making decisions about money than my recent graduates do. Why, because my students are thrown into the mix of graduates from dozens of meaningless degree programs. By now, it should be obvious that I am concerned with the value of a college education; an education in fact that results in a sustainable job opportunities. When there is no choice except to take a part-time rehab job or a fitness instructor job in which a non-college graduate can work alongside you, then, it is clear that the students’ tuition dollars were squandered by a mindless education. It is also clear that the outcome is the result of unethical behavior of part of exercise physiologists who stand back and allow it (if not encourage it) to happen.

If we accept the idea that one purpose, if not the primary purpose, of a college education is to become financially independent as an adult with a financial income sufficient to pay for the cost of the college experience, then, it is reasonable to conclude that the college experience is hugely problematic when their experience fails to access an income to survive. Failure to recognize this point is failure in being truthful with students, with yourself (if you are a college teacher), and with all others associated with the degree program, particularly the parents of students who often invest a considerable amount of their own money helping to ensure their children will be safe and secure.

If you find yourself bearing bad things and unjust treatment, read and think about what Matt. 5:39-41 says, “When struck on one check, they turn the other; when deprived of their coat, they offer their cloak also; when pressed into service for one mile, they go two.” Remember, it takes humility to face the challenges and to go on. But, when you feel in your heart that you are doing the right thing for the right reason, keep at it. It makes sense to tell the truth as best we can. Of course telling truth often calls for exhaustive redundancy. The problem is those who dismiss the efforts of ASEP to move exercise physiology into the 21st century fail to mention that every other healthcare profession has its own professional challenges and the right to exist.

The chief irony of misinformation is that so many people don’t realize it. Why, largely because it comes from the mouths of otherwise educated men and women. What we lack is a concerted effort to evaluate the agenda of others. Is it an inspired vision or is it an oppressing alliance with the past and, if so, for what reason(s)? Perhaps, this is the issue and hard work of professionalism. What can we do to advance a new view of exercise physiology? While it is obvious that what we lack is a concerted effort to “stay the course” and to “engage” exercise physiologists at all levels, it is the responsibility of each person to be strong in face of huge distractions and even persecution. This is where I think self-revelation and humility are necessary if we are to address the increasing inequalities of our students’ access to jobs.

Clearly, the reliance on generic certifications hasn’t worked and is naïve at best. By now it should be obvious that exercise physiology lags behind the established healthcare professions, especially since exercise physiologists are still at the first steps of professionalism. Obviously, it is going to take decades to get even a breath of fresh air and to discern correctly where we are, but it is imperative that we try to do so. That’s why we must make room within our historical way of thinking for serious dialogue on the growing gap between the lack of success of our students and success of students of other programs. We need a philosophy of exercise physiology that can pick apart the claims of past thinking. In fact, more now than ever before, a philosophy is central to our task. Only a failure of imagination has led us to ignore this point. There is nothing vindictive or utopian about the content of this message. I want to be part of my own professional organization and not that of some a generic organization. It is as simple as that. Frankly, every person has the right to such thinking as well as the right to explain his or her feelings, hopes, and dreams.

As Leonardo Boff said, “The process of liberation brings with it a profound conflict. Having the project be clear is not enough. What is necessary is spirituality of resistance and of renewed hope….” I like this quote because it speaks directly to the core of the change process. Exercise physiologists may not understand it, but this article isn’t about trashing ACSM or other exercise physiologists. Rather, it is about the conflicting and troublesome realities of untruths. As Garcia Lorca said, “Things that go away never return – everybody knows that.” Ask yourself the question, “Is it this truth that keeps so many exercise physiologists frozen in their tracks?” That is, they are fearful of not having the chance to return to what is comfortable. This is, I know, a simple conclusion to this article. However, in seeking to close it, I think I want to finish it here because there is always tomorrow. So, why not ponder this final thought, “Isn’t it time to clean up our act?”

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