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Americanizing Exercise Physiology

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“If you are not supporting the ASEP organization and effort, you are helping its members.” -- William T. Boone

On a hot summer July day in 2004, it occurred to me that the work of the American Society of Exercise Physiologists (ASEP) is revolutionary. An impressive volume of documents can be found on the ASEP website [1]. That July day, Saturday the 17th in downtown Minneapolis will always be an important transition point from seeing and hearing dedicated men and women speak about strength conditioning, training, coaching and athletics to thinking about my interest in healthcare. Although I have nothing but admiration for their drive and passion to develop athletes, it is not my cup of tea! And, yet, decades earlier I, too, had spent time thinking and planning in regards to teaching and coaching gymnastics. I wrote articles and published books on gymnastics and physical activities. So, what is different now? The short answer is that I'm different. Admittedly, I don't swing to handstands on the parallel bars like I used to. Nonetheless, though, I'm different.

By different, I mean that my “professional work and thinking” have made me a different person. No longer centered on athletics and winning, I'm inspired by powerful emotions and profound reflections of another kind. *Americanizing exercise physiology*, for example, is at the center of what I'm am and what I do everyday. It relates to the selfless efforts and hard work by the ASEP leadership, like Matthew Wattles (President of ASEP), Steve Jungbauer (Past-President of ASEP), Robert Robergs (Co-Founder and Past-President of ASEP) and, more recently, Matthew Lehn of Indiana, Jason Young of Wisconsin, Aliisa Criffield of Nebraska, Don Diboll of California, and Lonnie Lowery of Ohio; all members of the ASEP Board of Directors. Just imagine, if their lives were not challenged enough already, being part of ASEP has certainly raised the potential for conflict and anxiety (and let us assume as well, personal and professional sense of doing something good for the right reasons). Literally speaking, they are transforming exercise physiology from a discipline to a profession.

Like the development of all new organizations of significance, there are plenty of ideas and considerations to deal with. Assimilating facts and working through protocols are always tasks filled with anxiety and challenges. Even when members of the new organization try not to offend or rub someone wrong, important differences often demonstrate themselves early on and throughout the transformation from the old way of thinking to the new way. The story of the ASEP effort to “Americanize” exercise physiology is not about the “establishment” pitching in and helping, or students who are willing to jump in and help to achieve the ASEP vision, or even the doctorate prepared college professors who could speak favorably about ASEP. Nor does it involve members of other healthcare professions reaching out to the ASEP leadership. This is a story of ideas, concepts, possibilities, hopes, dreams, and the almost insurmountable odds to bring professionalism to exercise physiology by a very small group of professionals.

I have found that not everyone is interested in the story. Yet, however mundane (and exciting, too) the constant level of work is huge and will only increase. Complicated by the small number of members and, therefore, a budget to confront significant financial issues, members have learned to stand together and be supportive of each other. Collectively, they help explain and clarify the messy place that exercise science finds itself. Ideas about “what is exercise science” and academic departments that offer kinesiology and human performance degrees are analyzed for credibility. In the end, though, only a few faculty members seem willing to shift their thinking from the old to the new view of exercise physiology and undergo the necessary redefinition of exercise physiology field. Still, too much emphasis is placed on sports medicine and its role in exercise physiology through the window of exercise science. Politics, social and organizational restraints, and groupthink [2] have all but kept a daring few from genuine acceptance of the ASEP vision. Clearly, with their help and pressure on others to reconsider their thinking, the assumption of uncertainty that new organizations must bear with its development can be adequately challenged and understood.

Americanizers of exercise physiology, like Dr. Robert Robergs [3] and Mr. Steve Jungbauer [4], are important to the new exercise physiology academic path and career options. They help dispel the exercise scientist myth and the certain likelihood of negative results that associate with it when allowed to go unchallenged. They are our change agents. Their willingness to get involved is critical to reforming exercise physiology. Hence, by helping us with new ideas and adapting to new thinking, they help us unite a nation of exercise physiologists. In addition, they help to set the tone for *a new healthcare profession of exercise physiologists*. In other words, exercise physiology is understood beyond its limited role as a discipline to one of playing a primary role in healthcare as educators, researchers, and business officials. The dream of exercise physiology as a healthcare profession, therefore, lies in the beliefs organized and managed by ASEP leaders and members.

The wrenching truth is that increasingly more non-doctorate exercise physiologists will become responsible for producing and distributing the ASEP vision and to help others understand the ASEP goals and objectives [5]. The growing up process is always gradual. Beyond the initial confusion and curiosity of engaging in new thinking, there is

the belief that every “true” profession has its own professional organization. Thus, ASEP is integral to the professional development of exercise physiology. Not surprisingly, until the discussion of professionalism rises to the top of other issues and concerns (like fitness instructors and/or personal trainers), the idea and/or need for professionalism pitched by ASEP members seems to be considered “radically antagonistic” by non-members. Those who are loyal to traditional thinking are challenged to witness much less support the testimony of those who embrace the new thinking. The architects of every paradigm shift [6] are not alien to the stereotypes and groupthink. Whether in college, at the clinic, or inside the fitness facility, the ASEP leadership perceives Americanization through professionalism as a vital tool for realizing a share of the healthcare niche.

As part of the preparedness for professional development, ASEP has recently updated its efforts by writing and submitting to the senators of Minnesota the first-ever bill for title protection. In its official newsletter, the task of bringing together the many different views of exercise physiology into a unified American Exercise Physiology is a constant effort of the Editors (particularly Dr. Lonnie Lowery). This raises a vital understanding: when our profession is at war, which it is with sports medicine, every exercise physiologist belongs and can only belong to either one or the other. The Americanization of exercise physiology requires that all members of the profession are loyal, or else be recognized for what they are. The notion that a person can have a foot in both camps, in time of greater need for harmony and support, is impossible. Anything less than a total commitment results in a truncated attempt to forge a permanent change. Commitment, courage, persistence, and determination are imperative for a successful Americanization of Exercise Physiology.

Also, it is very important to point out that Americanizing exercise physiology is more than being licensed professionals. It is the total rethinking of what it means to be a profession with a civic and public consciousness. It is an acceptance of a new state of mind, of how exercise physiologists think, and their ideals to professional standards of practice [7]. It is the putting aside of all thinking that is not exercise physiology and the preservation of everything possible that is likely to stimulate the development of exercise physiology through the ASEP initiatives [8]. It is standing up for ASEP, speaking out when and where appropriate to uphold the ASEP code of ethics [9], accreditation [10], and board certification [11]; all contribute to the recognition of the ASEP organization as *[the]* professional organization of exercise physiologists. The issue of loyalty is critical to professional development, thus the reason for the following **Pledge of Membership** authorized by the *American Society of Exercise Physiologists*

The object of the ASEP Society and the Pledge of Membership is to support exercise physiologists by uniting in loyalty to one vision, one philosophy, and one standards of practice.

Its Motto: Exercise Physiologists who is not for the American Society of Exercise Physiologists is against Exercise Physiology as a Healthcare Profession.

Pledge of Membership: I pledge myself to be the very best professional exercise physiologist; to promote with all of my power a professional knowledge of the

exercise physiology, the professional guidance of exercise physiology by the *American Society of Exercise Physiologists*; and to support other ASEP members by my every word and act in our collective struggle for the ethical and professional development of exercise physiology as a healthcare profession.

In summary, to those devoted to the ASEP organization and the Americanization of Exercise Physiology, the objective is to elevate all exercise physiologists to a higher level of professional respect and financial stability. It is the members' way of developing and sharing their own "language of exercise physiology". In fact, learning to speak like an exercise physiologist, accessing better career opportunities, and assimilating new ideas for healthcare delivery are all vital glimpses of our new professional careers. ASEP membership is, therefore, "a badge of distinction" that defines the process of integration by which all exercise physiologists must engage.

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